

THE
PATRON SAINTS
HANDBOOK

BY
MITCH FINLEY

the**WORD**
among us[®]
press

Copyright © 2010 by Mitch Finley

All rights reserved

Published by The Word Among Us Press
9639 Doctor Perry Road
Ijamsville, Maryland 21754
www.wau.org

ISBN: 978-1-59325-169-7

14 13 12 11 10 1 2 3 4 5

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture passages contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition, copyright © 1989, 1993, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Cover design by John Hamilton

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the author and publisher. Made and printed in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Finley, Mitch.

The patron saints handbook / Mitch Finley.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 978-1-59325-169-7 (alk. paper)

1. Christian patron saints. I. Title.

BX4656.5.F56 2010

270.092'2--dc22

2010028321

CONTENTS

Introduction: Saints and Patron Saints / 9

1. Abuse Victims: Blessed Laura Vicuña / 13
2. Actors: St. Genesisius / 15
3. Accountants: St. Matthew / 17
4. Altar Servers: St. John Berchmans / 19
5. Animals: St. Francis of Assisi / 20
6. Arthritis Sufferers: St. Alphonsus Liguori / 22
7. Artists: St. Catherine of Bologna / 24
8. Astronauts and Aviators: St. Joseph of Cupertino / 26
9. Astronomers: St. Dominic / 28
10. Athletes: St. Sebastian / 30
11. Authors: St. Francis de Sales / 32
12. Bakers: St. Elizabeth of Hungary / 34
13. Bicyclists: Madonna del Ghisallo / 36
14. Blood Banks: St. Januarius / 38
15. Bodily Ills: St. Bernadette Soubirous / 40
16. Booksellers: St. John of God / 42
17. Bricklayers: St. Stephen of Hungary / 44
18. Broadcasters: St. Gabriel the Archangel / 46
19. Builders: St. Vincent Ferrer / 48
20. Bus Drivers: St. Christopher / 50
21. Business Men and Women: St. Homobonus / 52
22. Butchers: St. Anthony of Egypt / 54
23. Cab Drivers: St. Fiacre / 56
24. Cancer Patients: St. Peregrine Laziosi / 58

25. Catechists: St. Charles Borromeo / 60
26. Charitable Societies: St. Vincent de Paul / 62
27. Chastity: St. Thomas Aquinas / 64
28. Children: St. Nicholas of Myra / 66
29. Converts: St. Margaret Clitherow / 68
30. Cooks: St. Lawrence / 70
31. Dancers: St. Vitus / 72
32. Deacons: St. Stephen / 74
33. Dentists: St. Apollonia / 76
34. Desperate Situations: St. Jude / 77
35. Disabled People: St. Giles / 79
36. Divorced People: St. Helena / 80
37. Drug Addicts: St. Maximilian Kolbe / 82
38. Emigrants and Immigrants: St. Frances Cabrini / 84
39. Engaged Couples: St. Agnes / 86
40. Engineers: St. Ferdinand III of Castile / 88
41. Expectant Mothers: St. Gerard Majella / 90
42. Farmers: St. Isidore / 92
43. Fathers: St. Joseph / 94
44. Firefighters: St. Florian / 96
45. Forest Workers: St. John Gualbert / 98
46. Friendship: St. John the Evangelist / 100
47. Funeral Directors: St. Joseph of Arimathea / 102
48. Gardeners: St. Adalard / 104
49. Grandmothers: St. Anne / 106
50. Headache Sufferers: St. Teresa of Ávila / 108
51. Holy Souls in Purgatory: St. Nicholas of Tolentino / 110
52. The Homeless: St. Benedict Joseph Labré / 112

CONTENTS

53. Human Rights: Blessed Jerzy Popieluszko / 114
54. Infertility: St. Rita of Cascia / 116
55. Lawyers: St. Thomas More / 118
56. Leaders and Papal Delegates: Blessed John XXIII / 120
57. Librarians: St. Jerome / 122
58. Mental Health Therapists: St. Christina / 124
59. Mental Illness: St. Dymphna / 126
60. The Military: St. Joan of Arc / 128
61. Miscarriages: St. Catherine of Sweden / 130
62. Missionaries: St. Thérèse of Lisieux / 132
63. Mothers: St. Monica / 134
64. Motorists: St. Frances of Rome / 136
65. Mountain Climbers: St. Bernard of Montjoux / 138
66. Musicians: St. Gregory the Great / 140
67. Nurses: St. Catherine of Siena / 142
68. Parents: St. Louis IX of France / 144
69. Penitent Sinners: St. Mary Magdalene / 146
70. Pharmacists: Sts. Cosmas and Damian / 148
71. Physicians: St. Pantaleon / 150
72. Police Officers: St. Michael the Archangel / 151
73. Priests: St. John Vianney / 153
74. Prisoners: St. Dismas / 155
75. Pro-Life Movement: Blessed Margaret of Castello / 156
76. Public Relations: St. Bernardine of Siena / 158
77. Racial Justice: St. Martin de Porres / 160
78. Rape Victims: St. Maria Goretti / 162
79. Retreats: St. Ignatius of Loyola / 164
80. Sailors: St. Brendan the Voyager / 166

THE PATRON SAINTS HANDBOOK

81. Schoolchildren: St. John Bosco / 168
 82. Scientists: St. Albert the Great / 170
 83. Searchers of Lost Articles: St. Anthony of Padua / 172
 84. Second Marriages: St. Adelaide / 174
 85. Separation from a Spouse: St. Nicholas von Flüe / 176
 86. Single Mothers: St. Margaret of Cortona / 178
 87. Social Workers: St. Louise de Marillac / 180
 88. Songwriters: St. Caedmon / 182
 89. Stress: St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina / 184
 90. Teachers: St. John Baptist de la Salle / 186
 91. Teenagers: St. Aloysius Gonzaga / 188
 92. Television: St. Clare of Assisi / 190
 93. Throat Ailments: St. Blaise / 192
 94. Toymakers: St. Claude de la Columbiere / 193
 95. Unborn Children: St. Gianna Beretta Molla / 195
 96. The Unemployed: St. Cajetan / 197
 97. Waitpersons: St. Martha / 199
 98. Widows: St. Paula / 200
 99. Wine Merchants: St. Amand / 202
 100. Young Adults and World Youth Day: Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati / 204
- Alphabetical Index of Saints / 206
- Bibliography / 210
- Helpful Web Sites / 211

INTRODUCTION

Saints don't go out of style, and patron saints in particular enjoy a perennial popularity, a few even among members of Protestant denominations and even other religions. Something about the saints attracts and intrigues us. Perhaps it's their special closeness to the mystery of the divine, or their simplicity, or their inclination to thumb their noses at the pretensions of power and wealth. Sometimes they endear themselves to people by their common sense and good humor. Even the saints who were dour or utterly impractical fascinate us.

The Catholic affection for saints was what led to the tradition of adopting saints as patrons of particular causes, groups, or regions. In *The Patron Saints Handbook*, you'll learn about one hundred such saints. You'll find out, for example, who St. Genesius was and why he is the patron saint of actors. You'll discover why St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who spent her life in a cloistered French convent, is the patron saint of missionaries. You'll meet the patron saint of firefighters, songwriters—and even astronauts.

Before we go any further on the topic of patron saints, however, we need to have a clear understanding of saints in general and their role in the life of the community of faith. The saints are recommended to us because they excelled at living their lives with great trust and confidence in God. As they willingly and completely opened their hearts to the risen Christ, God was able to do marvelous, frequently delightful, and always inspiring things through them. Because of their heroic virtue, the Church recognizes them as worthy of devotion. That's why they're saints.

At the same time, saints are like anyone who has ever lived in this world and died trusting in the grace of Christ: They live now as they lived then, as members of the Church, the same faith community to which we belong. This is what Catholic tradition calls “the communion of saints,” and we who flounder around in time and space are every bit as much members of this communion as are the countless souls who went before us. Just as we may ask others here in time and space to pray for us, so also we may ask those who have gone before us into eternity to pray for us.

If saints are our brothers and sisters in Christ and companions on our faith journey, then it makes sense to ask them to be patrons of particular causes. As patrons, we are asking various saints to take a special interest in something that may somehow have related to their lives on earth. This could be a cause, such as the pro-life movement; a group of people, such as parents of large families; or members of a profession, such as dentists or physicians. Churches and dioceses also have patrons, as well as some cities and countries.

St. Francis of Assisi, for example, encouraged his followers to honor and respect the natural world, so he is the patron saint of animals and those who work to protect the environment. He is also the patron of Assisi, Italy, and other cities. St. Francis de Sales was a writer, so he is the patron saint of journalists and writers. St. Clare of Assisi is the patron saint of television because one Christmas when she was too ill to attend Mass, she saw and heard Christmas Mass on her wall, even though it was happening in a different place.

At times popes have named saints as patrons of particular causes. After the conclusion of the First Vatican Council in 1870,

Pope Pius IX named St. Joseph, the husband of Mary, as patron of the universal Church. St. Joseph is also the patron of fathers and workers. Patrons also can be chosen by individuals, groups, or organizations. St. Isidore the Farmer is the patron saint of farmers and the United States National Rural Life Conference.

Popular saints such as Mary and St. Joseph are often selected as patrons of numerous causes. Each of the one hundred saints in this book has been identified with only one specific cause, but at times I have noted when a saint is also a patron of another group. Although it's often obvious why a saint is a patron of a particular cause, sometimes there seems to be no connection at all or only a peripheral one. For example, St. John Gualbert is the patron of forest workers because the first monastery he established was in a shady grove of trees.

The saints in this book span the two thousand years of Christianity. In the case of early Church saints, it's sometimes difficult to tell fact from fiction. We usually have good evidence that the saint existed and was martyred, but often legends developed around a particular saint, stories that both entertained and inspired people. Whatever really happened, however, we do know that these men and women were put to death for their belief in Jesus Christ. Their intercession is just as powerful as the saints whose lives we are more familiar with. At times the veneration and practices that followed the saints' deaths are as interesting as the lives of the saints themselves.

There are a few cases in which it's impossible to verify that a saint actually existed. St. Christopher is probably the best example of this situation. Then the Church tends to gently discourage devotion to him or her, although we can still be inspired and

delight in these stories that are so much a part of our ancient tradition.

This book is arranged alphabetically by the cause to which a saint is attached. An index in the back of the book also lists the saints alphabetically by their first name so that you can easily find a particular saint. There are far more patron saints than those included in this book, of course, so you'll also find a list of resources for researching other patron saints.

As you read or browse through *The Patron Saints Handbook*, keep in mind that these saints were human just like all of us. Unlike us, however, they now enjoy what we experience only partially and imperfectly: loving intimacy with the God whom Dante in his *Divine Comedy* called “the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.” Yet the very idea of patron saints takes for granted that the saints in heaven know what goes on in this world and in our lives, and they care for us and pray for us when we ask them to do so. How delightful is that!

Mitch Finley

1

ABUSE VICTIMS

Blessed Laura Vicuña

JANUARY 22

Laura Vicuña was born just three months after a civil war had erupted in Chile in 1891, so her life was in danger soon after it began. Claudio Vicuña, a relative of her father, was a prominent figure in the war—which left him with many enemies. The animosity toward him also threatened Laura and her family, and they moved to the Andean mountains for safety. In 1894 Laura’s father died, leaving his wife, Mercedes, alone with her two daughters.

Mercedes became the mistress of a man named Manuel Mora in exchange for his protection and financial support. Mora sent Laura and her sister to a boarding school, which was run by the Salesian Sisters. Laura loved her new school—particularly the chapel that housed the tabernacle—and spent much of her time in prayer. At the age of ten, she made her First Holy Communion, which was a deeply spiritual experience for her. In her notebook at the time, she wrote, “O my God, I want to love you and serve you all my life. I give you my soul, my heart, my whole self.” She asked the bishop who came to visit her school if she could become a Salesian Sister herself, but he responded that she was too young. Later, however, her confessor allowed her to take private vows.

Although she loved her time at school, Laura’s life at home during school vacations was plagued with difficulties. Mora, who was often drunk, was becoming increasingly abusive and began

making sexual advances toward the girl. Furthermore, Laura realized that her mother was neither happy nor close to God. This troubled her so much that she offered her life to God in exchange for her mother's salvation.

Laura fell ill in the winter of 1903 and returned home from school to recuperate and be with her mother. Mora's behavior grew steadily worse, and Laura and her family moved out. One night Mora caught up with them. He beat Laura until she was unconscious. She died several days later on January 22, 1904. After Laura's death, Mercedes returned to her faith and left Mora for good.

Laura was beatified by Pope John Paul II on September 3, 1988. Because she suffered and ultimately died at the hands of Mora, Laura is the patron saint of abuse victims. By dying she gave her mother the courage to escape a terrible domestic situation and to return to the Church. We may ask for her intercession to give us the strength to assert our rights in the face of abuse—physical or otherwise—as well as to deepen our faith.

ACTORS

St. Genesisius

AUGUST 25

During the second and third centuries, Christians were frequently subjected to persecution by various Roman emperors. One of the most infamous of these emperors was Diocletian, who reigned from 284 until 305. When Diocletian first became emperor, he gave the impression that he might be more tolerant of Christianity than his predecessors, but this did not happen. For political reasons, Diocletian ordered that Christian churches be destroyed and that all copies of holy books be burned. He then denied all Christians in the empire their civil rights, which meant that they were no longer considered to be Roman citizens. Next, he directed that all members of the clergy be thrown in prison. All clergy who refused to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods were to be tortured and put to death. Before long he ordered that all Christians receive the same treatment.

Genesisius was an actor who lived in Rome during the third century. One day he was performing in a play being presented for the emperor's entertainment. The play had been written to mock the Christian Sacrament of Baptism, and Genesisius portrayed a catechumen who was to be baptized. While performing, however, Genesisius underwent a conversion.

When Genesisius' fellow actors took him before the emperor, Diocletian became enraged and sent him to Plautian, a high-

ranking military officer. Plautian threatened him with torture if he didn't offer sacrifice to the pagan gods, but Genesisius refused and insisted that he would be a Christian no matter what the cost. Genesisius was then beheaded.

Certainly we can learn from the example of Genesisius. We may not live in a society in which people are killed in huge numbers for being Christian, but in many countries in the world, acting on one's Christian faith can put a person in harm's way. In fact, notable individuals in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been murdered for precisely this reason. There is nothing out-of-date about the witness of Genesisius.

Actors, whether amateur or professional, can learn from Genesisius that it is important that there be no conflict between one's faith and one's art. They have a special gift, through which they may choose to influence people for good or for ill. Genesisius, of course, would have them use it for the former.