

St. Joseph's Family Activities

January Saints and Celebrations



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Two thousand years of saints

Our saints this month cover the earliest of saints (St Paul and his first bishops) to St. Marianne Cope who did in 1918 and who was canonised by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012.

A lot of the saints are members of religious orders but there is a very special saint this month who was a labourer. St. Nicholas Owen a master-carpenter did a lot to save the lives of many Catholic priests during the penal times in England through his construction of priest holes. His skills at designing priest holes, so that no two were the same is legendary. There are probably many which have never been discovered.

This month we encounter 9 bishops, 1 canon lawyer, 3 scholars, 4 abbots, 1 pope, 3 saints not members of any religious order, 3 women, 1 Apostle, and a number of teachers, including St Paul in the first century through St. Benedict Biscop, St. Thomas Aquinas, to St. Marianne Cope in the twentieth. We need to be grateful to these dedicated and courageous men and women, without whom we would not have received the faith.

As ever, please do let me know if there any saints you would like me to mention in future editions.

we do, we are either learning or proclaiming the faith, celebrating it in the liturgy and the sacraments, living it in the context of the family and community and praying it.

The Saints are in glory, praying for us.

There are three dimensions to the Church: those of us here on earth, journeying to the Father in Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit; those in purgatory whose lives on earth have finished and who are being purified, and those in heaven, sharing in the divine life, for which we have all been created. For them, their joy is complete but because of that, they are eager for us to join them. Close to Our Lord, they intercede (pray) for us. The saints in heaven are more than the canonised saints the Church knows of, as the author of the Book of Revelation says, "I looked and saw a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, tribe and peoples and tongues..." (Rev.7:9).

The saints are our heroes. They come from all walks of life, from all around the world and all ages. We can always find a saint who inspires us and ask him or her to pray for us. So, celebrate your own saints' days, go to Mass if you can as there, the whole Church is united! We can't see the saints, but we join in with their praise in the Holy Holy Holy. Have something special to eat, light your baptism candle or another one if you don't have it, and regard the saints as special members of the family.

2nd January St Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazianzen

These two great saints worked hard in the early Church to help people realise that Jesus is true God and true man. At that time, a group of people followed the wrong teaching of a man called Arius, who said that Jesus was not God. However, if Jesus was not God, then He could not lead us perfectly to His Father in heaven. Jesus is not just a role model to copy; united to Him in Baptism we can by His grace, live a holy life in the heart of the Holy Trinity.

St. Basil the Great (330 - 379) was born into a Christian family and early on realised that Jesus was calling him to something special. At first, he was a hermit (lived alone away from people) but God had other plans for him. He was ordained bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, his home-town, and set out a rule for monks which is the basis for many monks in the Eastern rites of the Church. He argued against the heresy that said that Jesus was not God (Arianism).

St Gregory Nazianzen (330 - 389) came from Nazianzus and followed his friend Basil into the desert at first. However, he too was ordained a bishop, and like Basil was also a great theologian and taught that each person of the Holy Trinity is in Himself entirely God, the Father is fully God, the Son is fully God, and the Holy Spirit is fully God.

I believe in One God, the Father almighty... I believe in One Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God... I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord the giver of life... (Lord is another word for God)

Make the Sign of the Cross slowly and reverently, savouring the words, IN the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. If you have some holy water at home, use it to make the Sign of the Cross and pause for a moment to reflect on the mystery that God became man in Jesus Christ, in order to lead us to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.

3rd January, St Geneviève (c.420 - c.510)

St Geneviève was born near Paris in Gaul (now called France) around 420 and was impressed by the teaching of two other future saints, St Germanus of Auxerre and St Lupus of Troyes. They were teaching against the Pelagian heresy. (This was a teaching started by Pelagius [probably a Welsh monk] that said that we have to earn our way to heaven and grace has nothing to do with it). Germanus noticed the young girl and blessed her, encouraging in her plan to live a religious life. At first, she lived like a religious at home, setting special times for prayer and going to Mass as often as she could, as there were no convents for women nearby. When her parents died, Geneviève moved to Paris and spent her time looking after the poor and the sick.

In 451 Attila the Hun and attacked Gaul and the Parisians were preparing to escape, but Geneviève encouraged them to pray, and to hope and trust in God. She said that they should do works of penance, so that God would spare them. Wonderfully, the citizens of Paris said they were sorry for their sins and Attila left Paris untouched and headed for Orléans instead.

Later, Paris was attacked and overrun by Merowig, and by his successors, Childeric and Clovis but Geneviève continued to work for the people of the city and was able to influence the attackers to show mercy. Eventually just before her death, she persuaded Clovis to support her plan to build a church dedicated to St. Peter and St Paul. When the Church was completed, Geneviève was buried inside it.

A church still stands on the same spot, dedicated to St. Peter and St Paul, but it's been much rebuilt. Nearby are the remains of an 8th century monastery, still much later than the era we are talking about, so it's been a holy place for a very long time!

St. Geneviève shows us that a life dedicated to God brings about its own rewards.

St. Geneviève pray for us.



3rd January, The Holy Name of Jesus

Today we reflect on the fact that the name " Jesus" is a sacred name which we should never abuse or say flippantly. St Paul said that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow. Maybe we can start to acknowledge when we hear the name of Jesus, by just nodding our head. Colour in the name here and use this as a bookmark.

J E S U S

7th January St Raymond of Peñafort (c.1175 - 1275)

Raymond was born near Barcelona in North-East Spain, around 1175, and when he was old enough, went to the University of Barcelona to study and to become a priest. Whilst he was studying, Raymond became fascinated by Canon Law, which are the regulations and the responsibilities of priests, bishops, parishes, Catholic schools, who can and cannot receive a Sacrament, how the Church manages her money, and so on. However, when Raymond was studying Canon Law, and later, teaching it, there was no single book with all the Church's laws in one place, but they were scattered throughout many different documents and teachings, including of course, the Bible.

In 1222, Raymond realised that God was calling him to become a Dominican. Dominicans have as their main charism, teaching, or rather "preaching", which is something that Raymond had been doing in his university work. However, his hard work on researching and teaching canon law was noticed by Pope Gregory IX who summoned him to Rome and commanded Raymond to sort out all the different versions of the Church's laws, and put them all into one book, so that everyone would know where to look for the laws on governing the Church. Canon Law is still a single book, although it has been updated several times, most recently in 1983.

After many years in Rome sorting out canon law, Raymond was allowed to go back to his native Spain, but he was not to live in peace for long. He was quickly made the General of the Order of Dominicans, a post which he held for two years. The Pope asked him to be the bishop of Tarragona, but he declined that honour. Instead, Raymond now turned his attention to two of the sacraments and set out conditions and regulations for the celebration of the Sacrament of Confession/Reconciliation and of Marriage. In these works, his aim was to help priests to help people first, understand and make better use of the Sacrament of Confession and to be able to grow in holiness from this Sacrament. Then in his later work on Marriage, Raymond focussed on what marriage was and what were "impediments" to marriage. Impediments are situations that make marriage impossible, such as being married already, or not being able to understand marriage vows and so on.

Although not as famous as St. Thomas Aquinas, whose feast day is later this month, both men were Dominicans, and both made a big contribution to the Church's understanding of what it is to live as a Christian in the world. St. Raymond of Peñafort died on 6th January 1275 after a long and fruitful life in the service of Christ and His Church.

If you have not been to Confession for a long time, why not make an appointment to see your priest? You will be filled with God's grace as a result. What could be better?

9th January, St Adrian of Canterbury (d. 710)

Adrian was born in North Africa but travelled to Italy to join the Benedictines there. He was regarded as a wise and learned monk and was made abbot of Nerida, which is near Naples. Here, his virtues and ability to teach were noted. Pope Vitalian soon heard about him and invited him to go to England to head up the young community in Canterbury which was still becoming established, and still in the process of converting the land. Adrian did not feel that he was up to this, and asked the pope to send his friend Theodore, instead as he was the better leader. Adrian agreed to be Theodore's assistant. So the two of them travelled together to Canterbury. The journey was not without its trials, at one time Adrian was imprisoned having been taken for a spy! Once they reached England, whilst Theodore was the archbishop, Adrian was eventually made abbot of the abbey, then called the Abbey of Sts. Peter and Paul, now known as St Augustine's Abbey. Adrian was a very talented teacher and monks from all over the country came to study Greek, Latin, the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, Church law and of course Sacred Scripture. St. Bede, the great early English historian and monk of Wearmouth Abbey, said that Adrian's skill in teaching was renown and that his students were the best educated in the land. For 39 years, Adrian held his post, helping generations of monks and priests who in turn were able to pass that teaching on to the country in general.

One characteristic of the saints is perseverance in prayer. Prayer is communicating with God. One way is to listen to Him in the words of Sacred Scripture and responding to what we hear. The Psalms are wonderful prayers, and are worth reading slowly, as they are both listening to the Lord and responding to Him. This is one of the Psalms for today's morning prayer: (Note the antiphon is said at the beginning and the end of the psalm, not after every stanza as in Mass).

Psalm 5

A morning prayer for help

It is you whom I invoke, O Lord. In the morning you hear me.

To my words give ear, O Lord,
give heed to my groaning.

Attend to the sound of my cries,
my King and my God.

It is you whom I invoke, O Lord.

In the morning you hear me;

*in the morning I offer you my prayer,
watching and waiting.*

*You are no God who loves evil;
no sinner is your guest.*

*The boastful shall not stand their ground
before your face.*

*You hate all who do evil;
you destroy all who lie.*

*The deceitful and bloodthirsty man
the Lord detests.*

*But I through the greatness of your love
have access to your house.*

*I bow down before your holy temple,
filled with awe.*

*Lead me, Lord, in your justice,
because of those who lie in wait;
make clear your way before me.*

*No truth can be found in their
mouths,
their heart is all mischief,
their throat a wide-open grave,
all honey their speech.*

*All those you protect shall be glad
and ring out their joy.
You shelter them; in you they rejoice,
those who love your name.*

*It is you who bless the just man,
Lord:
you surround him with favour as with
a shield.*

*Glory be to the Father and to the
Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.
It is you whom I invoke, O Lord. In
the morning you hear me.*

12th January, Two English Saints of the North

St Benet (Benedict) Biscop (c.628-690)

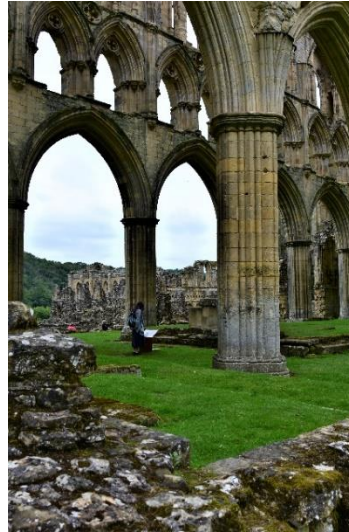
The son of a nobleman in the court of King Oswiu of Northumbria, and it was expected that he would live a life of luxury. However, all this changed at the age of 25, with a conversion to Christ and a journey to Rome. He became a Benedictine monk at Lerins, taking the name "Benedict". Going back to Rome, he was asked by Pope Vitalian to accompany Theodore and Adrian to England. On reaching Canterbury, Benedict was appointed Abbot until Adrian had settled. Benedict returned once more to Rome bringing back with him a large collection of books, relics and pictures which he took to Northumberland. King Egfrid gave him land at the mouth of the River Wear (Wearmouth) to build a monastery, and then later he built another monastery at Jarrow on the Tyne, six miles away. It was one of the first churches in England to be built of stone (using French stonemasons and glaziers as the English did not know how to make glass at this time).

This double monastery, dedicated to St. Peter (Monkwear-mouth) and St Paul (Jarrow) became the greatest centre of learning in Northern Europe, with students travelling from far and wide. Benedict remained abbot of both monasteries for the rest of his life, but he appointed two priors to run them from day to day because of his frequent absences, traveling not only to Rome but to other centres of learning in Europe. One of Benedict's most famous students was St. Bede, who later was to use the great treasures of Benedict's collection to write an authoritative ecclesiastical history of the English people.

All his travel wore Benedict out and for the last three years of his life was bed-ridden before dying on 12 January 690.

St Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167)

St. Aelred who is patron saint of friendship, was offered a life of luxury in the court of King David I of Scotland but realised that God was calling him to something different. He joined the Cistercian community at Rievaulx in Yorkshire, then one of the largest Cistercian abbeys, with more than 150 choir monks and 500 lay brothers.



Rievaulx abbey today showing the high altar in the centre (where the person is standing). Next time you visit a ruined abbey, take a moment to imagine the monks filing through, praying and praising God. Pray also for the grace to pray for our enemies.

Aelred understood that the spiritual life was about recovering the likeness of God in our souls, that has been damaged by sin. He recognised that spiritual friendship was vitally important to be able to grow to love and trust in Jesus Christ. He explained that a spiritual friend is, *"A person who can shed tears with you in your worries, be happy with you when things go well, search out with you the answers to your problems."*

He said that when we walk with people in this way, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we are loving them as Jesus Christ loves them.

Aelred was a competent abbot of Rievaulx, successfully managing the complex needs of the abbey as well as taking a personal interest in each of his monks whom he ruled firmly, but kindly. He never expelled a monk on the grounds of misbehaviour but worked with him to help him get back on track. He wrote that as Jesus made excuses for their behaviour of those who crucified Him, saying "Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing" (Lk. 23:34). Aelred said that we need to learn from Jesus and "open our arms and embrace our enemies."

13th January St Hilary of Poitiers (- 367) (Doctor of the Church)

St. Hilary was born at the beginning of the fourth century and became Bishop of Poitiers in France in 350. He argued against Arianism which was the belief that Jesus was not God but was a kind of being greater than a man. Because of this the Emperor Constantius exiled him (sent him away). This did not stop Hilary writing though, and today his works show us that he was very brave by speaking the truth about God as the Holy Trinity. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ, the Son, is fully God and fully man at the same time.

St. Hilary wrote,

"Almighty God and Father, I want to make my every thought and word speak of you. You have given me this gift of speech, and I want to use it for making You known as the One God and that the Lord Jesus is also God; He is true God and true man. I ask that the breath of your Holy Spirit will help me to talk about you and to tell everyone the truth. Give me the courage in difficult times to say this."

St. Hilary, pray for us that we too will be brave enough to tell other people about Jesus.

17th January St Antony, Abbot (251 - 356)

St Antony who was born in Egypt, is recognised as the first monk. He was a young man when suddenly both his parents died, leaving just him and his sister. One day at Mass, the Gospel was the account of the young man asking Jesus about inheriting Eternal Life, where Jesus says, "If you want to be perfect, sell all that you have and come, follow me" (Mt.19:21). Antony heard this as a command from Jesus and so, making sure that his sister had all that she needed and was well looked after, he gave away all his share of his parents' money to the poor. Then he went into the desert to live in poverty, praying, working, meditating (thinking about Jesus' teachings). People began to hear of him and of his holiness and they started to come to him for advice. Some people stayed as they also wanted to live the same kind of life. Gradually, a community of men grew up in the desert with St. Anthony. Jesus' invitation was heard again by St. Francis of Assisi about a thousand years later, and he too gathered a group of people around him, living in poverty and teaching about Jesus. St. Anthony is patron saint of basket-makers and gravediggers.

Jesus still invites us to be brave enough to put Him at the centre of our lives. In honour of St. Anthony, try to spend just 10 minutes each day for a week, away from the rest of the family in your bedroom or in the garden if you have one. Don't look at your phone or games or listen to music. Just be with Jesus and read a bible, or another holy book, and think about some of the things that He has said. Write down or draw a picture of what you thought about.

Which days this week have you been able to spend alone with Jesus? Tick those what you were able to.

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

19th January St. Wulstan

(1008? - 1095)

St Wulstan became a Benedictine monk at Worcester Cathedral priory, and later was made prior. He was encouraged the other monks to pray and work properly and also was an outstanding preacher and counsellor and gave generously to the poor.

In 1062 he became Bishop of Worcester and is the first English bishop known to have made a systematic visitation of his diocese. He built a lot of parish churches, some of which are still standing, although much "restored and renovated." When the Normans arrived, they got rid of a lot of the English bishops, but they allowed St. Wulstan to stay on because he was such a good bishop and looked after his diocese so well. When he died, he was buried in his cathedral, and although his body was removed during the Reformation, there is still a shrine to him in the crypt of Worcester Cathedral. If you live near there, and have not been there, do visit and say a prayer there.

St. Wulstan was one of a number of famous Benedictine saints and blessed: how many can you find in this wordsearch? Names only, not the "St." (The numbers are the date they died; and only search for the part of the name underlined). One has been done for you.

L	O	U	I	S	J	B	E	N	E	D	E	O	I	M	W	T	R	X	I	N
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c.550, St. Benedict

604, St. Gregory the Great, (Pope)

619, St. Lawrence,

644, St. Paulinus of York

690, St. Benet Biscop

735, St. Bede the Venerable

754, St. Boniface,

942, St. Odo,

988, St. Dunstan

1095, St. Wulstan

1109, St. Anselm of Canterbury

1140, St. Malchus,

1178, St. Frowin,

1219, St. Donatus,

1248, Bl. Jordan

~~1262, Bl. Beatrix II,~~

1267, St. Silvester Guzzolini,

1295, St. Thomas of Dover

1302, St. Gertrude the Great

1348, Bl. Bernard Tolomei,

c.1400, St. Sergius of Amalfi

1436, Bl. John Bessand, Celestine

1440, St. Frances of Rome

c.1500, Bl. Raphael of Dalmatia,

1529, Bl. Catherine Bognora

1539, Bl. Richard Whiting

1582, Bl. Ann Toschel,

1601, Bl. Mark Barkworth

1610, Bl. John Roberts,

1616, Bl. Thomas Tunstall

1646; Bl. Philip Powell

1670; Bl. Jane Mary Bonomo

1792, Bl. Augustin Chevreux

20th January, Two Martyrs of the Early Church

Pope St Fabian (- 250)

St. Fabian became Pope in 236 and was martyred on 20 January 250, during the persecution of the Emperor Decius. Eusebius, the early Church historian, says that his election as pope was remarkable because he was only on a visit to Rome with "a party from the country" whilst the election of a pope was taking place, when suddenly a dove settled on Fabian's head. It was taken as a sign that he had been chosen (as in Jesus' Baptism when the Holy Spirit descended on Him as a dove). Fabian was pope for just 13 years, being martyred by the emperor Decius. Not a lot of detail is known about his reign, but tradition ascribes to Fabian the division of Rome into seven districts assigned to the seven deacons of Rome.* He was reputed to have been one of the greatest administrators of the early Church and did a lot to support the development of the catacombs. He arranged for some former popes to be buried together in a single chamber of the catacombs of St. Callixtus, where he too would be buried in due course.

** The "seven deacons" of Rome follow the practice of the early Church in choosing seven deacons to assist in the administration of the Church (Act 6:1-6).*

St Sebastian

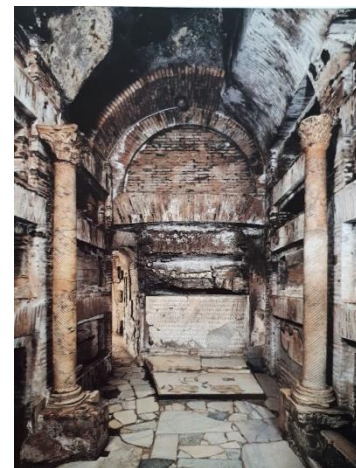
Very little is known about St Sebastian except the fact that he was martyred early in the persecutions of Diocletian. Tradition says that he came from Milan and was a soldier who converted to Christianity and was martyred as a result. St Ambrose knew of him and states that he was already venerated in Milan in the fourth century. The earliest mosaic pictures of Sebastian show him to be a grown bearded man, not a youth pierced with arrows. The story of his being tied to a tree and shot with arrows is probably apocryphal and does not originate until 400 years after his death. However he died, he was noted by his contemporaries for his faith and his body was preserved. One of the seven chief churches of Rome was built over his grave in 367 and that is now the site of the catacombs named after him.

21st January St Agnes (c.292-304)

St. Ambrose wrote that the martyrdom of Agnes was "A new kind of martyrdom!" This was still in the era when a lot of Christians were being killed because of their faith in Jesus Christ. The "newness" of Agnes' martyrdom was that she was only a child, a girl aged about 12. Despite her youth, she was already firm in her faith. She was very beautiful, and many young men wanted to marry her, but she had already decided to give her life to serving Jesus and did not want to marry.

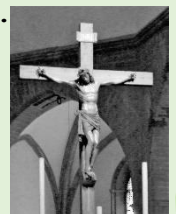
St. Ambrose, in his homily about Agnes, said that her persecutors tried to get her to worship at pagan altars to save her life, but instead she stood there, with the chains around her, and made the Sign of the Cross. Then she was told that if she married, she would not die, but she said that she already has a husband and that was Jesus, and that she only wanted to give herself to He who had already given Himself to her. She then bent down and prayed as she waited for the executioner to do his work.

St. Agnes is one of the saints listed in the Roman canon of the Mass (Eucharistic Prayer 1).



The "Mausoleum" of the Popes in the catacomb of St Callixtus.

Next time you are tempted to pretend that you are not a Christian or tempted to do something that you know you should not do, make the Sign of the Cross. The Sign of the Cross is a shield that defends us from temptation.



A priest hole at Harvington Hall under the stairs

A priest hole at Harvington Hall that leads up the chimney and into the roof.

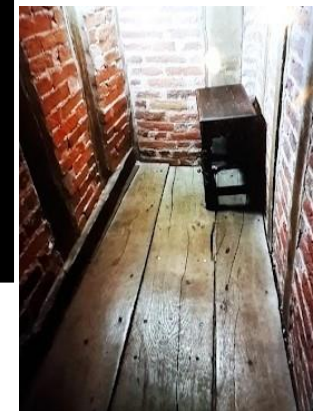
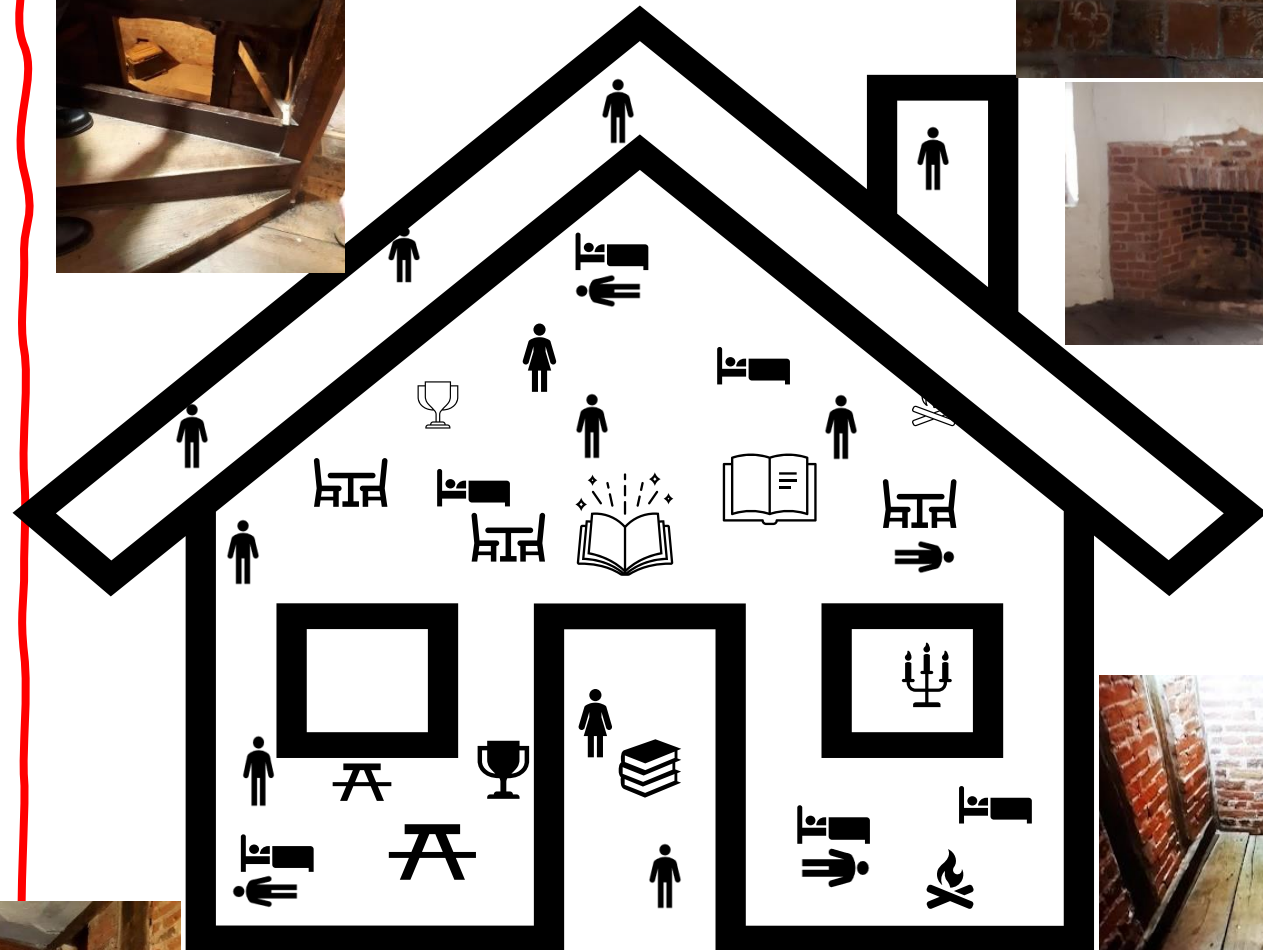
**23rd January St Nicholas Owen
(1550-1606)**

St. Nicholas Owen was a master carpenter in the time of the Reformation in England. He was skilled at making priest holes in houses so that priests could hide from the people who wanted to kill them. It was illegal to be a Catholic and to go to Mass at that time, but people celebrated Mass in secret in their homes. If you have been to Harvington Hall in Worcestershire, you will have seen some of his work. He was a brave man and was eventually captured and tortured but he never gave away his secrets.

How many priests can you find hiding in this house?



(Be careful, not all the human shapes are men!) If you have the space at home or in a nearby park, how about a game of hide and seek?



A priest hole at Harvington Hall originally hidden behind bookshelves in a library.

Going in..... Inside

23rd January, St Marianne Cope (1838 - 1918)

She was born as Maria Anna Barbara Koob (known as Barbara) on 23rd January 1838 in Hesse, Germany. When she was a year old, the family (which eventually included 10 children) emigrated to the United States and they anglicized their surname to "Cope". From a young age, Barbara felt that God was calling her to the religious life, but she was not able to answer that call straight away as she had to go to work to help support her large family as her father became too ill to work. Finally, after nine years of working, in 1862, at the then mature age of 24, she was able to join the Sisters of St Francis in Syracuse, New York and received the religious name, "Sr Marianne".

Although Sr Marianne had joined the religious order to become a teacher, she soon realised that God had other plans for her. After only a short time teaching, her administrative skills were put to good use in helping her order establish two of the first hospitals in the New York area. By 1870, now as Mother Marianne, her work as a nurse administrator led people to criticise her for welcoming the "outcast" sick, such as alcoholics as well as the "good" sick to receive treatment in hospital. However, despite this she was respected and loved as a kind, loving and practical woman who reflected Jesus' love for everyone, poor or rich.

One day in 1883, when she had become Mother Superior of her order, she received a letter from a priest in the Hawaiian Islands asking for help with the schools and hospitals there. Leprosy (a dreadful and then incurable, illness) was rife, and the priests needed help. Mother Marianne's heart was touched, and she decided to go herself rather than just send some sisters. On arrival, she and six other sisters set to work cleaning the hospital and looking after its 200 patients. The sad thing about leprosy patients is that when the parents were ill in hospital, there was no one to look after the children, so Mother Marianne and her sisters opened a unit to care for the healthy children whose parents were in the hospital. This dedication to the needs of the whole family was unusual and marked Mother Marianne apart. In 1887 a new government in Hawaii decided that instead of treating lepers in hospitals on the mainland, they would all be sent to Molokai, one of the islands, to form a leper colony there, and Fr. (now St.) Damien was sent to live and work there with the lepers. Mother Marianne and two of her sisters willingly accepted the request to go and work on the island looking after the patients. They arrived a few months before (St.) Fr. Damien died of the disease himself.

She worked cheerfully tirelessly on the island, with the other two sisters from her order, especially making sure that the children in her care were as comfortable as possible. All she wanted was that for them "life (was) as pleasant and as comfortable as possible". She trusted God implicitly, and miraculously, did not catch the dreaded disease, dying of natural causes in Hawaii on 9th August 1918. She was canonised by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012. (Details from https://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20050514_molokai_en.html accessed 3/1/24)

Sometimes we are asked to do things that are difficult or unpleasant, but God, by His grace, can help us to be cheerful all the time. St. Marianne Cope, pray for us and pray for those who are suffering from incurable illnesses.

24th January St. Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva and Doctor of the Church (1567-1622)

St. Francis was born at the Chateau de Sales in Savoy, France. Aged eight he was sent away to college to make his First Holy Communion, be confirmed and then received the tonsure (where the centre of his head was shaved as a sign of his dedication to Jesus) as he wanted to consecrate himself to God. However, his father wanted Francis to be a lawyer so when he was 14, he was sent to Paris to study. At 24, he qualified as a Doctor of Law, but he had to tell his father that this was not what he wanted. His father was not happy at first and reluctantly agreed that Francis could be ordained and so Francis began the work which occupied him for the rest of his life.

In time the areas which bordered Switzerland, many Catholics had become Calvinists; a strict form of Protestantism which taught that people were either chosen by God... or not! Francis was sent to the area south of Lake Geneva to preach that holiness is for all, not just for a select few, and that God does not have favourites as well as preaching in public, Francis wrote letters gently explaining the Church's teaching. These were copied and spread about from person to person. Gradually he was heard, and Catholics who had turned away from the Church, began to come back.

Pope Clement VIII heard about this energetic young man who was having such a huge effect on the people he reached, and called him to Rome, where Francis was questioned by him and a number of leading theologians, including St. Charles Borromeo. He answered their questions calmly and directly, showing that he was an effective teacher of the faith. As a result, Francis was appointed coadjutor and then bishop of Geneva. As Geneva was in the hands of the Calvinists, he could not live there or minister to the Catholics there personally, but from his centre in Annecy, he organised catechesis throughout the diocese of Geneva, recognising that everyone was owed the dignity of being taught the faith. Much of what he taught was written down and copied again and again.

In 1610 Francis and St. Jane Frances de Chantal founded the order of the Visitation, for women who did not have the health or strength to live strict to be able to live in communities dedicated to God. Francis' famous book called "An Introduction to the Devout Life" began as letters to a cousin, helping her draw closer to Jesus. Francis firmly believed that everyone, whatever their work, rank or station in life was called to a life of devotion to Christ. Francis wrote:

"I say that devotion must be practised in different ways by the nobleman and by the working man, by the servant and by the prince, by the widow, by the unmarried girl and by the married woman. But even this distinction is not sufficient; for the practice of devotion must be adapted to the strength, to the occupation and to the duties of each one in particular. Therefore, in whatever situations we happen to be, we can and we must aspire to the life of perfection."

This is so comforting, as it both recognises the need for each one of us, whatever our work or situation, to seek to become holy, yet no one should feel guilty because they cannot pray as much as they would like to. St Francis de Sales is patron saint of journalists and the media, recognising his efforts to be in touch with as many people as he can.

Let us spend a few moments praying for all journalists and those who work in the media, that they can be honest and present the truth with integrity.

25th January the conversion of St. Paul, a reflection.



After Jesus ascended into heaven, the Apostles told others about Jesus and lots and lots of people became His followers. St Paul, who was originally known as Saul, hated the followers of Jesus and wanted to kill them. (This story is in the Bible, Acts 9). He was on his way to a city called Damascus when suddenly, he saw a bright light and he fell down. He could not see anything, but heard a voice saying, "Why are you persecuting me?" Saul replied, "Who are you?" and the voice said "I am Jesus, and you are persecuting me. Get up and go into the city and you will be told what to do." Saul was now blind and was led into the city by his friends and he stayed there for three days, fasting (eating nothing) and praying. A follower of Jesus called Ananias was nearby, praying, when he heard Jesus telling him to go to Saul and lay his hands on him so that he might get his sight back. Ananias was surprised and said to Jesus, "But Lord, this man came here to gather up your followers and have them killed!" But Jesus said that things were different now and Saul was going to travel all over the place teaching about Jesus. Nervously, Ananias went to Saul, and cautiously called him "Brother Saul." He laid his hands on Saul and immediately Saul could see again! Full of joy, Saul went with Ananias and was baptised. Saul became Paul and is one of the Church's greatest ever missionaries. The Holy Spirit inspired many of his letters to the early Christians, which we often read at Mass.

This is a famous painting of the "Conversion of St Paul" by an artist called Caravaggio. Saul (Paul) has fallen off his horse which is about to step on him. It is a symbol of the way Saul was going to treat the followers of Jesus. Look at the light shining on Saul, lying on the ground, and the darkness all around. It shows how Saul was living in the dark about Jesus. The light that is in the centre of the picture is the light of Jesus. Both the man and the horse look at Saul on the ground. They look puzzled. They don't hear Jesus, but only see the light, and don't understand. Other people don't always understand our faith and can be puzzled by it. What is Saul lying on? A red cloak. Red in Sacred Art means humility and in his letters, St. Paul used to say that he was the least important person. He knew that his work was only possible because he trusted the Holy Spirit to guide and help him. Finally, look at his arms which are reaching out like a baby reaches out for their parent. Saul (St Paul) has become like a baby, totally dependent others; firstly, on his friends who took him to Damascus and then throughout the rest of his life, he was dependent on the Holy Spirit who guided him every day. (On the next page is a map of all his missionary journeys and some places to find.)

We too are dependent on the Holy Spirit. Each one of us who has been baptised has been filled with the Holy Spirit and in Confirmation we are strengthened by that same Holy Spirit. St Paul wrote that we can call God "Father" because we have been joined to God the Son (Jesus) by the Holy Spirit. You can end this reflection with a slow and thoughtful Sign of the Cross, and think about how the Holy Spirit helps us.



This is a map of St Paul’s missionary journeys around the then known world.

Can you find these places on the map:

- **Jerusalem**
- **Damascus**
- **Antioch** (where the followers of Jesus were first called “Christians”)
- **Corinth** (where the “Corinthians” lived, whom St Paul wrote to)
- **Ephesus** (home of the Ephesians)
- **Philippi** (home of the Philippians)
- **Thessalonica** (home of the Thessalonians)
- **Rome**
- **Cyrene** (where Simon of Cyrene, who helped Jesus carry the Cross came from).

If you have travelled to any of these places, may be you would like to make a mark on the map to the paces you have been to.”

Map from: <https://aleteia.org/2018/09/19/a-quick-guide-to-st-pauls-travels-according-to-todays-map/> (This is an interesting link if you want to know more).

26th January Sts. Timothy and Titus.

Timothy and Titus were friends and companions of St Paul and became Christians because they heard St Paul's teaching. They were two of the first bishops who were not Apostles and were ordained by St Paul. St. Paul made Timothy Bishop of the Christians in Ephesus, and Titus was sent to Crete to look after the Christians there.

Three of the books in the Bible are letters written to Sts. Timothy and Titus and they are still very good advice for priests, bishops, teachers, parents... and indeed all of us who want to grow in faith in Jesus.

To St. Timothy, St Paul wrote: "Rekindle the gift of God that is in you... for God did not give you a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim.1:26-27).

We can hear this ourselves - in Baptism we have been given the Holy Spirit who gives us strength and power and love in difficult situations. Ask the Holy Spirit to re-kindle His fire in our hearts.

To St. Titus, St Paul wrote: Be obedient, honest and don't tell lies about other people. Avoid quarrelling, be gentle and be polite to all people" (c.f. Titus 3:1-2).

There we are parents and teachers! The Bible supports us in helping our children to grow up as wonderful people, by the grace of God.

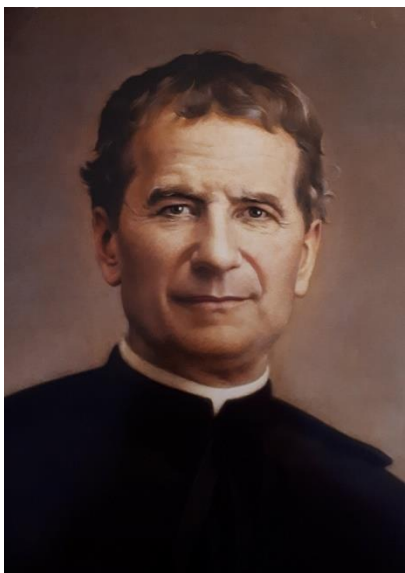
28th January St. Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-1274)

St. Thomas is another saint from a noble family, this time Counts of Aquino which is about halfway between Rome and Naples. The young Thomas was sent to the great Benedictine centre at Monte Cassino nearby at the age of 5 and then at 13, he was sent to the university of Naples to study the arts and the sciences. Whilst there, Thomas joined the Dominicans (the Order of Preachers). His mother was furious as she had planned that he would become a Benedictine and would someday be abbot of Monte Cassino. She set out to bring him home but before she arrived, Thomas had escaped and then began a chase across Italy; always Thomas had moved on before his furious mother arrived! Eventually, his brothers caught up and Thomas was imprisoned for two years in the castle at Monte San Giovanni not far from his family home. During this time Thomas studied and eventually, his family gave up and he was allowed to re-join the Dominicans. Thomas' studies continued in Cologne under St. Albert the Great and from there he went to Paris in 1252 to begin his teaching career. In 1259 he went to Italy and was made "preacher general" and preached in many of Italy's towns and cities. In 1266 he began his most famous work, his "*Summa Theologica*" which is a brilliant defence of Catholic doctrine. His explanation of what happens during the consecration at Mass was written as an answer to the king of France (St. Louis IX) and it was so well written was his explanation was accepted it as a definition of the faith by the Church. St. Thomas explained that although the bread and wine look the same, after the consecration, this is the only thing that is the same. What in fact we have before us on the altar, is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ Soul and Divinity, truly present. We may no longer refer to the contents of the chalice as "wine." St. Thomas never finished his great summary of the Church's faith and died on his way to the council of Lyons in 1274.

The adventures of St. Thomas show us that sometimes God's plans are the best ones. If his mother had succeeded in keeping her son nearby and he had joined the Benedictines, the Church would have been the poorer. As parents we want the best for our children. We need to be aware that God's plans may not be the same as ours.

St. Thomas is patron saint of students. St. Thomas pray that all those studying from the youngest child to the most mature student, will be able to grow in wisdom more and more each day.

31st January St. John Bosco (1815-1888)



St. John Bosco founded the "Salesian" order of men and women who set up schools to educate poor children (originally just boys). The order was named after St. Francis de Sales who had preached the Gospel in Switzerland in the 1600s. and whom St. John Bosco admired.

St. John was born into a peasant family, and his father died just after he was born. When he became a priest, he was very concerned about the boys and young men who had not been able to go to school, so set up evening classes to teach them to read and write. Hundreds of people turned up! Then he began workshops in boarding houses for apprentices, and by 1868 over 800 boys and young men were under his care. Today the Salesians continue his work all over the world in schools and in similar kinds of workshops in countries where education is not free.

Why don't you pray the prayer on the next page for teachers and decorate it and give it for your own teacher.

A Prayer for Teachers

Almighty Father, we come to you today and give thanks
for all our teachers.
Thank you for the way in which they give of themselves
each day in the classroom,
serving and instructing the next generation.
We thank you for them all now.
Father, please fill their hearts with courage now by your
mighty Spirit.
Fill them with your strength, so they may rise to every
challenge and not grow weary.
Fill them with your wisdom,
so that they may be able to make good judgement when
guiding and helping others.
Fill them with your peace,
so that when stress and anxiety comes it would not
overwhelm them.
Fill them with your joy,
so that the passion they have for their subject may
become a infectious passion that spreads. We ask all this
in the wonderful name of Jesus Christ, your Son, and
our Lord.
Amen.

Adapted from https://www.lords-prayer-words.com/family/prayer_for_teachers.html

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