

Patron Saints

A patron is one who has been assigned by a venerable tradition, or chosen by election, as a special intercessor with God and the proper advocate of a particular locality, and is honored by clergy and people with a special form of religious observance.

The underlying doctrine of patrons is that of the communion of saints, or the bond of spiritual union existing between God's servants on earth, in heaven, or in purgatory. The saints are thereby regarded as the advocates and intercessors of those who are making their earthly pilgrimage.

Patrons of Churches

- Patrons of Churches : During the first few centuries, Christians had always held in deep reverence the memory of the heroes who had sealed with blood the profession of their faith. Churches were built over the spot where the bodies of martyrs lay buried. Examples are St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Lawrence, St. Sebastian and St. Agnes.
- Down to the seventeenth century popular devotion, under the guidance of ecclesiastical authority, chose as the patrons of churches those men or women renowned for their miracles, the saintliness of their lives, or their apostolic ministry in converting a nation to the Gospel.

Patrons of Countries, Trades and Professions

These patrons with very many others were chosen on account of some real correspondence between the patron and the object of patronage, or by reason of some play on words, or as a matter of individual piety.

Recently, the popes have named patron saints but patrons can be chosen by other individuals or groups as well.

Students: St. Thomas Aquinas
Teachers: St. John Baptist de La Salle
Civil Servants: St. Thomas More
Boys: St. John Bosco
Girls: St. Agnes, St. Maria Goretti
Children: St. Nicholas
Lovers: St. Valentine
Immigrants: St. Frances Xavier Cabrini
Travelers: St. Anthony of Padua
Charities: St. Vincent de Paul
Political Prisoners: St. Maximilian Kolbe
Homeless: St. Benedict Joseph Labre
Ireland: St. Patrick
Philippines: St. Rose of Lima

Patron Saint of Children

St. Nicholas (? – 346)

Feast Day - December 6

Canonized – Pre-Congregation

Priest. Abbot Bishop of Myra, Lycia (modern Turkey). Generous to the poor, and special protector of the innocent and wronged. Many stories grew up around him prior to his becoming Santa Claus.

He was very well brought up, we are told, by pious and virtuous parents, who set him to studying the sacred books at the age of five. His parents died while he was still young, leaving him with a comfortable fortune, which he resolved to use for works of charity. Soon an opportunity came. A citizen of Patara had lost all his money and his three daughters could not find husbands because of their poverty. In despair their wretched father was about to commit them to a life of shame. When Nicholas heard of this, he took a bag of gold and at night tossed it through an open window of the man's house. Here was a dowry for the eldest girl, and she was quickly married. Nicholas did the same for the second and then for the third daughter. On the last occasion the father was watching by the window, and overwhelmed his young benefactor with gratitude.

Nicholas was also the guardian of his people in temporal affairs. The governor had been bribed to condemn three innocent men to death. On the day fixed for their execution Nicholas stayed the hand of the executioner and released them. Then he turned to the governor and reproved him so sternly that he repented. There happened to be present that day three imperial officers, Nepotian, Ursus, and Herpylion, on their way to duty in Phrygia. Later, after their return, they were imprisoned on false charges of treason by the prefect and an order was procured from the Emperor Constantine for their death. In their extremity they remembered the bishop of Myra's passion for justice and prayed to God for his intercession. That night Nicholas appeared to Constantine in a dream, ordering him to release the three innocent officers. The prefect had the same dream, and in the morning the two men compared their dreams, then questioned the accused officers. On learning that they had prayed for the intervention of Nicholas, Constantine freed them and sent them to the bishop with a letter asking him to pray for the peace of the world. In the West the story took on more and more fantastic forms; in one version the three officers eventually became three boys murdered by an innkeeper and put into a brine tub from which Nicholas rescued them and restored them to life.

From the legend of the three boys may have come the tradition of his love for children, celebrated in both secular and religious observances. In many places there was once a year a ceremonious installation of a "boy bishop." In Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands gifts were bestowed on children at Christmas time in St. Nicholas' name. The Dutch Protestant settlers of New Amsterdam made the custom popular on this side of the Atlantic. The Eastern saint was converted into a Nordic magician (Saint Nicholas—Sint Klaes—Santa Claus). His popularity was greatest of all in Russia, where he and St. Andrew were joint national patrons. There was not a church that did not have some sort of shrine in honor of St. Nicholas and the Russian Orthodox Church observes even the feast of the translation of his relics. In the later Middle Ages four hundred churches were dedicated to him in England alone.

Patron Saint of Charities
St. Vincent de Paul (1581 – 1660)

Feast Day - September 27

Canonized 1737

Born in 1581 into a farming family in Pouy, France, Vincent's initial desire to be a priest was mainly for social advancement and monetary gain. Through a process of careful planning and being in the right place at the right time, Vincent was ordained a priest at the ripe age of nineteen by an elderly bishop who could barely see or hear.

Beginning his ordained life with less than pure motives, Vincent's change of heart began in the middle of one of his visits to the poor tenants of a wealthy estate holder.

When Vincent was called to hear the confession of a dying man, the spiritual naiveté of the penitent shocked Vincent. The poor man knew next to nothing about his religion. Not long after, Vincent preached a sermon on general confession from the pulpit (pictured below) in the village chapel of Folleville, France. In it he asked the people to take to heart the necessity of repentance.

The response overwhelmed him.

For hours the villagers stood in line to go to confession. Inside they poured out their longing for the Gospel and for good priests to minister to them. Vincent had not guessed at their hunger or their need. Based on this conversion of heart, Vincent gathered a little band of missionary priests to his side.

In 1626, Vincent and three priests pledged to, in his own words, "Aggregate and associate to ourselves and to the aforesaid work to live together as a Congregation...and to devote ourselves to the salvation of the poor country folk."

The Congregation of the Mission was born. More men became priests to join Vincent and his three original companions and began preaching all across France. Within Vincent's lifetime the Congregation of the Mission had spread throughout the world.

At Vincent's funeral, the preacher declared that Vincent had just about "transformed the face of the Church". No one disputed this claim.

Funny, charming, impassioned, candid - Vincent de Paul had an extraordinary capacity to connect with all types of people and to move them to be inflamed with the Gospel and to live their lives in charity.

His basic vision was simply that the Good News of Jesus Christ should be announced to the poor through word and service.

Patron Saint of Political Prisoners
St. Maximilian Kolbe (1894 – 1941)

Feast Day – August 14

Canonized – 1982

Second of three sons born to a poor but pious Catholic family in Russian occupied Poland, Kolbe was known as a mischievous child, sometimes considered wild, and a trial to his parents. However, in 1906 at Pabianice, at age twelve and around the time of his first Communion, he received a vision of the Virgin Mary that changed his life.

I asked the Mother of God what was to become of me. Then she came to me holding two crowns, one white, the other red. She asked if I was willing to accept either of these crowns. The white one meant that I should persevere in purity, and the red that I should become a martyr. I said that I would accept them both. -*Saint Maximilian*

In 1907, Kolbe decided to join the Franciscan order and took the name Maximilian. After being sent to Rome, he and six friends founded the *Immaculata Movement (Militia Immaculatae, Crusade of Mary Immaculate)* devoted to the conversion of sinners, opposition to freemasonry (which was extremely anti-Catholic at the time), spread of the Miraculous Medal (which they wore as their habit), and devotion to Our Lady and the path to Christ. Stricken with tuberculosis which nearly killed him, and left him in frail health the rest of his life. In 1919, he returned to the newly independent Poland, where he was very active in promoting the veneration of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, founding and supervising the monastery of Niepokalanów near Warsaw, a seminary, a radio station, and several other organizations and publications. Not content with his work in Poland, Maximilian and four brothers left for Japan in 1930. Within a month of their arrival, penniless and knowing no Japanese, Maximilian was printing a Japanese version of the *Knight*; the magazine, *Seibo no Kishi* grew to a circulation of 65,000 by 1936. In 1931 he founded a monastery in Nagasaki, Japan comparable to Niepokalanow. It survived the war, including the nuclear bombing, and serves today as a center of Franciscan work in Japan.

During the Second World War, in the Niepokalanów friary, Kolbe provided shelter to refugees from Greater Poland, including 2,000 Jews. He was also active as a radio amateur, with Polish call letters SP3RN, vilifying Nazi activities by reporting the facts. In 1941, he was arrested by the Germans and was transferred to Auschwitz I as prisoner #16670. He was assigned to a special work group staffed by priests and supervised by especially vicious and abusive guards. His calm dedication to the faith brought him the worst jobs available, and more beatings than anyone else. At one point he was beaten, lashed, and left for dead. The prisoners managed to smuggle him into the camp hospital where he spent his recovery time hearing confessions. When he returned to the camp, Maximilian ministered to other prisoners, including conducting Mass and delivering communion using smuggled bread and wine.

In July 1941 there was an escape from the camp. Camp protocol, designed to make the prisoners guard each other, required that ten men be starved to death in retribution for each escaped prisoner. Francis Gajowniczek, a married man with young children was chosen to die for the escape. Maximilian volunteered to take his place, and died as he had always wished - in service. After two weeks of starvation, only four of the ten men were still alive, including Kolbe. The cells were needed, and Kolbe and the other three were executed with an injection of carbolic acid in the heart.

Patron Saint of Students
St. Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274)

Feast Day – January 28

Canonization – 1323

He was the son of Landulph, Count of Aquino, who, when St. Thomas was five years old, placed him under the care of the Benedictines of Monte Casino. His teachers were surprised at the progress he made, for he surpassed all his fellow pupils in learning as well as in the practice of virtue.

When he became of age to choose his state of life, St. Thomas renounced the things of this world and resolved to enter the Order of St. Dominic in spite of the opposition of his family. In 1243, at the age of seventeen, he joined the Dominicans of Naples. Some members of his family resorted to all manner of means over a two year period to break his constancy. They even went so far as to send an impure woman to tempt him. But all their efforts were in vain and St. Thomas persevered in his vocation. As a reward for his fidelity, God conferred upon him the gift of perfect chastity, which has merited for him the title of the "Angelic Doctor".

After making his profession at Naples, he studied at Cologne under the celebrated St. Albert the Great. Here he was nicknamed the "dumb ox" because of his silent ways and huge size, but he was really a brilliant student. At the age of twenty-two, he was appointed to teach in the same city. At the same time, he also began to publish his first works. After four years he was sent to Paris. The saint was then a priest. At the age of thirty-one, he received his doctorate.

At Paris he was honored with the friendship of the King, St. Louis, with whom he frequently dined. In 1261, Urban IV called him to Rome where he was appointed to teach, but he positively declined to accept any ecclesiastical dignity. St. Thomas not only wrote (his writings filled twenty hefty tomes characterized by brilliance of thought and lucidity of language), but he preached often and with greatest fruit. Clement IV offered him the archbishopric of Naples which he also refused.

Aquinas had a mystical experience while celebrating Mass on 6 December 1273. At this point, he set aside his *Summa*. When asked why he had stopped writing, Aquinas replied, "I cannot go on . . . All that I have written seems to me like so much straw compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me." Later, others reported that Aquinas heard a voice from a cross that told him he had written well. On one occasion, monks claimed to have found him levitating. He left the great monument of his learning, the *Summa Theologica*, unfinished.

St. Thomas was one of the greatest and most influential theologians of all time. The philosophy of Aquinas is "rich and varied." It has had an enormous influence on subsequent Christian theology, especially that of the Roman Catholic Church, and on Western philosophy in general, where he stands as a vehicle and modifier of Aristotelianism. Even atheist philosophers have been strongly influenced by Aquinas. His extraordinary patience and fairness in dealing with erring philosophers, his approbation of all that was true in their writings, his gentleness in condemning what was false, his clear-sightedness in pointing out the direction to true knowledge in all its branches, his aptness and accuracy in expressing the truth -- these qualities mark him as a great master not only for the thirteenth century, but for all times.

1. **St. Clare of Assisi** was named patron of television because one Christmas when she was too ill to leave her bed she saw and heard Christmas Mass -- even though it was taking place miles away.
2. **St. Benedict Joseph Labre** was named patron of the homeless because he spent years wandering Europe in complete poverty, spending his days in perpetual adoration in the cathedrals. He begged in the streets, and if he was given more than he needed for the day, he would give the remainder to some one he considered more in need than he was.
3. **St. Dismas** was named patron of reformed thieves because he was the one of the thieves crucified with Jesus. He rebuked the other thief and asked Jesus to remember him.
4. **St. Apollonia** was named patron of toothache because she had all her teeth knocked out after being hit in the face by a Christian persecutor under the reign of Emperor Philip. After she was threatened with fire unless she renounced her faith, Apollonia jumped into the flames voluntarily.
5. **St. Christopher** was named patron of safe journeys because there was one legend about him in which he was crossing a river when a child asked to be carried across. The child, according to the legend, was Christ carrying the weight of the whole world.
6. **St. Francis of Assisi** was named patron of animals because of his love for animals. One story has him preaching to hundreds of birds about being thankful to God for God's care. The story tells us the birds stood still as he walked among them, only flying off when he said they could leave.
7. **St. Dominic Savio** was named patron of boys because in his short life of fifteen years, he showed extraordinary love for God and brave struggle to keep his innocence from Baptism to the end of his life.
8. **St. Vincent Ferrer** was named patron of builders because of his fame for "building up" and strengthening the Church: through his preaching, missionary work, in his teachings, as confessor and adviser.
9. **St. Catherine of Bologna** was named patron of art because she was a well educated nun who could draw. Some of her religious pictures still survive now in Venice.