

St. Joseph's Family Activities

July Saints and Celebrations



<https://www.theannunciation.org.uk/resources/>

July; saints known and less-well-known.

I nearly gave this the subheading of “saints, great and small” and then realised that all the saints are great as they are all in the presence of the most Holy Trinity in heaven, and in God, there is no difference; all are equally great. This month’s saints include the saint who gave his name to St. Helier in Jersey, as well as the saint in whose honour one of the most famous walking routes in Europe is named for. There is even an Old Testament saint! This month we are encouraged to think about taking time out to contemplate how much we are loved by Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose only concern is that we, like the saints, are led to share in the divine life of the Holy Trinity in heaven. This time out might be ten minutes in the garden or a pilgrimage to a holy place.

Someone who has just visited some holy places is one reader, Deacon Steven, who has sent some pictures of the Sacred Heart as a response to last month’s edition. They are at the end of this edition. They are from Chapelle de la Visitation, Paray le Mondial, France, the burial place of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. It is one of Frances’ largest pilgrimage centres other than Lourdes.

Deacon Steven will be ordained to the priesthood on 23rd July. Please keep him in your prayers.

Recent past copies of the family activities sheets which cover saints days until the end of February are available from <https://www.theannunciation.org.uk/resources/> If you are after copies that go back further, please contact me directly.

These activities still reflect the four dimensions of our faith, as in everything 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.

Later this month we celebrate the feast of St. Anne and St. Joachim, Mary’s parents and Jesus’ grandparents. Let us pray for all grandparents and thank God for the roles they have in our families.



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.

1st July: St Oliver Plunkett (1625 - 1681)

St. Oliver Plunkett is the first Irish martyr of the Reformation to be Beatified (declared a "blessed" on the way to becoming a saint). He was born in Loughcrew, in County Meath and both his parents were connected to the Irish nobility. He grew up in the turmoil of the English civil wars which impacted also on Ireland which was ruled by King Charles I (mostly against the will of the Irish).

Oliver started to train for the priesthood at quite a young age, first of all in Dublin but then he was sent to Rome at the age of 16, where he was an outstanding scholar. All the time he was being prepared for the mission in Ireland, and he was really keen to go back home after his ordination in 1654. However, the political situation was too dangerous. Catholics were outlawed and being a Catholic in Ireland (as in England and Wales), was illegal and punishable by death. Instead, Oliver stayed in Rome and worked hard in Rome on Irish affairs for the next twelve years.

In 1669, the then Archbishop and primate of all Ireland ("first" or "head" bishop) died in exile in France, and Pope Clement IX chose Oliver Plunkett to take his place. He was consecrated bishop in Gent and then secretly went to Dublin in 1670. His first two years in Ireland were busy ones. He ordained some men as priests and confirmed ten thousand people of all ages. There were another 50,000 to confirm! (In those days, you could not receive Holy Communion until you had been confirmed!). As well as this, Oliver established schools for boys and schools for girls. It was not an easy time as Oliver had to tread carefully as the politics of the time meant that he could not be seen to be recognising the Pope's authority, (but of course, he was). Oliver worked hard to help and support the spiritual lives of priests and religious in his diocese, and helped them to help their parishioners. All the clergy, including the bishops had to live in extreme poverty as there was no money to support them. Much of what he did was done quietly and even secretly, not making a big fuss and drawing attention to himself.

In 1676 he and the bishop of Waterford had to go into hiding as persecution of Catholics started again. Then in 1678, Titus Oates pretended that the Jesuits in England were planning to assassinate (kill) King Charles II. This led to real panic in the whole of the British Isles and many priests and bishops were rounded up and put in prison. It was used as an excuse to get rid of Catholics (again). Oliver was arrested and put in Dublin castle, and tried on the grounds that he was plotting to bring in French soldiers to rebel against the king. Although the jury found no evidence, Oliver was not released. So, a judge bribed a fresh jury to find him guilty. Oliver now a sick man, worn out from his years of poverty and hard work, was sent to London, where he was executed on 1st July 1681 on the made-up charge of being a traitor to the king.

Implications... It is very easy to believe what we hear about other people... but we should not always do so, especially if what they are saying is negative or not kind. If we hear something about someone else that seems to go against their character, we can either refuse to get involved in the conversation, or better still tell them to stop passing on bad things about other people. Then we need to pray for the person/people they are talking about and also very importantly, for the person who is saying these things.

3rd July St. Thomas the Apostle

We all know about "doubting Thomas, the Apostle who did not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead and insisted on touching Jesus' wounds before he could believe. However, St. Thomas is also the first Apostle to recognise that Jesus is God. When Jesus appeared a week after Easter and St. Thomas was there with the other Apostles, Jesus invited St. Thomas to put his finger in the holes made by the nails when Jesus had been nailed to the cross, and to put his hand in the hole in Holy Spirit side from the soldier's spear.

St. Thomas' reaction was to say, "**My Lord and my God!**" (Jn. 20:28). St. Thomas's exclamation is a brief prayer of faith and recognition that Jesus is indeed God among them, and we can say the same prayer when the priest lifts the host and chalice at Mass, recognising that Jesus is really truly present with us in the form of bread and wine.

There are no records of what St. Thomas did after Jesus' Ascension into heaven, but Tradition tells us that he went East to India, and the Christians of Kerala in India consider him to be the founding father of their faith. There is no reason why St. Thomas did not go East, as there were many trade routes that way.

There are a number of other St. Thomases, all named after the man Jesus chose to be among his chosen twelve. St. Thomas of Canterbury, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Thomas More, to name but a few. All of these men in their own way witnessed to Christ, and the word "Apostle" means "witness".

In the banner below, write down St. Thomas's Prayer of recognition and may be cut it out and put it up somewhere to remind you that Jesus is our Lord and God.



6th July St. Maria Goretti (1890-1902)

Maria was a very beautiful girl from a poor family. Even at her young age, Maria had a deep prayer life, and a real sense of the dignity of who we are, made in the image of God, and she decided that she wanted to keep herself pure for Jesus. However, because they were so poor, the Goretti family lodged with another family with two sons. One of them, Alessandro, was very attracted to Maria and tried several times to get her to kiss him. She managed to avoid his attentions until one day when they were alone at home, armed with a dagger he tried to rape Maria. Still, she refused and was stabbed 14 times. She was rushed to hospital and there, Maria forgave Alessandro before she died of her injuries.

Alessandro was sent to prison for 30 years but after 6 years he repented, realising that he had committed a great sin. He spent the rest of his time in prison praying and had a vision of Maria in heaven.

When he was released at the end of his sentence, he became a monk and spent the rest of his life in a monastery. He was reconciled with Maria's mother and they received Holy Communion together at Christmas 1937. Maria Goretti was canonised in 1950 and her mother was present at the ceremony, the first time this had ever happened.

Forgiveness is not easy by ourselves. The first step to forgiving someone who has hurt or offended us, is to pray for them and ask Jesus to bless them. This allows us to begin to forgive by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

11th July St. Benedict 480-547



St. Benedict was born in Nursia in Italy and after studying in Rome, he went to live as a hermit. However, because he was a very holy man, lots of people flocked to him and so he set up a community of monks, called "Benedictines" after him. He wrote a "rule" for how the monks were to live which was a balance of prayer, work, and social times. He recognised that however much we try to be perfect, we do fall but that God is merciful, and He picks us up again by His grace.

Benedictines spread and became a great community of good around the world, setting up schools and hospitals. Benedictines were also famous for their hospitality and in days before hospitals and other places of care, they would often be where people would go if they were sick.

Travellers would use the monasteries as safe places to stay, and often people would settle to live nearby a monastery, sometimes working for the monks (and nuns). Malvern as a town grew up around the priory, a Benedictine establishment.

Our nearest Catholic Benedictine monastery is Belmont Abbey at Hereford. If you live elsewhere in the country, why don't you find out where your nearest Benedictine Community is (there are women's communities as well as men, of course) and see if you can visit them?

Because the "rule" of St. Benedict was so well designed, it was adopted by most later religious communities and St. Benedict is known as the father of monasticism in Europe. He is also co-patron of Europe.

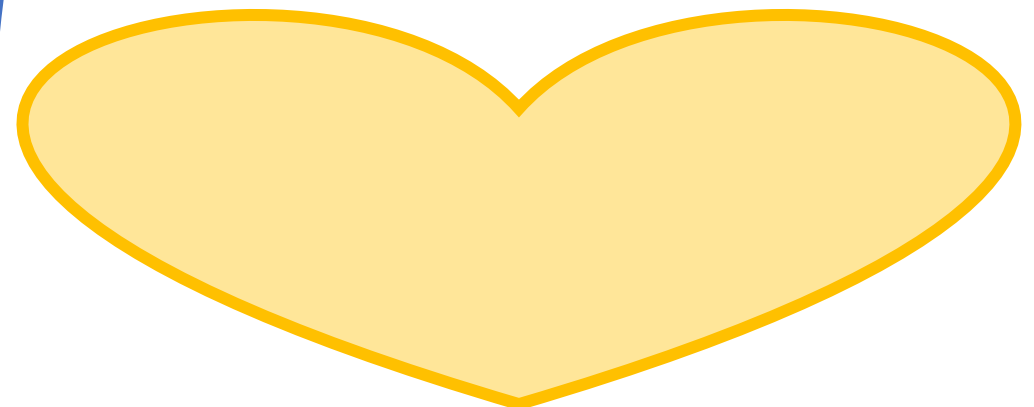
The rule of St. Benedict was based on reason and having a balanced life. Having family rules is very sensible as it helps everyone to get along better and know when it is their turn to do something, like helping in the home. After all a family, even if there are only two people in it, is a community.

Why don't you as a family write a few "rules" for the summer that give time for prayer together, for "work" - both school homework and helping in the home, and special times of relaxation and fun.

Put it up and call it the
"Rule of the _____ Family"

St. Benedict wrote: Whenever you begin any good work, you should first of all ask Jesus Christ Our Lord to make it a perfect work. We don't want to offend Jesus doing something badly.

Write a prayer below asking Jesus to help you do a task you normally find difficult, to do well.



15th July, St. Bonaventure & St. Swithun

Two completely unrelated saints who share the same feast day.

St Bonaventure (1218 - 1274)

Bonaventure was born at Bagnoregio, a hill-top city in central Italy in about 1218. Baptised Giovanni, tradition says that he was a young child he was healed by St. Francis of Assisi. At about 25 of age, Bonaventure joined the Franciscans, St. Francis' new order of religious who lived in poverty. Unlike Benedictines who join a community and generally stay in the same place, Franciscans travelled around serving different communities as needed. Bonaventure went to Paris to study philosophy and theology where he met and worked with the great Dominican scholar, St. Thomas Aquinas.

Because the Franciscans were a new order of religious, people were suspicious of their radical calls to poverty and their rejection of the usual religious structures, such as living in community as St. Benedict had set out. However, St. Bonaventure was an outstanding teacher, and he eased a lot of peoples' fears and concerns about the Franciscans. In 1255 he was elected general of the Franciscan Order, ruling it with wisdom and prudence. Because of his hard work in helping people to recognise and accept Franciscans, he is regarded as its second founder.

He was made cardinal Archbishop of Albano the year before he died, having turned down being archbishop of York.

He was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1588 by Pope Sixtus V, which means that his teaching is worthy of learning from.

The amazing hill-top city of Bagnoregio which due to earthquakes is very hard to reach these days, and so hardly anyone lives there now. (From <https://roman-vacations.com/civita-di-bagnoregio-2/>)



Some of the spiritual things St Bonaventure taught which are helpful for us today:

- Christ is both the way and the door. Christ is the staircase and the vehicle (lift).
- We should turn our full attention to Christ's throne of mercy and should gaze at him hanging on the cross.
- When we gaze at Jesus Christ on the Cross let us be filled with faith, hope and charity. Let us be devoted, full of wonder and joy, marked by gratitude, and open to praise and jubilation.
- Being at Mass and receiving Jesus in Holy Communion is a sacred mystical experience. We cannot understand it unless we long for Jesus.
- The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus Christ sent into the world, inflames our innermost soul by God's grace.
- Let us enter into the mystery of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- God's grace is sufficient for us.
- God is the strength of my heart and my heritage for ever.
- *Blessed be the Lord for ever, and let all the people say: Amen. Amen!*

(adapted from "the Journey of the Mind" in www.universalis.com)

15th July, St. Swithun (d.862)

St Swithun was born in the Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Wessex, and after being chaplain to King Egbert and his son Aethelwulf, he was made Bishop of Winchester which was then the capital city. He was well-known for always being generous to the poor and he built a lot of churches.

He died on 2 July 862. He had said that he did not want to be buried inside his minster (cathedral) but in a "vile and unworthy place" outside it. After he died, a lot of miracles were associated with him and so it was decided in 971 to move his body to a much more worthy place on the anniversary of his death. However, on 1st July (the date of his death) it poured with rain and his body could not be moved until 15th July, which has now become his feast day. It has been said that if it rains on St. Swithun's day, it will rain for 15 days non-stop! Let's hope that this is not the case this year!

When the new (Norman) cathedral was built his body was moved again and placed in a beautiful shrine in 1093 and there he rested, until the Reformation when the shrine was destroyed. If you go to Winchester Cathedral now, there is a candle in the place where his shrine was, and you can still say a prayer to St. Swithun. St. Swithun teaches us that however

important we are, we are never too important to be generous to the poor. Maybe go to a charity shop this week and buy something. The money we spend then goes to help then helps other people.

Write on the scroll how you can help the poor this week.

I can help the poor by....



Winchester Cathedral today. The Original minster was just to the left of the Norman cathedral and if you go there, you can see it marked out on the ground.

16th July, St. Helier (-555)

St Helier was from Tongeren in what is now Belgium, and was born to pagan parents. However, when he heard about Jesus he decided to be baptised and also wanted to search for a place where he could pray in peace and quiet without being disturbed by people or things. On his wandering across northern France, he came across the monastic community of St Marculf at Nantus (now Nanteuil, St-Marcouf-de-l'Isle) in Normandy. However it was still not quiet enough for him - there were too many people coming and going! So he was sent along with another monk who became a saint St. Romard, to the island of Jersey, off the Normandy coast, to teach the people who lived there about Jesus. He did this, and was allowed to spend a lot of his time on a tidal island, today known as the Hermitage Rock, next to L'Islet. There he was able to pray and contemplate undisturbed. He was killed on the beach there by robbers or infidel barbarians, traditionally in AD 555.

In Jersey he is celebrated as the saint who brought Christianity to the Island, but in northern France he is known as a healing saint and people ask for his prayers for problems with the skin and eyes. (adapted from www.universalis.com)

20th July, St Elijah, Father of the Carmelites (1-2 Kings, Prophet)

In the Western Church we don't tend to think of the Old Testament people as "Saints" but in the Eastern Church, they are all recognised as such, so they celebrate St. Abraham, St. Isaac, and so on. Today, the Carmelites (the order of contemplatives founded on the prophet Elijah's experience of contemplating God) commemorate the feast of the prophet Elijah. *Elijah* is Hebrew for means "My God is YHWH". (My God is the Lord). It was on Mount Carmel that Elijah defended the worship of the true God of Israel against the practice of worshipping Baal (who is not a god at all). Contemplation is about being in the presence of God and allowing Him to draw us closer to Him. This was the prophet Elijah's experience and we read in the Old Testament that God is not found in the noise and the thunder of life but in the still small voice that guides us day by day (I Kings 19: 11-13). As with St. Helier above, when we seek God the peace of solitude, He can reach through the noise and clatter of the distractions of everyday life.

Two saints who
sought to be with
God in peace and
quiet.

It's good to get away....

In our busy and "noisy" world, it's good to sometimes find a space of peace and quiet just to be with God. We can go outside where there is no phone signal (or leave the phone behind.) Just relax and breathe in the fresh air and know that Jesus is present, that He loves you and wants to refresh you. If you can, "see Him in your mind's eye. This is the opposite of "mindfulness" which is centering on oneself. When we contemplate Christ, we are totally focused on Him. Then the Holy Spirit more profoundly and fill us with His grace and peace.

22nd July, St. Mary Magdalene

We know that Mary was healed by Jesus and that she was one of the first women at the tomb on Easter morning. She has a very special place in our hearts because she shows us that when we put our faith in Jesus, He rewards us enormously. She was probably not a very "good" woman before she met Jesus, but she was willing to trust Him completely. He in turn trusted her enough to show Himself to her on Easter morning before He showed Himself to the Apostles.

In this picture by Raphael, Mary Magdalene is the woman with the pink shawl over her shoulders, kneeling at the foot of the cross. Notice the total love that is shown on her face as she is completely focussed on Jesus.

Whenever we are at Mass, we are in the same place, at the foot of the cross. Notice the angels catching Jesus' blood in the chalices.

At Mass when the priest lifts up the chalice, ask St. Mary Magdalene to help you to trust in Jesus as much as she did.



25th July St James (? - 44)

St. James was a fisherman and one of the two "sons of Zebedee", the other being St. John, who was known as the beloved disciple. (St. John is the figure in green and red in the picture of Jesus on the cross here.) St. James was a part of Jesus' close circle who were invited to be with him at special moments, such as the Transfiguration, the raising of Jairus' daughter, and the agony in the garden (through which they all slept). After Jesus' Ascension into heaven he was the first Apostle to be martyred and was beheaded by King Agrippa to please the Jews who hated the Christians, and was buried in Jerusalem.

In the ninth century there was a Tradition that St. James' bones had been taken to Compostela in Spain and a shrine to him there became very popular; the most popular destination for pilgrimage in Europe. "Camino de Santiago de Compostela" literally means "the way of St. James of Compostela" and there are hundreds of different routes across Europe leading to this one place. The scallop shell, the symbol of St. James has become a symbol of all pilgrims.

What is a pilgrimage? It is a journey to a holy place. Sometimes the journey itself is the most important part of the pilgrimage, especially if it is undertaken in a more arduous way than modern travel offers. We can go on a pilgrimage to offer our prayers of a particular situation or as a pilgrimage of thanks. We don't have to go to a big or famous centre to make a pilgrimage; we can do something more local and cheaper. If there is a local saint, why not walk or cycle to where they lived, and on the way, stop for moments of prayer or reflection. Or make a pilgrimage to your cathedral by public transport or by bicycle... The important thing is to offer the whole journey, not just the arrival, as a prayer.

26th July, St Anna and St Joachim

An ancient tradition, already known in the 2nd century, gives these names to the parents of the Virgin Mary. By the 6th century, St Anna (Anne) was very popular in the Eastern Church and by the 10th century, this popularity had spread to the West, and Anne became a very popular girls' name. Joachim was added a long time later - too often the fate of fathers.

Although there are some very strange myths and legends about Mary's parents, there is no reason to doubt their names, (Note that Mary was conceived in the "ordinary way"). The fact that Mary was able to say yes to the Angel Gabriel was in part helped by the home life in which she grew up; one of faith and trust in God. Her parents must have been devout people who were ready to support their daughter in her amazing vocation as mother of God.

If we have any responsibility for children, whether as parents, grandparents, teachers, or catechists, we need to ask St. Anne to pray for us so that we can give them every opportunity to grow in faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ, by the grace of the Holy Spirit which they received in Baptism.

Anne/Ann/Anna/ is also the same meaning as "Hannah" which means "grace". What a wonderful name to have. Let us pray that all those given these names may rely of the grace of the Holy Spirit to guide their lives so that all their choices may be according to God's will for them.



This carving is in Exeter cathedral. It shows St. Anne with Mary on her lap and Jesus on Mary's lap. St. Anne and St. Joachim are Jesus' grandparents and today is a good day to pray for all grandparents.

Why don't you make something for your grandparents?

A card,

Flower posy

A cake/biscuits

Write them a letter

Dear God, please bless my grandparents. Thank you for the life they gave my parents and for the life, they give to me.

For the ways they helped me and made me strong, I give thanks.

For the ways, they love me no matter what, I rejoice.

For the ways, they have paved the road that leads me here, I am grateful.

Let them grow in wisdom and joy in life.

Let them find peace and rest from their work.

Let them be healed of every sickness and pain.

And let them see with their own eyes your glory and the love of their children and grandchildren.

Bless them always until they come to rest in you.

<https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/prayers-for-grandparents>

Speaking/Learning the faith (which the Church calls "professing the faith")

There are Four Dimensions of our Faith. Draw or write down four things you have done in July that have been inspired by the saints this month

Living it (in Christ) - i.e. the choices we make in everyday life

Celebrating it in the liturgy and the sacraments



Christian prayer.



Images of Jesus revealing His Sacred Heart to St Margaret Mary Alacoque.

Her first vision was in 1673.

Photos © Steven Fleming taken at Chapelle de la Visitation, Paray le Mondial, France.

