

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- The saints weren't always perfect.
- The saints are our mentors.
- The saints intercede on our behalf.



The Saints

- Describe someone you know whom you would consider to be holy.
- How has the way this person lives affected your life?



Your answers will tell you a lot about why the Catholic Church recognizes saints. Like the person you described, saints were real people who led holy lives that we look to as role models. The person you described as holy may be unknown to the rest of the world. By honoring saints, the Church makes sure that everyone can benefit from the grace of God that shines through holy people.

Please choose which statements are true and which are false.

- | T | F | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Saints were hermits who withdrew from the world. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Saints never made mistakes or failed. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. Saints liked to have fun and laugh. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Saints never got angry. |

1. False. There are many saints who lived in the world. Saint Frances of Rome was a wife and the mother of three children. She converted her home into a hospital and shelter for victims of war. Saint Frances Cabrini lived in slums and cooked her food in tenement courtyards to be close to people who needed her most. She was just as likely to be found laying brick as talking to bishops.

2. False. Saints were not perfect! Many saints failed at what they tried and certainly made mistakes and sinned. Saint Anthony of Padua left a monastery because he wanted to be a missionary. But he fell sick as soon as he got off the boat and never preached. On his way home to Portugal, he was shipwrecked in Italy and couldn't even get a job as a dishwasher! The holiness of the saints was not in worldly success but in their desire to do God's will.


3. True. Many people assume all saints were serious and didn't know how to have fun. But the opposite is true. Saint Teresa of Ávila said, "Lord, deliver me from gloomy-faced saints," and that's the way she lived. Saint John Bosco delighted poor children with magic tricks and acrobatics as he taught them about their faith. People thought he was crazy for taking responsibility for so many children without money. One day two priests came in a carriage to take him to the mental hospital. John, who had been warned, agreed easily to "a ride in the country." Then he very politely said, "After you," to the priests. As soon as the priests were in the carriage, John slammed the carriage door and yelled to the driver, "To the mental hospital!"

The saints' joy comes from their love of God and their faith that God loved them.

4. False. Saints struggled with the same problems we do, including anger. Saint Philip Neri went into a church to pray that God would rid him of his temper. When he left, he immediately ran into someone he disliked and got into an argument. Going back into the church, he prayed again to be rid of his temper. This time he left the church and ran into a friend—and got into a fight. He went into the church a third time and said to God, “Why didn’t you answer my prayer?” God answered, “You said you wanted to get rid of your temper. I thought you wanted practice!”

Saints are not plaster statues but were real people who made mistakes, struggled, and enjoyed life. The reason these people are saints is that they faced their mistakes, their struggles, and their joys with a deep love of God and a desire to do God’s will completely, no matter what the sacrifice.

- How do these answers change or affirm your understanding of the saints and sainthood?



How to Become a Saint

The procedure the Church uses to name a saint is called **canonization**. The canonization process begins after the death of a Catholic who has been considered holy. To be canonized, the candidate’s life is examined for heroic virtue or martyrdom, orthodoxy of doctrine (which means living one’s life according to Church teachings), and reputation for holiness. A candidate must have one miracle attributed to him or her after death to be **beatified**, which puts the individual one step away from sainthood. After this, one more (for a total of two) miracle must be attributed to the person before sainthood can be granted. This is not necessarily true for martyrs, who can be canonized without any miracles being attributed to them.

The title **saint** tells us that the person lived a holy life, is in heaven, and is to be honored by the universal Church. But canonization does not make a person a saint. It only recognizes what God has already done. Canonization is also a lengthy, difficult process. So while every canonized saint is holy, not every holy person has been canonized.




St. Thérèse of Lisieux



St. John Bosco

- How would you explain the canonization process to someone who knows nothing about sainthood or the Church? Create a list, narrative, graph, or other visual.




Do Catholics Worship Saints?

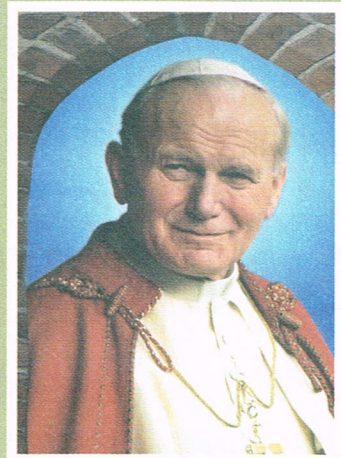
“Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness...They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us.”

CCC 956

You probably have pictures of people you love around your house or in your room, but you probably don’t worship the images. The reasons you keep pictures of people you care about is the same reason Catholics have statues and pictures of saints. Seeing a statue of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who lost her mother when she was a child, might make us feel less alone when we are grieving. A picture of St. Francis of Assisi might remind us of how much he loved God’s creation and make us more aware of our environment.

- Think about the photos you have at home. Why do you keep them around?
- Name a particular virtue or struggle you need help with. Find a saint you can look to for inspiration.





St. John Paul II



St. Mother Teresa

We honor the saints in many different ways. We celebrate feast days, write icons, create religiously inspired art, place images and statues around our churches and homes, and say special intercessory prayers.

- Do any of these ways of honoring saints especially appeal to you? Confuse you?



If you aren't used to praying with the saints, you might be overwhelmed by everything the Church offers. The most important thing to remember is that we can pray with the saints simply by talking to them as friends. Here's a meditation that may help:

- Picture yourself in a place you consider holy.
- A saint (pick one you feel close to or who is meaningful to you) joins you there.
- Talk to the saint as you would a friend.
- Share the events of your day, your problems, anything at all.
- Ask the saint for advice.
- Sit in silence and keep your mind and heart open to this advice.

Saint John Vianney struggled with his studies, flunking out several times. He never would have been ordained without the constant tutoring of another priest. Yet he was so wise and compassionate that 20,000 people a year came to his tiny rural parish to confess to him.

There are saints who were twelve years old and saints who lived 100 years. There are saints from all ethnic and racial backgrounds, like Martin de Porres, Kateri Tekakwitha, Juan Diego, and Paul Miki. There are saints with disabilities, like Julia Billiard who, though unable to walk for twenty years, taught, organized boycotts, and hid priests during French persecution. There are saints who grew up homeless, like John of the Cross, and saints who grew up to be queens, like Elizabeth of Hungary.

For every struggle you can imagine, there is a saint who embraced and became holy through it. The only thing that can keep you from being a saint is your desire. Do you want to do God's will? Do you want to be transformed by God?

We don't pray to saints the same way we pray to God. Only God is worthy of worship. One definition of pray is "earnest petition." When Catholics say they pray to saints, they are not saying they worship saints. They are earnestly asking the saints to pray to God for them.

- Have you ever asked anyone to pray for you when you were having a hard time? Why did you choose that person?



We often ask particular saints to pray for us if we feel they have a particular interest in our problem. For example, many people ask St. Monica to pray for them if they have trouble with unanswered prayers because Monica prayed for twenty years for her son to be converted.

The question is: Why would they stop caring once they are in heaven? If St. Martin de Porres loved helping the sick so much that he gave up his food and his bed to sick people and animals, would he stop loving the sick when he went to heaven? Or would he actually love them more, since he no longer has earthly cares and anxieties weighing him down?

"It is not merely by the title of example that we cherish the memory of those in heaven; we seek, rather, that by this devotion...the whole Church in the Spirit may be strengthened."

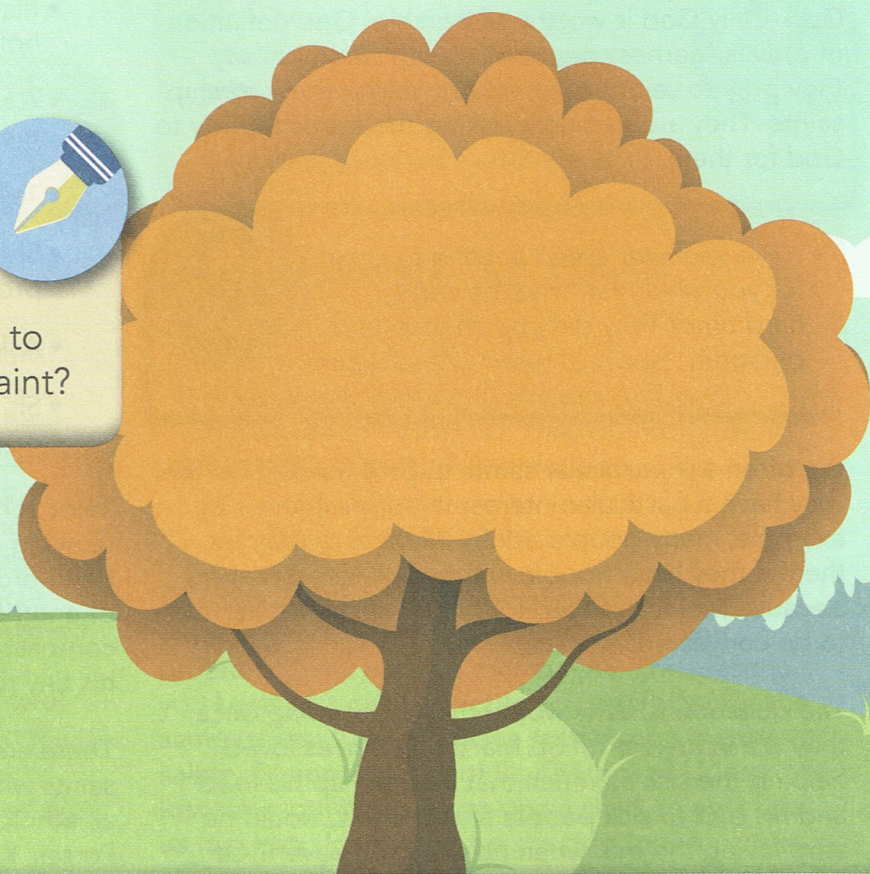
With a partner or on your own, research a saint you feel connected to, such as one who shares your name, hobbies, future occupation, and so on.

Choose two or three key facts about why you picked that saint to share with the group.

What would you like to be patron saint of?



What would you have to change to be open to God making you a saint?



Journey of Faith for Teens: Inquiry, Q15 (826337)

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehauer, CSSR, Provincial, Denver Province, the Redemptorists.

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