

LAY SAINTS

*Ascetics & Penitents*



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JOAN CARROLL CRUZ

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*This book is  
dedicated with love  
to  
The Holy Family*



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

**A** NATIONAL Catholic magazine polled a thousand of its readers to learn what they believe about the saints. The magazine reported that while news reports on the nation's Catholics have highlighted disagreements with traditional Church teachings, sixty-seven percent of the survey's respondents said they prayed to the saints as much, or more, than they did years ago. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents said they tried to imitate the lives of the saints.

Mentioned as the four favorite saints were the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux (the Little Flower). With the exception of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, who are in a unique category, we are left with a Franciscan brother and a Discalced Carmelite cloistered nun. While we can admire the virtues of St. Francis and St. Thérèse, the lifestyles of these two saints, and other saints of religious orders, are far removed, to say the least, from those of lay people.

Although the exact number of canonized saints is unknown, we know, of course, that the greater majority have been members of religious orders. We love them, we admire them, we wish to imitate them. But how can a mother with

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small children, a wife with a difficult husband, a young bride with in-law problems—how can they really relate to the nun who lived in the quiet of a cloister, the nun who lived in a community where everyone shared the work of the house? How can they relate to the saints of religious orders whose lives were arranged in an orderly manner and who had designated times for quiet prayer and who had little or no financial problems? One might wonder if these saints of the cloister would have merited their titles if they had remained in the world to face the conflicts and dangers confronted by ordinary lay people.

It is profitable, of course, for laymen to love these saints, to pray to them and to imitate their virtues as much as they are able. But it seems that laymen would draw more encouragement to advance in prayer and virtue and would derive more consolation in their trials by examining the troubles and temptations of those saints who lived and died as lay members of the Church.

St. Teresa of Avila suggests that “we need to cultivate and think upon, and seek the companionship of those saints who, though living on earth like ourselves, have accomplished such great deeds for God.” Here, then, are the lives of lay saints who have, so to speak, “lived on earth like ourselves.” Represented here are single men and women, mothers and fathers, soldiers and servants, doctors and lawyers, the humble and the noble—all who have met the difficulties and challenges of the secular life and triumphed over them. Their virtues are to be admired, but most of all imitated. May we benefit from their example and from their prayers.

—Joan Carroll Cruz

# PREFACE

## A WORD ABOUT THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

A BOOK about lay saints would be incomplete without mentioning the pre-eminent model for secular people, the Blessed Mother. But what could be said here that has not been mentioned about her already in numerous biographies and devotional works? We have only to delve into these to find a solicitous and understanding mother, a kindly and generous friend, a consoling companion, and a ready and willing intercessor with God.

Although it is known that Mary was free from sin, full of grace, blessed among women and the fairest honor of our race, yet, as we know, she was not exempt from countless trials and hardships. She, who was the model of saints throughout the ages, should be the particular ideal of lay people, since Mary was an exemplary member of our lay ranks. She was, of course, a young bride, a young mother, a housekeeper, and a widow. . . .

May this Immaculate Mother pray for us, that in our imitation of the saints, we can advance in virtue and eventually join her and her sainted children in our heavenly homeland.



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*Then shall the king say to them that shall be on his right hand: Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me.*

—Matthew 25:34–36

*But if the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed, and keep all my commandments, and do judgment, and justice, living he shall live, and shall not die. I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done: in his justice which he hath wrought, he shall live.*

—Ezekiel 18:21–22





MODELS OF CHARITY,  
ASCETICS, AND  
SOLITARIES



ONE

## BLESSED BONAVIDA

D. 1375

THE little town of Lugo, situated fourteen miles west of Ravenna, Italy was the place of Bl. Bonavita's birth and death. Here he worked as a humble blacksmith, spending his time either at labor or in the performance of good works. It is recorded of him that whether working or at leisure, whether sitting or walking, indoors or out of doors, he was often so rapt in contemplation as to be unaware of all that was taking place around him. This was demonstrated the day a fire destroyed many of the houses in Lugo. When the whole population of the city was feverishly working to extinguish the fire, Bl. Bonavita passed by, totally unaware of what was taking place. When his attention was gained, he made the Sign of the Cross over the flames. From that moment the fire is said to have been totally extinguished.

As a Franciscan tertiary, Bonavita had the true spirit of the Order and a love of poverty. His zeal for the poor was shown one bitter, wintry day when he found a poor man half frozen outside the church of San Francesco. Bonavita immediately gave the man his own clothes. The little urchins of the town ran after the nearly naked blacksmith, throwing stones at him and shouting words of abuse. On another occasion,

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Bonavita gave his newly mended shoes to a beggar. With the proceeds from his strenuous profession, it was his custom to feed the hungry, to visit prisons, and to bury the dead.

Through his prayers, and with the Sign of the Cross, Bl. Bonavita worked many wonders. He died a holy death in the year 1375.