

UNBREAKABLE

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SAINTS WHO INSPIRED SAINTS
TO MORAL COURAGE

Kimberly Begg

Foreword by
Leila Miller

TAN Books
Gastonia, North Carolina

Unbreakable: Saints Who Inspired Saints to Moral Courage © 2023
Kimberly Begg

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Lovingly dedicated to my husband, Ian, and our children.

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Foreword

If I have said one thing to Catholic parents over the past few years, it's this: we need confidence and courage to face the spiritual dangers of an increasingly hostile culture—not just for our own souls but for the souls of our children.

We cannot give what we don't have, and courage is in short supply today. The world hates Christ and His Church more than ever, and many Catholics are weary of the battle, often unwilling to undergo the real and painful consequences of taking a public stand for the Faith. This weariness has led some parents to close their eyes to the accelerating moral chaos that threatens to sweep away our children.

To be sure, a good portion of this “slumber” by Catholic parents is more like paralysis, the result of an unspoken fear. Parents are secretly afraid of what will become of their children in an increasingly merciless and perverse society; they don't know if their children can withstand the pressures and temptations that surround them; some even wonder if there is a way around the cross—a way for their children to please both Christ and the world.

“After all,” they rationalize, “doesn’t God want my children to be happy? To make a good living? To thrive in the world?”

Confusion, complacency, and fear cause even faithful parents to sleep through the war that wages around us and targets our children’s souls.

It is high time to awake for battle, and Kimberly Begg has met us with a herald of trumpets! In *Unbreakable*, Begg equips and challenges parents to fulfill their duties to God by setting their children’s hearts on fire for Christ. The stories in this book are important and compelling. They will leave parents and children awestruck and eager to serve as soldiers for Christ in our own troubled and dangerous times.

In addition, this book reinforces a critical lesson for modern parents: to whatever crosses we are called, we are not asked to do anything the saints before us have not also done, knowing Christ has gone before us all.

Through the simple genius of *Unbreakable*, Begg has provided something refreshing and invaluable to anxious Catholic parents everywhere: not only the clarity of *truth and faith* but also the inspiration to have *courage and confidence* to back it up.

Leila Miller

Feast of Saint Padre Pio

Preface

When my children were very young, I read a secular parenting book that shared a compelling insight: families that pass on the stories of their ancestors have children who are more confident and well-grounded than those that lack a culture rooted in the past. I immediately saw the parallel to Catholicism. I thought, “What a gift our faith is to all of the world’s children!” Indeed, how fortunate we are to be connected to the great saints—the luminaries of the Church who came before us—to model the truth that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever” (Heb 13:8).

What occupies our children’s imaginations is of profound importance. The ideas they ponder and the stories they turn over in their heads—about heroes, honor, sacrifice, and glory—shape the way they see the world and their place in it.

My children attend faithfully Catholic schools where all aspects of the culture and curriculum are rooted in truth. They encounter the Blessed Sacrament daily at Mass and in prayer. They learn about God’s world and the human experience through the study of theology, philosophy, science, classic literature, history, mathematics, the arts, and other disciplines.

They also celebrate the lives of the saints. I have seen my children become captivated by the stories of saints they discovered at school—holy men and women who united their wills to the will of God, heroically standing up for the truth of the Catholic faith. What a blessing it is to be a part of school communities that reinforce what we're teaching at home.

I wrote this book to be a resource for Catholic parents, regardless of whether their children attend faithfully Catholic schools, to help them provide a Catholic education for their children. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provides important insights about the educational and evangelical duties of parents:

Parents must regard their children as *children of God*.

. . . Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in Heaven, parents must educate their children to discover their vocation and fulfill God's law. . . .

. . . Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. . . .

. . . Parents must teach children to avoid the compromising and degrading influences that threaten human societies. . . .

Education in the faith should begin in the child's earliest years. . . .

Parents' respect and affection are expressed by the care and attention they devote to bringing up their young children and *providing for their physical and spiritual needs*. As the children grow up, the same respect and devotion lead parents to educate them in the right use of reason and freedom.¹

The vocation of Christian parenthood imposes lifelong obligations rooted in the reality that children don't belong to their parents; they belong to God. Fathers and mothers have a duty to raise children who know who they are and why they were made—who know that God is constantly calling them to cooperate with His unique plan for their lives, and who accept and even embrace the suffering and sacrifice required of them on their path to heaven.

It is of paramount importance that parents teach their children to discern and do God's will. Their souls—and their children's souls (and their children's children's souls, and so on)—depend on it.

TAN Books is the perfect home for this book. Since 1967, TAN's number one priority has been the salvation of souls. As such, TAN occupies a unique space in the publishing world, preserving and promoting more than one thousand works aimed at helping God's children to become saints.

In 2021, TAN released *Parenting for Eternity: A Guide to Raising Children in Holy Mother Church* by Conor Gallagher, CEO of TAN. *Parenting for Eternity* is an important work that challenges parents to understand “the eternal consequence of every single parental act—acts of commission and acts of omission”—in forming their children's eternal souls.

Unbreakable: Saints Who Inspired Saints to Moral Courage reinforces Gallagher's crucial message. In keeping with TAN's rich tradition of preserving the Church's teachings and history with the aim of saving souls, this book tells the stories of Church heroes like they've never been told before: with an emphasis on the importance of passing

down stories of the saints to help parents cultivate moral courage in their children.

Saints inspire saints. This book attempts to make that point by highlighting a crucial lesson: the men and women who attain heaven are those who love Christ so fiercely that they develop a habit of suffering and sacrificing for Him, fearlessly uniting their wills with His will. I wrote this book to help parents fulfill their duties to their children in a world that is increasingly hostile to Christians. My hope is that it will inspire parents and children alike on their path to heaven.

Acknowledgments

It's incredibly satisfying to look back on how this book came about and know that I owe its fruition to the help of so many wonderful people. Of those, I am most grateful to my loving husband, Ian, who has been amazingly supportive of what may have seemed like an impossible idea at the outset. Despite our many responsibilities at home, he patiently gave me time and space to write without distraction for hours at a time as he did all the things with our mostly happy children. He was the first person to read each chapter, and he offered feedback that made my editor's job much easier.

Which brings me to the second person I need to thank: my editor, Paul Kengor. This book would not have happened without Paul. He is the first person I shared the idea for the book with. He understood the vision and took it to Patrick O'Hearn at TAN Books, who encouraged me to submit a formal proposal. I will forever be grateful to Paul, Patrick, and the hardworking team at TAN, who took a leap of faith in supporting me as a first-time author and bringing me into the TAN family. I am still amazed and so very grateful.

Several friends made important contributions that should be recognized. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Ron Robinson for introducing me to Blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko, whose heroism served as the initial inspiration for the book; Austin Ruse, for reviewing my proposal to TAN; Kevin Doak, for loaning me his extensive Saint Maximilian Kolbe library and for reviewing the section on Kolbe; Catherine Pakaluk, for keeping me accountable for daily word counts, which allowed me to finish writing on Saint Teresa of Calcutta's feast day; and Leila Miller, for reviewing my manuscript and writing such a thoughtful and powerful foreword.

In addition, I would like to thank my parents, Mike and Dee Martin, for baptizing me in the Catholic Church; my children—Charlie, Bryson, Adelyn, Marielle, and Lucia—for giving me a glimpse of the magnificent love that God has for His children; the wonderful priests in my life—especially Fr. Thomas Petri, OP, STD, Fr. Dominic Legge, OP, Fr. Jerry J. Pokorsky, Fr. Mark E. Moretti, Fr. J. D. Jaffe, Fr. Stephen Holmes, and Fr. Matt Russick, TOR—for deepening my relationship with Christ through the sacraments and their examples of holiness; my children's schools—The Heights School in Potomac, Maryland and Holy Family Academy in Manassas, Virginia—for supporting Ian and me in our role as primary educators; and many friends, too many to name, who supported me during this process, and especially those who prayed for me. Special thanks to Mike and Liz Ortner, Rich and Shirley Walker, Hope Hargadon, Ann Woodson, Heather Hambleton, Meg White, Becca Hanssen, Holly Smith, and Beth Sullivan.

Finally, I am most grateful to God for the beautiful gift of my life and the hope of my salvation, and to the Blessed Mother and all the angels and saints for their heavenly assistance. It took me a full year to write the manuscript for this book. I prayed throughout that time and was intentional about praying to the saints as I was writing about them. This may be bold to assert, but I believe the saints featured in this book helped me tell their stories the way they wanted them to be told.

Introduction

Catholic parents have long sought to raise saints. We bring our children to Mass, prioritize the sacraments, and teach them to be Christ-like in their interactions with others. Many of us send our children to Catholic schools and cultivate friendships with Catholic families. We give our children a foundation of faith, which we hope and pray is strong enough to resist the unholy temptations outside our homes.

The world that awaits our children is remarkably different than the one today's parents encountered when they left their childhood homes. It's a world that not only glorifies sin but also demands universal and unequivocal celebration of sin. While the ridiculing of Christians has gone on for decades, the "canceling" of believers as "haters," disqualified from friendships, jobs, and other opportunities, is new.

To prepare our children, we must seek to raise not only saints but *martyrs*—young men and women strong enough to rejoice in the blessings promised by Jesus in Matthew 5:10–12: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed

are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Parents need to be intentional about cultivating moral courage in their children to prepare the next generation of Christians to stand up for their faith amidst the hostility of an increasingly atheistic and antagonistic culture.

G. K. Chesterton—the renowned twentieth-century writer, philosopher, and historian whose love of truth fueled his conversion to Catholicism—said, “The Catholic Church is the only thing that frees a man from the degrading slavery of being a child of his age.”² Chesterton was masterful at illuminating the brilliant truths of the Catholic faith—but how confusing his words must be to modern people who are ignorant of the history of man and the Church!

The truth of our faith is much more interesting than the modern lens through which most of us have been taught to see the world. The Magisterium of the Catholic Church recognizes Christ as the Logos—the divine reason for creation, giving the world order, form, and meaning. With Christ as Logos, Christians understand our time in this world as temporary and, at the same time, important and consequential.

All Catholic parents hope and pray their children will live holy lives and go to heaven. Where many parents fall short is preparing their children for what will be required of them as Christians today—sacrificing, suffering, and facing persecution for the faith.

It’s no wonder. Catholic parents—even the most devout—are a product of the modern world. And the modern world

values happiness above all else, especially concerning children. A recent survey found that 73 percent of Americans rated happiness as the most important goal in raising children and assessing the results of education—far ahead of any other option.³

It is not wrong to seek happiness. On the contrary, as Saint John Paul II observed, we are ordered, in Christ, to want and to attain happiness: “People are made for happiness. Rightly, then, you thirst for happiness. Christ has the answer to this desire of yours. But He asks you to trust Him.”⁴ The problem is that modern parents seek happiness for their children on the world’s terms, not God’s terms, despite Jesus’s instruction in John 15:18–19: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

“Hate” is a word that has become all-too familiar to our modern ears. In a world obsessed with wokeness and the celebration of sexual deviancy, “hate” is the secular culture’s go-to accusation aimed at silencing and marginalizing Christians. One marvels at the success of a tactic so obviously rooted in deceit, manipulation, and intimidation. After all, “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). And yet, we know in our hearts that the father of lies has been assisted in his persecution of Christians not only by enemies of Christ and His Church but also by Christians afraid to sacrifice and suffer.

Fear is a terrible reason to risk the salvation of our souls. It’s an even worse reason to risk the salvation of our children’s souls.

There's no question that raising children today is more complicated than it has been in recent decades, if perhaps ever. Modern parents face challenges to their authority—and God's authority—that their own parents could have never imagined. Indeed, children today are fed a constant narrative celebrating the “courage” and “pride” of people who identify as “LGBTQ+” and condemning the “bigotry” and “hatred” of Christians who uphold biblical truths. It is critical that parents minimize children's exposure to corrupting influences to the greatest extent possible; government schools and modern media should be avoided entirely if possible. But shielding children from the world when they are young is not enough. In order to set them on the path to heaven, parents must also prepare children to stand up for truth once they encounter the world.

Jesus understood that the weaknesses of man include our pitiable desire to be liked—even by a world that despises the source of all love. He knew Christians throughout the ages would try to justify “getting along” with the world in denial of truth in order to avoid sacrifice and suffering. That's why, when He prepared the apostles to go out into the world to proclaim the Kingdom of God, Jesus left them with this warning: “So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 10:32–33).

Our children will be tested in little ways—including conversations with friends and acquaintances—and in big ways that could cost them opportunities to advance in their careers or participate in community life.

Catholic parents must cultivate moral courage in their children. The best way to do this is to pass on stories of the saints who exhibited exceptional courage in their times—including red martyrs, who died for the Faith, and white martyrs, who were persecuted by a world hostile to the Faith—in a manner that engages children’s minds and excites their imaginations.

Similar to Sacred Scripture and Church teaching, the stories of the saints are the birthright of all Catholic children. They make up an essential part of the Church’s education tradition. They have been passed down by dutiful parents since the earliest days of the Church, inspiring successive generations of saints willing to endure persecution for Christ.

This book tells the stories of some of the Church’s most courageous saints—and the saints who inspired them:

Saint Joan of Arc was the fifteenth-century French teenager who fulfilled God’s extraordinary plan for her life, leading French troops to drive the English out of Orléans, making it possible for Charles VII, the rightful heir to the French throne, to be coronated in Reims and ultimately save France from English rule. She was betrayed by her countrymen and her king, captured by the English, and forced to endure underhanded interrogations and a sham trial resulting in her burning at the stake. Under the threat of torture and an agonizing death, she refused to affirm the lies of her indictment and conviction.

Before Joan could save France, she needed the courage to leave her home and subject herself to the ridicule of asking the captain of a royal fortress to help her—a sixteen-year-old farm girl—obtain an army to command. The journey

marked the beginning of a three-year period when Joan practiced acts of courage on and off the battlefield every day.

When Joan was fourteen years old, Saint Michael the Archangel, Saint Margaret of Antioch, and Saint Catherine of Alexandria visited her, relaying the extraordinary role God intended her to play in the war, and providing encouragement and counsel. Saint Michael is the commander of God's army and protector of the Church who defeated the unholy angels in the first great battle between good and evil. Saints Margaret and Catherine were fourth-century teenage martyrs who refused to renounce their faith during the Diocletian persecution, the last and most horrific Roman persecution of Christians. Their love for Christ over their own lives converted thousands of pagans to Christianity.

Saint José Luis Sánchez del Río was the twentieth-century, fourteen-year-old Mexican martyr who served the Cristero army as a Soldier of Christ and was tortured and murdered by the socialist, anti-Catholic government. He is one of twenty-five Mexican martyrs who died at the hands of government enforcers as a result of President Plutarco Elias Calles's outlawing of Catholicism (resulting in the execution and exile of priests, seizing of Church property, closure of Catholic schools, and other human rights violations).

Throughout his short life, José showed extraordinary courage in defending Christ against His enemies. When he was a boy, he risked his life by providing "illegal" religious instruction to the children in his town, even taking them to visit Jesus, really present, in the Blessed Sacrament. Desperate to join the Cristero cause, he journeyed a great distance to two camps; he was turned away from the first for being

too young and accepted into the second to serve as an aid to General Ruben Guizar Morfin. When General Morfin's horse was shot during a battle, he gave his horse to the general, knowing it would lead to his capture. For six days, the enemy used temptation and the threat of death to try to convince José to renounce his faith. He never wavered.

José grew up with a strong devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, who appeared to Saint Juan Diego—a native Mexican, Aztec-to-Catholic convert—in the sixteenth century. Juan Diego showed tremendous courage and persistence in obeying the Blessed Mother. José heard the stories of Anacleto González Flores and Saint Tarcisius at critical times during his life; he made the decision to enlist with the Cristeros soon after visiting Flores's grave. At camp, the soldiers affectionately gave him the nickname "Tarcisius" after the twelve-year-old early Christian who was martyred for protecting the Eucharist.

Blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko was the twentieth-century Polish priest in communist Poland who served as chaplain of the Solidarity Movement. He preached the truth of the Faith, telling the Polish people that the communist state was illegitimate because it violated the dignity owed to all people as children of God, when he knew it made him a target and when it was clear his life was in danger. He was murdered by three security police officers in 1984.

Jerzy never let the communists come between him and his duties to Christ. As a child, he attended daily Mass and served as an altar boy, despite warnings from his communist school that he would receive a lower mark because of his religious activities. During his two years of compulsory military

service, he prayed the Rosary out loud even though prayer of any kind was prohibited. He also defied an order to trample on a medal of the Blessed Mother (whom he provocatively identified to the guards as the Queen of Poland). His acts of resistance earned him repeated beatings and other punishments, including a month-long period of solitary confinement. These experiences early in his life helped him develop a habit of courage, even as communists stepped up their harassment and intimidation (apprehending and arresting him thirteen times, planting evidence in his apartment, slandering him in the press, and throwing a bomb into his apartment window).

Jerzy grew up learning about the saints. His favorite saint was Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish Franciscan friar who volunteered to take the place of a Catholic family man when he was sentenced to die in a starvation cell at Auschwitz during World War II. As a teenager attending secondary school, his favorite works were books by Maximilian Kolbe and Cardinal Wyszyński, who was a strong figure of resistance to the Sovietization of Poland. He was trained and ordained by Cardinal Wyszyński at a seminary in Warsaw.

Six years after his ordination, he was part of a massive audience that had come to see Pope John Paul II on his historic visit to Poland in 1978; he sat in one of the front rows.

Saint Teresa of Calcutta was the twentieth-century Albanian-born founder of the Missionaries of Charity who used her popularity as a humanitarian serving the “poorest of the poor” to courageously speak out against the evil of abortion. Born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, she was known simply as “Mother Teresa” to the world.

Mother Teresa practiced courage every day of her ministry, beginning when she left home at age eighteen to travel to Paris and then India to join the Loreto Order of Irish nuns. When she was thirty-seven years old, she left the safety and security of her religious community to begin a one-person ministry in the streets of Calcutta. What began as a makeshift slum school and hut for the sick and dying in one city grew into a worldwide humanitarian effort operating on six continents just two decades later. Thanks to the interest of a British journalist, she began receiving recognition and awards for her good work. In 1979, she used her platform as the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize to condemn abortion as “the greatest destroyer of peace today” and the nations that had legalized abortion as “the poorest nations”; Norway, the host country of the distinguished prize, was one of those nations. Throughout the last eighteen years of her life, she took every opportunity to speak out in defense of unborn children, even when it was controversial, including in front of her pro-abortion hosts, President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton, at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC, in 1994.

When Agnes became a postulant with the Loreto Order, she chose the name “Sister Mary Teresa of the Child Jesus” in honor of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, the beloved nineteenth-century Carmelite nun, known affectionately as the Little Flower, who professed a spirituality of doing the ordinary with extraordinary love for God. Her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, contains beautiful and inspiring insights about loving Christ and being “not afraid of suffering for Thee.”

Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus told His disciples, “I am with you always” (Mt 28:20). For two thousand years—through the persecution of Christians by gruesome killings, ostracization, and ridicule—He has kept His promise, providing a gateway from our fallen world to the kingdom of heaven. All the while, He has raised up saints. In the darkest moments of world history, Christ’s light has shined brightly through courageous men and women who refused to be slaves to the lies of their times; they boldly united their wills to the will of God and found their eternal reward in heaven. The stories contained in these pages are a part of the birthright of all Catholics. May they stir the imaginations of today’s young people—and inspire them to live a heroic life with Jesus, “always.”