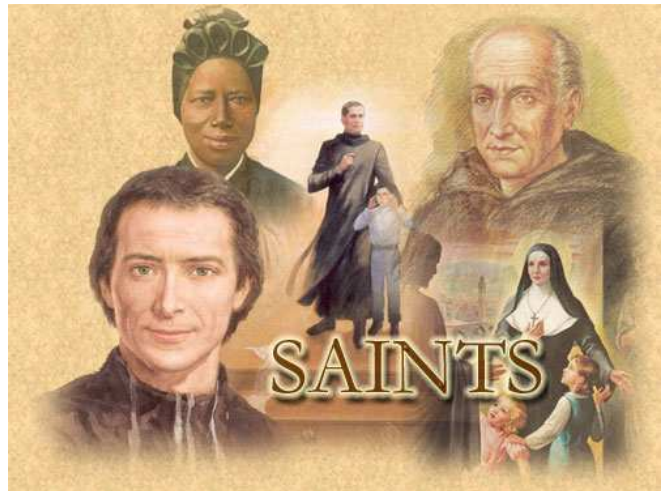


Why are Catholics encouraged to have a devotion to the Saints?

We live our faith in God not as isolated individuals but as members of a community of believers. We help and support one another in our faith journey.



People of extraordinary faith and vision

The saints were people of extraordinary faith and vision who took the Gospel seriously. Their lives and stories inspire us. Jesus Christ is of course our “hero”; the saints mirror one or another aspect of Jesus Christ. There are martyrs, missionaries, mystics, ascetics, pilgrims, artists, contemplatives, activists, eccentrics, “outsiders” ... the saints were certainly not perfect in every way, they had their shortcomings and their weaknesses; but they also had outstanding qualities.

The Communion of Saints

Catholics believe in the “Communion of Saints”. This is the belief that we are not separated from Christ or one another at death. We are members of the one Body of Christ, one church, and we don’t become cut off from the Body when we die.

Since those in heaven and those on earth are in communion with one another, we ask the saints to pray for us. We do not pray *to* the saints, then; but ask them to pray for us. This is not an alternative to praying to God and has nothing to do with an attitude that we human beings are unworthy to approach God ourselves. It is about a belief in the power of prayer, and just as we would ask our friends on earth to pray for us if we were going to write an exam or going to hospital for an operation (no one thinks that is odd), so we can ask the saints to do the same for us because we are in communion with them. The saints have no power of their own: only God can answer their prayers.

The lives of many of the saints can provide inspiring examples for children of people who lived moral lives “for others” and wrought much good in the world. We should present the saints to children as ordinary people subject to the same weaknesses and temptations as anyone else, and be wary of hagiographical embellishment. Here are some examples of heroic virtue, of people who lived gospel values:



SAINT ISIDORE THE FARMER (1070-1130)

Farm labourer near Madrid in Spain. He rose early every morning to go to Mass. All day long, whether he was ploughing, planting or harvesting, he would commune with God. He was noted for providing food for those even poorer than himself. He and his wife Maria (also canonised) had a great concern for the proper treatment of animals.



SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI (1181-1226)

Italy. Son of a wealthy cloth merchant. He renounced his inheritance, and became the poverello - "God's little poor one". He went to work amongst the lepers and became a peacemaker between warring towns. Soon others joined him. They went on preaching missions, lived in simple huts, slept on the ground and had no tables or chairs. When near death he composed the Canticle of Brother Sun, which celebrated the unity of all creation, referring to the sun, moon, wind, water and fire as "brothers" and "sisters".



SAINT ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY (1207-1231)

Daughter of the King of Hungary. She supported hundreds of poor people and sold state robes and jewellery for their relief. She dressed simply, and refused to wear her jewelled coronet in church, saying "How can I, when Our Lord wears a crown of thorns?" She had a hospital built, and personally cared for the lepers who came for treatment. When her husband died, she distributed much of her dowry among the poor. His family drove her from the court. Living in exile, she devoted herself completely to the needs of the poor, cleaning their homes and catching fish to help feed them.



SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES (1567-1622)

Bishop of Geneva. At his insistence, his household, food and dress were reduced to the simplest so that he would be better able to help the poor and needy. He visited inaccessible parishes of his diocese in the Alpine mountains, preached, heard confessions, reformed religious communities and instituted catechetical instruction in simple language.



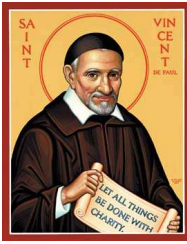
SAINT MARTIN DE PORRES (1579-1639)

Lima, Peru. Illegitimate son of a Negro slave woman and a Spanish nobleman. He was a lay helper at a Dominican monastery, later becoming a religious brother. He spent his days scrubbing the floors, feeding the horses and donkeys, tending the gardens and cleaning the toilets. His nights were spent in prayer and penance. He begged on behalf of the sick and homeless of Lima and lodged them in the empty rooms of the monastery, causing the priests to complain. He set up a home for abandoned children and planted orchards for the poor on unused land. His charity extended even to animals. He fed the mice in the monastery kitchen and looked after stray dogs and cats.



SAINT PETER CLAVER (1581-1654)

Spanish Jesuit. The "saint of the slaves". In South America, he met the slaveships which arrived with captured Africans. In the holds of the ships where the slaves were chained together, half crazed and covered with sores, he ministered to the sick and dying amongst them. He instructed the slaves in the elements of the Christian faith, and baptised over 300 000 of them. He assured them of their dignity and worth as people who were redeemed by Christ. He visited hospitals and prisons, where he prepared condemned criminals for death. He travelled to the villages where he solemnised the slaves' marriages, baptised their children, and nursed the sick amongst them in conditions that no one else would endure. He spent the last four years of his life in a small room, alone and ignored, half paralysed and in constant pain. He did not complain, saying "My sins deserve more punishment than this".



SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL (1581-1660)

France. Ashamed of his poor background, he was determined to use his charm and intelligence to earn a good living for himself, and became a chaplain at the royal court. When he became aware of the needs of the poor, he gave up his pretensions to rank and status and founded an order of priests devoted to work amongst the poor. He shunned publicity and sought no recognition. He founded homes for orphans, for reformed prostitutes, for the physically handicapped, and for the elderly. He helped to found an order of nuns, the Sisters of Charity, who sought to relieve human suffering.



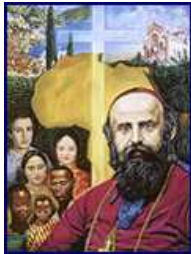
BLESSED KATERI TEKAKWITHA (1656-1680)

Kateri's father was chief of the Turtle clan of the Mohawks. When she was four, her family was killed by smallpox. The disease scarred her face and weakened her eyesight. She became a Christian. She cared for children and tended the sick. She spent many hours in prayer. She died when she was 24.



SAINT JOHN BOSCO (1815-1888)

Raised in poverty in Piedmont, Italy. He rescued working-class boys who had turned to crime and taught them a trade. He had an extraordinary gift for handling difficult youths with gentle firmness.



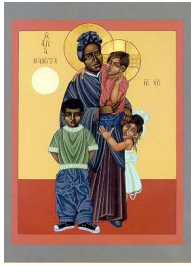
SAINT DANIEL COMBONI (1831-1881)

Italy. He established an institute for priests and brothers and another for sisters, the Comboni Missionaries. Along the east coast of Africa they established missions, schools and universities where African missionaries were trained. The European priests and brothers studied African philosophies and traditions. Daniel Comboni's plan was that Africans themselves must evangelise the continent, and after their training the African missionaries left to bring the Gospel to fellow-Africans living in the interior. European governments at this time were battling in a scramble for Africa. They considered the continent theirs to divide and "civilise". Though officially abolished, slavery continued to be practised by the colonial powers. Daniel Comboni denounced slavery and colonial oppression. He gave shelter to any slave who escaped to one of his missions. He had many opponents, both within and without the Church.



SAINT THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX (1873-1897)

France. Carmelite nun. Life in the convent was uneventful, consisting mainly of prayer and hard domestic work, but Thérèse's extraordinary devotion and faith surprised her fellow nuns. In her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, she revealed her "little way": to perform perfectly the small duties of everyday life for the love of God, not to be conspicuous in anything, not to complain, and to show a special friendliness towards those who were unfriendly to her.



SAINT JOSEPHINE BAKHITA (1869-1947)

Sudan and Italy. She was kidnapped and sold as a slave to an Italian Consul, Callisto Legnani, who treated her well. She was later entrusted to the Canossian Sisters in Venice. It was there that Bakhita came to know about God whom she had experienced in her heart without knowing who He was. She became a Daughter of Charity, engaged in simple services such as cooking, sewing, embroidery and attending to the door, where the children who attended the Canossian schools came to her for comfort and where she encouraged the poor and suffering who knocked at the door of the Institute. Her humility, simplicity and kindness won the hearts of all the local citizens. Her sisters in the community esteemed her for her good nature, her goodness and her deep desire to make the Lord known.



BLESSED CYPRIAN MICHAEL IWENE TANSI (1903-1964)

Nigeria. Served as a parish priest. He was a zealous preacher. Strong on self-denial, he entertained guests abundantly but ate little himself. He opened a boarding school. Later he was accepted as a monk by the English Trappist monastery of Mount Saint Bernard in Leicester. The monastery superiors became aware of Tansi's extraordinary holiness. Cardinal Francis Arinze, once a pupil and altar server of Father Tansi, said that canonisation of their own teaches African Catholics that "saints are ordinary men and women who come from your own villages."



BLESSED ALPHONSA MUTTATHUPADATHU (1910-1946)

Kerala, India. Practised constant acts of kindness to strangers, such as giving the supper which had been prepared for the family's evening meal to beggars who came to the door. She became a nun and taught in the convent school, but a series of diseases and ailments made her bedridden. She bore her sufferings without complaint, saying it was her vocation "to keep our Lord company in his troubles". She gained a reputation for extraordinary sanctity and closeness to God, and many people, including the children she had taught, came to her sickroom to ask her to pray for them, which she gladly did.



BLESSED JOSEPH GERARD (1831-1914)

Joseph Gerard was born in France and was a priest of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. His first worked among the Zulus, and moved to Lesotho in 1862, where he helped found the first Catholic mission, *Motse-oa-M'a-Jesu*, in what is now known as Roma Valley. After fourteen years of pioneer work at Roma, Fr Gerard founded the Mission of St Monica in the north of Lesotho. There he dedicated himself not only to the Basotho of Lesotho, but also frequently visited neighbouring areas in what is now Free State Province, attending to the Catholics there and spreading the Good News, especially among the Basotho employed on the farms. The Christians of Lesotho would say of him that he was living on prayer. He was known to spend long hours before the tabernacle during the night, and during the long visit to the sick on horseback he equally adored Jesus Christ in the Eucharist he carried on his breast. He was especially known for his love of the sick, the aged and destitute.

This pamphlet is part of a series on aspects of Catholic education for teachers, parents and board members, produced by the Ethos Committee of the Catholic Schools Board of the Archdioceses of Pretoria and Johannesburg



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