

Saints of the Month

A selection of lives of the saints for July 2020



THE CHURCH UNION



The Society
under the patronage of Saint Wilfrid and Saint Hilda

3rd July – St Thomas

Thomas, one of the 12 Apostles, is often referred to as ‘Doubting Thomas’ for the incident detailed in John 20: 24-29, where he wanted to see the marks of the nails in the hands of the Risen Jesus and put his hands in his side.

But, if he doubted, he also believed. When he saw the Risen Jesus, he made what is certainly one of the most explicit statements of faith in the New Testament: “My Lord and My God!” and, in so expressing his faith, gave Christians a prayer that is often used as an act of adoration of Jesus, especially when we see Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. He also occasioned a compliment from Jesus to all later Christians: “Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed” (*John 20:29*).

Thomas should be equally well-known for his courage. Perhaps what he said was impetuous—since he ran, like the rest, in the Garden of Gethsemane—but he can scarcely have been insincere when he expressed his willingness to die with Jesus. The occasion was when Jesus proposed to go to Bethany after Lazarus had died. Since Bethany was near Jerusalem, this meant walking into the very midst of his enemies and to almost certain death. Realising this, Thomas said to the other apostles, “Let us also go to die with him” (*John 11:16*).

Not much is known about St Thomas after the Resurrection. Tradition tells us that he went to India and spread the Gospel there, and that he was martyred near Madras in the year 72.

Almighty and eternal God,
who, for the firmer foundation of our faith,
allowed your holy apostle Thomas to doubt the resurrection of your Son
till word and sight convinced him:
grant to us, who have not seen, that we also may believe
and so confess Christ as our Lord and our God;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

6th July- St Maria Goretti

Maria Goretti was born on 16th October 1890 to a farming family in Italy. Her father died when she was 9 years old and the family had to share a house with another family, the Serenelli's. Maria took over the household duties, while her mother and siblings worked in the fields.

One afternoon in 1902, the 11 year old Maria was sewing a shirt of Alessandro, the 21 year old son of the Serenelli's. Knowing that she was alone, he made sexual advances towards her. She would not submit to him, and told him that what he was doing was a mortal sin and that he would go to hell for it. He first choked her, but when she said that she would rather die than submit to him, he stabbed her 14 times. Maria was taken to hospital but died 24 hours later on 6th July, with forgiveness for Alessandro on her lips.

He was sentenced to 30 years in prison. At first he was unrepentant, but had a vision of Maria handing him lilies which burned in his hands. During his time in prison he became repentant. On release from prison he visited Maria's mother to beg for her forgiveness, which she granted and they attended Mass together. He became a lay brother in a monastery and died in 1970.

O God, author of innocence and lover of chastity,
who bestowed the grace of martyrdom
on your handmaid, the Virgin Saint Maria Goretti, in her youth,
grant, we pray, through her intercession,
that, as you gave her a crown for her steadfastness,
so we, too, may be firm
in obeying your commandments.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

11th July – St Benedict

Benedict was born around the year 480 into a distinguished family in central Italy. He studied at Rome, and became increasingly horrified as his fellow students lived their lives in the pursuit of pleasure and not of truth. He left Rome seeking a quieter life, but God called him to even deeper solitude. Following this vocation he lived as a hermit in the mountains of Subiaco.

Attracted to his holiness, nearby monks asked Benedict for his leadership. He warned them that he would be too strict for them, but they were insistent. His warning about his strictness of life proved to be true, and they tried to poison him. The story goes, the monks attempted to poison Benedict's drink, but when he prayed a blessing over the cup - it shattered. The next set of monks that sought out Benedict proved to be more sincere, and he set up a series of monasteries, where the monks lived in groups of 12. Finally, he began to build what was to become one of the most famous monasteries in the world, Monte Cassino, it was here that Benedict set the roots for western monasticism, where instead of small communities he gathered his disciples into one whole community.

Benedict compiled the Rule, that would be the basis for his monasteries, and is still the bedrock of monastic life 1,500 years later. The Rule of St Benedict details a life of liturgical prayer, study, manual labour, and living together in community under an abbot. The Benedictine life is known for its balance between prayer, study and manual work, as well as for its hospitality and welcoming each guest as if there were Jesus themselves. The Rule is still as important to day as when Benedict wrote it, and it is used by many people (not just monks and nuns) about how they can live their lives in this Benedictine way – it has even been used by business people as a model for good leadership!

Please do pray for all those who live their lives as monks and nuns, and for an increase in vocations to the religious life.

Eternal God,
who made Benedict a wise master
in the school of your service
and a guide to many called into community
to follow the rule of Christ:
grant that we may put your love before all else
and seek with joy the way of your commandments;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

15th July – St Bonaventure

Bonaventure was born in Umbria in 1221. As a child he was said to have had a near death experience, and was saved by the prayers of St Francis of Assisi, who had died when Bonaventure was 5 years old.

He entered the Franciscan order in 1243. He was passionate about learning and was a senior member of the University of Paris. He captured the heart of his students through his academic skills, but more importantly he captured their hearts through his love for Jesus and the Church. Jesus was at the centre of everything that he did.

He became head of the Franciscan order, but his time was not an easy one as the order was embroiled in conflicts over the interpretation of poverty. Bonaventure steered the Franciscans on an intellectual and moderate course, uniting the pastoral and practical aspects of life with the doctrines of the Church.

Bonaventure's legacy was to leave behind a structured and renewed Franciscan order.

He died on 15th July 1274.

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that, just as we celebrate the heavenly birthday
of Saint Bonaventure,
we may benefit from his great learning
and constantly imitate the ardour of his charity.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

16th July – Our Lady of Mount Carmel

The title given to Our Lady is invoked as she is the protectress of the Carmelite order. The first Carmelites lived on Mount Carmel, in the Holy Land, in the late 12th century. The scriptures speak of the beauty of Mount Carmel where the prophet Elijah defended the faith of the people of Israel in the living God.

Our Lady was chosen as the patroness of the Carmelites, as they considered her to be the perfect model of the interior life of prayer and contemplation, as well as being a model of virtue. This is the life that Carmelites aspire to.

The day of 16th July was chosen for the feast day, as this was the day that Mary is said to have appeared to St Simon Stock, an English leader of the Carmelites, in 1251 and gave him a scapular (two small pieces of cloth that are placed around the neck and hang at the chest and back), telling him to promote devotion to it. The brown scapular is a modified version of Mary's own garment. It symbolises her special protection and calls the wearers to consecrate themselves to her in a special way. The scapular reminds us of the gospel call to prayer and penance—a call that Mary models in a splendid way.

May the venerable intercession of the glorious Virgin Mary come to our aid, we pray, O Lord, so that, fortified by her protection, we may reach the mountain which is Christ. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



21st July – St Lawrence of Brindisi

Lawrence was born in 1559.

He entered the Capuchin Franciscan order aged 16 and was ordained a priest at the age of 23. The Capuchins had been founded in 1525, with the purpose of returning to a more observant form of Franciscan living. The Capuchins were also noted for their long, untrimmed beards.

Lawrence taught theology to students, and wrote many works to explain the Catholic faith. He was also a noted linguist and could read and speak eight languages fluently.

Aged 31, he was elected as Superior to the Capuchin Franciscans in Tuscany. He moved to Rome and in 1596 Pope Clement VIII assigned him the task to preaching to the Jews of Rome because of his fluency in Hebrew.

He also travelled throughout Europe and founded Friaries especially in Germany and Austria.

Lawrence was a great preacher and teacher of the faith, and was known for having a great sensitivity to the needs of the people.

He died in Lisbon on 22 July 1619.

O God, who for the glory of your name
and the salvation of souls
bestowed on the Priest Saint Lawrence of Brindisi
a spirit of counsel and fortitude,
grant, we pray, that in the same spirit,
we may know what must be done
and, through his intercession,
bring it to completion.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

22nd July – St Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene was a follower of Jesus, who is mentioned 12 times in the Gospels.

Very little is known about her life. It is likely that she came from Magdala, a town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, and was called 'Magdalene' to distinguish her from the other Marys the group.

Mary Magdalene has long been regarded as a prostitute or sexually immoral in western Christianity, but this is not supported in the scriptures. The Gospels agree that Mary was originally a great sinner. Jesus cast seven demons out of her when he met her. After this, she told several women she associated with and these women also became followers.

Despite dispute over her background, what she did in her subsequent life, after meeting Jesus, is much more significant. She was certainly a sinner whom Jesus saved, giving us an example of how no person is beyond the saving grace of God.

During Jesus' ministry, it is believed that Mary Magdalene followed him, part of a semi-permanent entourage who served Jesus and his Disciples. Mary likely watched the crucifixion from a distance along with the other women who followed Christ during His ministry. Mary was present when Christ rose from the dead, visiting his tomb to anoint his body only to find the stone rolled away and Christ, very much alive, sitting at the place they laid Him. She was the first witness to His resurrection.

Almighty God,
whose Son restored Mary Magdalene to health of mind and body
and called her to be a witness to his resurrection:
forgive our sins and heal us by your grace,
that we may serve you in the power of his risen life;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

23rd July – St Bridget of Sweden

Born in 1303, to a pious family, with familial links to the King of Sweden. Her mother died when she ten years old, and she and her siblings were sent to live with an aunt. As a young child, Bridget had a vision in a dream of Jesus being crucified. This dream was very vivid. Bridget asked Him who had done that to him. Jesus' answer was 'All those who despise my love.' The memory of this dream never left her. She was married aged 13, and she and her husband had eight children.

The King of Sweden asked Bridget to be Lady-in Waiting to his Queen and to teach her the language and customs of her new country. After her years of service at Court, Bridget and her husband made the long pilgrimage to Santiago di Compostela. On the return journey her husband became dangerously ill and died the following year. After his death, Bridget devoted herself to a life of prayer and works of charity.

Through prayer, she felt called to found a new religious order (commonly called the 'Bridgittines'), mainly for women. In visions God said that the other orders had fallen into decay and this new order would be a vineyard whose wine would revivify the Church. He showed her how her abbey church was to be built, gave directions concerning the clothing and prayers of the nuns, 60 in all, who needed priests as chaplains, 13 priests, 4 deacons and 8 lay brothers. These two communities were to be ruled by an abbess, who was to represent the Blessed Virgin Mary together with the Apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. Bridget herself never actually lived the religious life, and it was her daughter, St Catherine of Vadstena who became the first abbess. The King of Sweden donated a small palace and much land to the new monastery, but almost as soon she had begun altering the palace and organising the work, Christ appeared to her and asked her to go to Rome and wait there until she got the pope to return from France to Rome. She was to be there during the Holy Year 1350. Bridget left Sweden at the end of 1349 never to return during her lifetime. For the rest of her life she saw visions concerning the reform of the Church, messages to kings and popes and many other persons in high places, directing them to work for the Church. She died in 1373, and her relics were taken back to the abbey church in Sweden, where they are venerated to this day.

Lord our God,
as Saint Bridget contemplated your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,
you revealed to her the mysteries of his passion.
Grant that we may rejoice, in time to come,
in the revelation of your glory.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

25th July – St James

James is the son of Zebedee and brother of John. The two were called by Jesus as they worked with their father in a fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had already called another pair of brothers from a similar occupation: Peter and Andrew. “He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then he called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed him”

Two incidents in the Gospels describe the temperament of James and his brother. Saint Matthew tells that their mother came—Mark says it was the brothers themselves—to ask that they have the seats of honour in the kingdom. “Jesus said in reply, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?’ They said to him, ‘We can’” (Matthew 20:22). Jesus then told them they would indeed drink the cup and share his baptism of pain and death, but that sitting at his right hand or left was not his to give—it “is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father” (Matthew 20:23b). It remained to be seen how long it would take to realize the implications of their confident “We can!”. The other disciples became indignant at the ambition of James and John. Then Jesus taught them all the lesson of humble service: The purpose of authority is to serve. They are not to impose their will on others, or lord it over them. This is the position of Jesus himself. He was the servant of all; the service imposed on him was the supreme sacrifice of his own life.

James was apparently the first of the apostles to be martyred. “About that time King Herod laid hands upon some members of the church to harm them. He had James, the brother of John, killed by the sword, and when he saw that this was pleasing to the Jews he proceeded to arrest Peter also” (Acts 12:1-3a). His remains are said to be at Santiago de Compostella, which is a great place of pilgrimage.

Merciful God,
whose holy apostle Saint James,
leaving his father and all that he had,
was obedient to the calling of your Son Jesus Christ
and followed him even to death:
help us, forsaking the false attractions of the world,
to be ready at all times to answer your call without delay;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

29th July – St Martha

"Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus." This unique statement in John's gospel tells us of the special relationship Jesus had with Martha, her sister, and her brother. Apparently Jesus was a frequent guest at Martha's home in Bethany, a small village two miles from Jerusalem. We read of three visits in Luke 10:38-42, John 11:1-53, and John 12:1-9.

Many of us find it easy to identify with Martha in the story Luke tells. Martha welcomes Jesus and his disciples into her home and immediately goes to work to serve them. Hospitality is paramount in the Middle East and Martha believed in its importance. Imagine her frustration when her sister Mary ignores the rule of hospitality and Martha's work in order to sit and listen to Jesus. Instead of speaking to her sister, she asks Jesus to intervene.

Jesus' response is not unkind, which gives us an idea of his affection for her. He observes that Martha is worried about many things that distract her from really being present to him. He reminds her that there is only one thing that is truly important -- listening to him. And that is what Mary has done.

In Martha we see ourselves - worried and distracted by all we have to do in the world and forgetting to spend time with Jesus. It is, however, comforting to note that Jesus loved her just the same.

Almighty ever-living God,
whose Son was pleased to be welcomed
in Saint Martha's house as a guest,
grant, we pray,
that through her intercession,
serving Christ faithfully in our brothers and sisters,
we may merit to be received by you
in the halls of heaven.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

31st July – St Ignatius of Loyola

Born in northern Spain in 1491, Ignatius became a soldier and dreamed of military fame. He was very badly injured when a cannonball shattered his right leg. As he recuperated, there were none of the romantic chivalric books that he loved available, and so he read books on the life of Christ and the saints.

His conscience was deeply touched, and a long, painful turning to Christ began. Having seen the Mother of God in a vision, he made a pilgrimage to her shrine at Montserrat near Barcelona. He remained for almost a year at nearby Manresa, sometimes with the Dominicans, sometimes in a pauper's hospice, often in a cave in the hills praying. After a period of great peace of mind, he went through a harrowing trial of scruples. There was no comfort in anything—prayer, fasting, sacraments, penance. At length, his peace of mind returned.

It was during this year of conversion that Ignatius began to write down material that later became his greatest work, the *Spiritual Exercises*.

In 1534, at the age of 43, he and six others vowed to live in poverty and chastity and to go to the Holy Land. If this became impossible, they vowed to offer themselves to the apostolic service of the pope. The latter became the only choice. The new Society of Jesus (commonly known as the Jesuits) was approved by Pope Paul III four years later, and Ignatius was elected to serve as the first general.

Ignatius centred his spiritual life on the essential foundations of Christianity—the Trinity, Christ, the Eucharist. His spirituality is expressed in the Jesuit motto, *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam* —“for the greater glory of God.” All activity was to be guided by a true love of the Church and unconditional obedience to the Pope, for which reason all professed members took a fourth vow to go wherever the pope should send them for the salvation of souls.

O God, who raised up Saint Ignatius of Loyola in your Church
to further the greater glory of your name,
grant that by his help we may imitate him
in fighting the good fight on earth
and merit to receive with him a crown in heaven.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.