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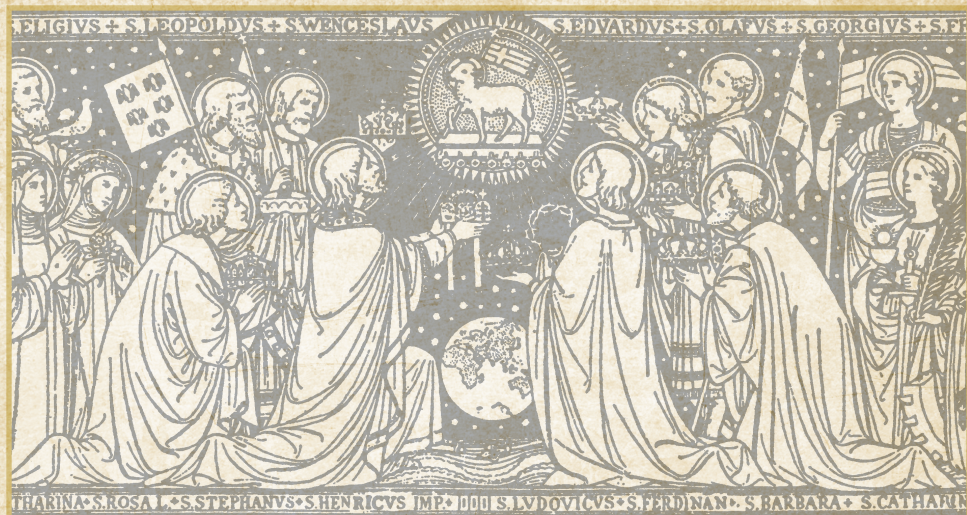
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A YEAR
WITH THE
SAINTS





A YEAR WITH THE SAINTS

DAILY MEDITATIONS
WITH THE
HOLY ONES OF GOD

PAUL THIGPEN



CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

DEDICATION

For my grandchildren
Francisco, Sofia, and one on the way
Three little saints in the making

Scripture quotations are from Revised Standard Version of the Bible—
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In some cases the writer's argument depends on a significantly different
translation, such as the Septuagint or the Vulgate in which case that
translation has been retained.

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The excerpt on page 92 was taken from *The Writings of St. Katharine Drexel*,
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Introduction



When I entered the Catholic Church twenty years ago, it was as if Jesus had brought me to a magnificent Mansion and said, “Welcome home at last, little brother! Let me show you around.”

The dining room with his banquet table—I mean, of course, the Eucharist—was by far the most thrilling of the rooms he showed me. But another treasured discovery was the family room, whose walls were lined with ten thousand portraits of the members of my new family: the communion of saints.

I’m still making my way through those portraits. And as I do, I have the privilege of speaking to the family members portrayed there and asking for their help, which they are faithful and even eager to give. My heart and mind have become knit together with theirs, and my gratitude for that vast fabric of fellowship is more than I can tell.

When I once told a friend how I talk to the saints, he asked: Do you do all the talking, or do they ever have something to say? It was an insightful question, and it reminded me of a passage in the Book of Hebrews. In the midst of a litany of faithful Old Testament saints, we read there about one of them that “he died, but through his faith he is still speaking” (Hebrews 11:4).

Through their example of faith and holiness, the saints are indeed still speaking to us today. And when we take time to read and reflect on their words, they can speak to us in ways that will powerfully transform our lives.

We might view this book, then, as a precious trove of personal letters we’ve received from the saints. They are elder brothers and sisters who have traveled far and reached a distant destination. But they love their younger siblings so intensely that they have written to us about what they have learned in their travels, and they offer us advice about how to follow them on their journey. They want us to join them someday at that glorious destination—which is, of course, the eternal home prepared for us by God himself.

You’ll find here 365 reflections from the saints, one a day for an entire year. But once you begin reading, you’re sure to discover that applying their wisdom to your everyday walk with God will take a lifetime. After all,

becoming holy is a kind of art that we learn through imitation. It takes long practice and keen focus, as St. Basil once noted in a letter to his younger brother, St. Gregory of Nyssa:

When artists paint by imitating another artist's work, they must constantly look at the model, doing their best to transfer its features to their own work. In the same way, those who seek to perfect themselves in every form of moral excellence must keep their eyes focused on the lives of the saints, as though they were living and moving statues. In this way, they can make the saints' virtue their own by imitation.

In short: To become a saint, study the saints. Their wisdom and example will be your guide.

Paul Thigpen

May 31, 2013

Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

How to Use this Book



St. Athanasius, a fourth-century champion of the Catholic faith, once noted: “You won’t find anyone who is truly striving after spiritual advancement who isn’t given to spiritual reading.” Such reading should of course include Scripture first of all. But what other kinds of spiritual reading are most profitable?

St. Francis de Sales, one of the greatest spiritual directors the Church has ever known, answered that question this way: He advised that when we choose material for spiritual reading, we should “always prefer” the authors “whose name begins with S.” He meant, of course, the saints.

I trust that both St. Athanasius and St. Francis would be pleased with this book. Its purpose is most certainly to assist those who are “striving after spiritual advancement,” and it offers a multitude of meditations from those “whose name begins with S.” But if this volume is to achieve its purpose, you must read through the texts slowly, attentively, and prayerfully, with an open mind and heart.

It’s best, if you can, to set aside a regular time daily for this spiritual reading, and the book is designed so you can take up one meditation each day for an entire year. The reflections aren’t tied to particular days of the year, so you can start anywhere you like, and skip around if you like. But the sequence of the readings does reflect in a rather general way the sequence of the four broad divisions of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: the Profession of Faith, the Celebration of the Christian Mystery, Life in Christ, and Christian Prayer. So you might find some advantage in reading them in the order presented.

Before you read each day, I urge you to pray to the Holy Spirit to enlighten you by his grace. Then ask the saint you’re reading that day to help you, too. I entreated the saints to assist me in compiling these meditations, and you can ask their assistance as well in understanding and applying what they have to say.

Each reading has a brief introduction. After the reading, you’re asked to consider in God’s presence what the saint is saying. These questions are intended to spur you to ponder, not just what the text means, but what it *means for you personally*.

Finally, each day has a brief closing prayer related to the reading. Most of these prayers are original, but some are drawn from, or echo the words of, traditional Catholic prayers. You may of course choose to pray in your own words instead.

An entire year's worth of profound and powerful thoughts from the saints is in your hands. Let them help you answer faithfully our Lord's calling to become a saint as well. As you begin, make your own this prayer of St. John Eudes:

You angels of Jesus and his saints, pray for me, that our loving Savior may give me new grace and new love for him, to devote this year and my whole life, purely and solely, to the service of his glory and love. Amen.

A Note on the Texts



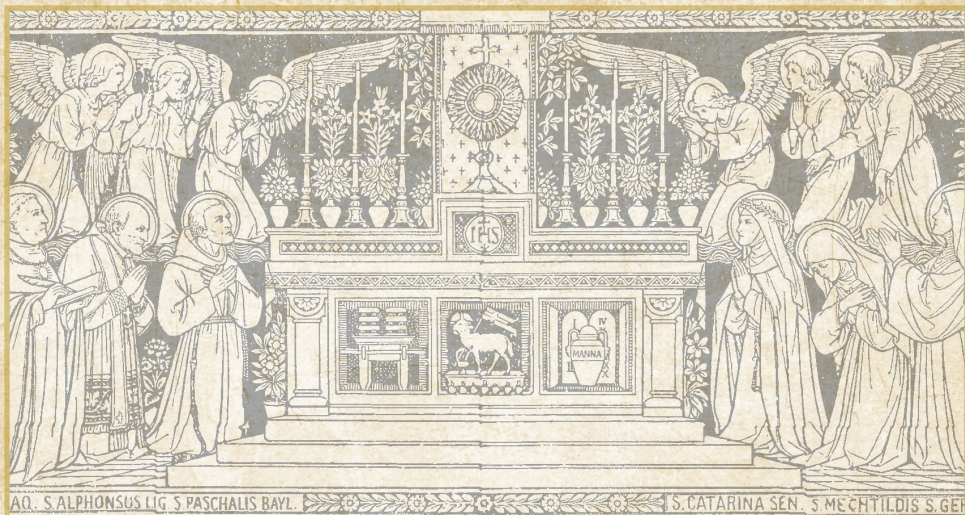
With the exception of the quotations from biblical saints and the reflection from St. Katharine Drexel, these readings are gathered and adapted from public domain sources, mostly in older English translations. If this book were intended as a scholarly tome, the texts would be strictly translated—and as a result, they would require extensive, and intrusive, explanatory notes. Many words in the original translations are unfamiliar to most readers today (“lictors,” “abnegation,” “disordinate,” “turpitude”). Others have changed their meanings. (A hundred years ago, for example, “confusion” typically meant “ruin” or “shame,” not “misunderstanding” or “perplexity.”)

My goal instead was to provide short and simple readings from the saints, profound in their insights yet easily accessible to contemporary readers. So I’ve adapted the texts rather freely to achieve that goal. I’ve modernized the language, and where earlier stylistic standards called for long, complex sentences and interminable paragraphs, I’ve broken them up into shorter, more manageable pieces.

In some places I’ve added clarifying words and contextual statements, such as a brief identifier for a biblical or historical character mentioned. In other places, I’ve condensed the text to fit the space available. In every case, nevertheless, I trust the original meaning has been illuminated rather than obscured.

Quotations from Scripture are from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition, unless the writer’s argument depends on a significantly different translation, such as the Septuagint or the Vulgate. Though I’m aware of the debates among modern biblical scholars about the authorship and origin of certain texts, I stand with the ancient Fathers of the Church in assuming that the authors and speakers quoted here are in fact the ones identified by ancient tradition.

My thanks goes to Patrick Yodzis at Saint Benedict Press for his help in the research, especially in creating most of the brief biographical sketches in the back of the book. These will allow you to learn a little more about each of the saints quoted. I encourage you to go even further in reading about them by consulting various print and online resources that provide more complete portraits of the inspiring, fascinating, and often colorful lives they lived in their pursuit of holiness.



A YEAR WITH THE SAINTS

The Daily Readings

Study the lives of the saints

Much of what we learn in life, we learn by imitation. St. Basil instructs us to study the lives of saints to serve as exemplary models for holy living



The study of inspired Scripture is the primary way to learn what our duty is in life. In it, we find not only instruction about conduct, but also accounts of the lives of blessed men and women. It's as if these stories are breathing images of godly living, presented for the imitation of their good works.

If we devote ourselves to imitating these saints, then no matter which virtue we may feel ourselves lacking, we can find in Scripture, as if in a medical clinic, the proper medicine for our particular ailment. Whoever is focused on chastity, for example, can reflect upon the history of Joseph in the Old Testament. We learn from him chaste actions. We find him well disciplined—firm in self-control with regard to pleasure—and we see him making virtue a habit.

To take another example, we're taught endurance by Job. He remained the same when the circumstances of life began to turn against him: In one moment he was plunged from wealth into poverty, and from being the father of beautiful children into a childless man. He kept the right attitude in his soul all through these changes without being crushed. He wasn't even stirred to anger against the friends who came to comfort him, but ended up trampling on him and making his troubles worse.

When artists paint by imitating another artist's work, they must constantly look at the model, doing their best to transfer its features to their own work. In the same way, those who seek to perfect themselves in every form of moral excellence must keep their eyes focused on the lives of the saints, as though they were living and moving statues. In this way, they can make the saints' virtue their own by imitation.

—St. Basil, *Letter to St. Gregory*, 3

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER . . .

Which saints in the Bible and in Church history do I find most appealing? What lessons about holy living do they have to teach me?

CLOSING PRAYER

All you holy men and women of God, so worthy of my imitation, I thank you for your shining examples of virtue and faith. Pray for me and lead me in the way of ever-lasting life.