

A Dictionary  
of Quotes  
*from the* Saints



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*from the* Saints

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Cover image: Illuminated initial capital letter Q, miniature from The Ebbo Gospels, manuscripts which originated in the Benedictine abbey of Hautvillers, 820-830, France 9th Century / De Agostini Picture Library / G. Dagli Orti / Bridgeman Images

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For my dear friend Scott,  
who, like St. Miguel of Ecuador,  
is quite happy with only  
a “room, some books, and a nearby chapel.”



# Introduction

Abba Theodore, a respected abbot among the monks in the deserts of ancient Egypt, once criticized a younger monk as someone who collected the wise sayings of others in order to “retail” them. The abbot’s words challenged me as I began to compile this collection: Was I simply “marketing” the saints’ wisdom for my own purposes?

Then I reread the account of Abba Theodore’s remark and took comfort in the context of his complaint. The other monk, the abbot was noting, concealed the sources of his borrowed sayings and took credit for them himself. This collection, on the other hand, gladly notes the sources, because it is the holy integrity of the saints’ lives that lends such weight to their words and urges us to ponder carefully what they have to tell us.

At the same time, a study of the saints’ lives shows that few of them would or even could take credit themselves for the insights recorded here. From their perspective, originality is not the goal, but rather faithfulness to a tradition: They aim, not to be novel, but to echo authentically the life and wisdom of

Christ as these are expressed in a variety of concrete historical circumstances. The striking parallels between quotes from saints who lived in drastically different conditions of time, place, and culture only confirm the repeated insistence of these men and women that truth is one, that wisdom is ancient, that the human condition is universal, and that the way to God is narrow.

Space constraints forced the omission of countless quite similar quotes that would have reflected this reality even more dearly. Instead, I have had to offer a sampling that suggests the “consensus of the saints” across the centuries and around the globe. Quotes are arranged in rough chronological order under each heading as a way of reflecting historical continuity and development.

In the choice of subjects, I tried to include the topics that are fundamental to Christian faith and experience; but the whimsical and even the comical appear here as well—lest we presume that the saints were humorless. Some topics on which the saints often focused, which are nevertheless ignored by our contemporaries, receive considerable attention here as a way of allowing them to rebuke us for our neglect. The result, I trust, is a collection of thoughts that will inspire and provoke, puzzle and comfort, startle and enlighten.

A list of the sources with brief biographical identifiers appears at the end in alphabetical order by first name. This list includes the titles ascribed to these saintly men and women according to their current place in the process of formal canonization—that is, the process by which the Catholic Church comes to recognize officially and publicly that a person has entered into eternal glory in heaven.

When an interested party or group approaches a bishop to advocate that a certain (deceased) candidate be canonized, and the bishop submits a report on that individual to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, the candidate is first deemed “Servant of God.” Once the congregation verifies that



the candidate practiced virtue to a heroic degree or died a martyr's death, and recommends the cause, if the Holy Father accepts the report the candidate is called "Venerable." Next, the process of beatification occurs when miracles associated with the candidate during life or after death have been studied and confirmed; the candidate is then called "Blessed." Finally, the process is complete when the Church fully canonizes the candidate and ascribes the title "Saint," recommending the person to the universal Church for veneration, imitation, and petition.

Veneration, imitation, and petition: in brief, these are the reasons for producing a dictionary of quotes from the saints, so that the reader can honor them by imitating them and asking their assistance in doing so. My desire is to help you enter more fully into the glorious communion of saints by acquainting you more deeply with these elder brothers and sisters in Christ, to draw you closer to them as friends so that they might draw you closer into their own friendship with God.

Pope St. Clement I said it best: "Follow the saints—because those who follow them will themselves become saints."

*Paul Thigpen*

## **ABANDONMENT OF SELF TO GOD**

Abandon yourself utterly for the love of God, and in this way you will become truly happy.

*Henry Suso*

Lose yourself wholly; and the more you lose, the more you will find.

*Catherine of Siena*

Let each one remember that he will make progress in all spiritual things only insofar as he rids himself of self-love, self-will, and self-interest.

*Ignatius Loyola*

I need nothing but God, and to lose myself in the heart of God.

*Margaret Mary Alacoque*

Let us throw ourselves into the ocean of His goodness, where every failing will be canceled and anxiety turned into love.

*Paul of the Cross*

I wish I could lose myself and never find myself except in God!

*John Vianney*

## **ABORTION**

A woman who deliberately destroys a fetus is answerable for murder. And any fine distinction between its being completely formed or unformed is not admissible among us.

*Basil the Great*

## ADVENT

There are three distinct comings of the Lord of which I know: His coming to men, His coming into men, and His coming against men.

*Bernard of Clairvaux*

## AFFECTIONS

We don't walk to God with the feet of our body, nor would wings, if we had them, carry us to Him; but we go to Him by the affections of our soul.

*Augustine of Hippo*

## AFFLICTION — *See also Sorrow; Trials*

Let your afflictions be books to admonish you.

*Ephraem the Syrian*

God measures out affliction according to our need.

*John Chrysostom*

One and the same violence of affliction proves, purifies, and melts the good, and condemns, wastes, and casts out the bad.

*Augustine of Hippo*

You who teach us by sorrow, and wound us in order to heal us, and kill us so that we may not die apart from You.

*Augustine of Hippo*

Why are we sad? Why do we blame God? Evils abound in the world so that the world will fail to seduce us into loving it.

*Augustine of Hippo*

The more we are afflicted in this world, the greater is our assurance in the next; the more we sorrow in the present, the greater will be our joy in the future.

*Isidore of Seville*

If things always went wrong, no one could endure it; if things always went well, everyone would become arrogant.

*Bernard of Clairvaux*

Tribulation is a gift from God—one that He especially gives His special friends.

*Thomas More*

Without the burden of afflictions it is impossible to reach the height of grace. The gift of grace increases as the struggles increase.

*Rose of Lima*

Whenever anything disagreeable or displeasing happens to you, remember Christ crucified and be silent.

*John of the Cross*

See to it that you're not suddenly saddened by the adversities of this world, for you don't know the good they bring, being ordained in the judgments of God for the everlasting joy of the elect.

*John of the Cross*

Many would be willing to have afflictions provided that they be not inconvenienced by them.

*Francis de Sales*

It is not enough to be afflicted because God wills it; but we must be so as He wills it, when He wills it, for as long as He wills it, and exactly in the manner in which it pleases Him.

*Francis de Sales*

Should we not adore God's will in profound submission, and lovingly kiss the rod with which He reproveth His elect?

*Jane Frances de Chantal*

## **AGE, AGING**

When men wish for old age for themselves, what else do they wish for but lengthened infirmity?

*Augustine of Hippo*

Let your old age be childlike, and your childhood like old age; that is, so that neither may your wisdom be with pride, nor your humility without wisdom.

*Augustine of Hippo*

## **ALMSGIVING**

Our prayers become effective through almsgiving; life is redeemed from dangers by almsgiving; souls are delivered from death by almsgiving.

*Cyprian of Carthage*

The bread you store up belongs to the hungry; the cloak that lies in your chest belongs to the naked; the gold you have hidden in the ground belongs to the poor.

*Basil the Great*

Scatter what you have, then, so that you may not lose; give away, so that you may keep; lay out, so that you may save; spend, so

that you may gain. If your treasures are to be hoarded, don't be the one who hoards them, for in doing so you will surely be throwing them away. Instead, entrust them to God, for no one can steal them from Him. ... Lend to Him who gives an interest greater than the principal.

*John Chrysostom*

The rich man who gives to the poor does not bestow alms but pays a debt.

*Ambrose of Milan*

If we can enter the church day and night and implore God to hear our prayers, how careful we should be to hear and grant the petitions of our neighbors in need.

*Francis of Assisi*

We must be charitable and humble and give alms, because they wash the stains of sin from our souls.

*Francis of Assisi*

It would be considered a theft on our part if we didn't give to someone in greater need than we are.

*Francis of Assisi*

We must give alms. Charity wins souls and draws them to virtue.

*Angela Merici*

## **AMBITION**

The only true riches are those that make us rich in virtue. Therefore, if you want to be rich, beloved, love true riches. If you aspire to the heights of real honor, strive to reach the

kingdom of heaven. If you value rank and renown, hasten to be enrolled in the heavenly court of the angels.

*Pope Gregory the Great*

Ambition is the mother of hypocrisy and prefers to skulk in corners and dark places. It cannot endure the light of day. It is an unclean vice wallowing in the depths, always hidden, but ever with an eye to advancement.

*Bernard of Clairvaux*

**ANGELS**— *See also Angels, Guardian; Angels and Saints*

The whole air about us is filled with angels.

*John Chrysostom*

Now it was not for the angels that Christ died. Yet what was done for the redemption of man through His death was in a sense done for the angels, because the enmity that sin had put between men and the holy angels is removed, and friendship is restored between them, and by the redemption of man the gaps that the great apostasy left in the angelic host are filled up.

*Augustine of Hippo*

An angel is an intelligent being, ever in motion, with free will, incorporeal, ministering to God, having by grace obtained immortality in his nature, the form and limitation of whose essence is known to the Creator alone.

*John of Damascus*

If we saw an angel clearly, we would die of pleasure.

*Bridget of Sweden*

Since God often sends us inspirations by means of His angels, we should frequently return our aspirations to Him by means of the same messengers.

*Frances de Sales*

Make yourself familiar with the angels, and behold them frequently in spirit. Without being seen, they are present with you.

*Francis de Sales*

Every breath of air and ray of light and heat, every beautiful prospect, is, as it were, the skirts of their garments, the waving of the robes of those whose faces see God in heaven.

*John Henry Cardinal Newman*

## **ANGELS, GUARDIAN**

Our weakness is such that, if the guardian angels had not been given to us, we could not resist the many and powerful attacks of the evil spirits. For this purpose, we had need of a higher nature. ... That is why God has taken these spirits out from among His treasures, and has given through them an aid to human weakness, so that this divine assistance might help us against the powers of this world of darkness to attain the heritage of salvation.

*Hilary of Poitiers*

Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd, leading him to life.

*Basil the Great*

An angel is put in charge of every believer, provided we do not drive him out by sin. He guards the soul like an army.

*Basil the Great*



We pray to the angels, for they are given to us as guardians.

*Ambrose of Milan*

So valuable to heaven is the dignity of the human soul that every member of the human race has a guardian angel from the moment the person begins to be.

*Jerome*

Our deeds are daily, both day and night, reported to the Lord by the angels assigned to us.

*Benedict of Nursia*

They are the guardians of the divisions of the earth; they are set over nations and regions allotted to them by their Creator. They govern all our affairs and bring us help. And the reason surely is that they are set over us by the divine will and command and are ever in the vicinity of God.

*John of Damascus*

The world of pure spirits stretches between the Divine Nature and the world of men. Because Divine Wisdom has ordained that the higher should look after the lower, angels execute the divine plan for human salvation: They are our guardians, who free us when hindered and help to bring us home.

*Thomas Aquinas*

If you find it impossible to pray, hide behind your good angel and charge him to pray in your stead.

*John Vianney*

When tempted, invoke your angel. He is more eager to help you than you are to be helped! Ignore the devil and do not be afraid of him: He trembles and flees at the sight of your guardian angel.

*John Bosco*

## ANGELS AND SAINTS

I tell you truly, my beloved, that our carelessness and our humiliation and our turning aside from the way are not a loss to us only, but they are a weariness for the angels and for all the saints in Jesus Christ. Our humiliation gives grief to them all, and our salvation gives joy and refreshment to them all.

*Antony the Great*

I bind to myself today the power in the love of the Seraphim, in the obedience of the Angels, in the ministration of the Archangels, in the hope of Resurrection unto reward, in the prayers of the Patriarchs, in the predictions of the Prophets, in the preaching of the Apostles, in the faith of the Confessors, in the purity of the holy Virgins, in the deeds of Righteous men.

*Patrick of Ireland*

So great was my joy in God that I took no heed of looking at the angels and the saints, because all their goodness and all their beauty was from Him and in Him; He was the whole and supreme Good, with all beauty, and so great a joy had I in His words that I paid no heed to any creature.

*Angela of Foligno*

I call upon the angels and saints, who fly like eagles straight toward their fiery goal; their protection will defend me against the birds of prey that threaten to devour me. The spirits of evil cannot claim me for their own;

I belong only to You, Jesus, You who have Your nest up there in the sun of love.

*Thérèse of Lisieux*

**ANGER** — *See also Anger, Holy*

It is blasphemy if you pray before God while you are full of wrath.

*Ephraem the Syrian*

Anger is a kind of temporary madness.

*Basil the Great*

If an angry man raises the dead, God is still displeased with his anger.

*Abba Agatho*

Guard your tongue when your husband is angry.

*Monica*

Imagine your anger to be a kind of wild beast ... because it too has ferocious teeth and claws, and if you don't tame it, it will devastate all things. ... It not only hurts the body; it even corrupts the health of the soul, devouring, rending, tearing to pieces all its strength, and making it useless for everything.

*John Chrysostom*

What is hatred, after all, than anger that was allowed to remain, that has become ingrained and deep-rooted? What was anger when it was fresh becomes hatred when it is aged.

*Augustine of Hippo*

As long as anger lives, she continues to be the fruitful mother of many unhappy children.

*John Climacus*