

8. What are saints?

Crucifix, p. 169

The San Damiano crucifix is dear to Franciscans, as well as to many other Christians. It is shown in this chapter not only because of its tie to Francis of Assisi, but also because the Christ figure is flanked with other saints, as listed in the textbook.

Quotes and Images

p. 170: The quote from William James focuses on the odd “happiness” of saintly persons and their immense contribution to the happiness of others. Students may find conversation about this quote instructive.

p. 171: The 2011 Hungarian stamp features St. Martin of Tours (316–397), born in Hungary, who after becoming a Christian refused military service and eventually became an exemplary bishop in France. He is usually pictured cutting his cloak in half in order to clothe a beggar. He exemplifies the proposals made by William James.

p. 172: Lawrence Cunningham is a Roman Catholic scholar and educator who has written several important books about saints.

p. 173: The fresco painting of the crucifixion of Peter by Michelangelo (1475–1564) follows the legend that Peter chose to be crucified upside down. The painting was executed beginning in 1546 and is now in the Vatican.

p. 174: The text of St. Patrick’s Breastplate is one of many hymns that invoke the protection of the angels and prayers of the saints. The hymn, ascribed to Patrick (c. 389–460), was being sung throughout Ireland in the seventh century.

p. 177: The website of St. Herman of Alaska Orthodox Church in Tapiola, Finland, shows the remarkable icons by iconographer Alexander Wilström that cover the church’s interior walls. The most famed icon maker, Andrei Rublev (c. 1360–c. 1427) is one of the saints depicted, and he holds his most beloved icon, the Trinitarian image of the three angelic visitors to Abraham. The story in Gen. 18:1-15 is the biblical passage that Eastern Orthodox Christians use to image the Trinity, rejecting the Western practice of drawing God as an old man.

p. 178: Justin Catanoso (b. 1959) visited Calabria, Italy, to investigate the history of a relative who was canonized in 2005. His memoir includes data about Padre Gaetano Catanoso and the Vatican’s canonization process, as well as his own religious questionings.

p. 179: The 1929 children’s song, “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God” by Lesbia Scott (1898–1986), has been a favorite of Episcopalians in the United States. Children particularly like the line “and one was slain by a fierce wild beast.”

p. 180: St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco has two worship spaces: the assembly sits in one for the word service, and then joins in a line dance to move to the other space for the meal. The area with the altar is surrounded by eighty-eight life-sized dancing figures, some of whom are classic Christian saints, and others who are regarded as “friends of God.” The walls were painted by iconographer Mark Dukes.

p. 181: The British sculptor Elizabeth Frink (1930–1993) made four castings of her *Walking Madonna*. Three are in Britain, and one is in the art collection of La Salle University in Philadelphia. The Madonna, larger than life, is thin, old, noble, and on the move.

p. 182: The prayer usually called the Hail Mary quotes Luke 1:28 and asks Mary to pray to God for the suppliant. It was first seen in print in 1495.

p. 183: Wayne Weible’s memoir of his pilgrimage to Medjugorje is particularly interesting because when he first traveled to the site, he was Protestant. Subsequently he has continued his writings about the site.

p. 185: This depiction of Mary Magdalene, painted by an unknown artist in about 1370, is based in part on John 30:11-18, in which Mary Magdalene mistakes the Risen Christ for a gardener: thus Christ’s hoe. Magdalene’s long unveiled hair is based on the sixth-century teaching that she was a converted prostitute.

Suggestions, pp. 185–86

7. The American teacher and writer Sandra Cisneros (b. 1954) is renowned for her contribution to Chicana literature. The short story “Little Miracles, Kept Promises” (1991) is comprised of two dozen requests and thank-you’s posted at a Texan shrine to Mary by petitioners who leave *milagritos* to symbolize their devotion. From heart-wrenching calamities to teenagers’ irritations, believers beg assistance from God, the Virgin Mary, and from the saints Martin de Pores, Antony of Padua, Sebastian, Lucy, Jude, Lazarus, and the Aztec mother goddess Tonantzin. Discussion of this story can focus on the practice of invocation of the saints, its pros and cons.

8. In *The Maid*, Kimberly Cutter has written what is perhaps the finest novel about Joan of Arc (1412–1431). Cutter’s depiction of Jehanne d’Arc is detailed, respectful, never sentimental. Burned at the stake in 1431, she was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church in 1920. Twice in the novel, Joan is communed with both the bread and wine: although rare, this was a fifteenth-century possibility in some situations. The Maid herself wonders whether her voices come from God: the novelist does not enter the story with her own viewpoint, and readers can make up their own minds.

9. The 1996 film *Entertaining Angels* narrates several years in the life of Dorothy Day (1897–1980). Her years encompass both her early leftist political activity and Bohemian lifestyle and her later devout Catholicism. She is famous for the Catholic Worker organization and her Houses of Hospitality that housed and fed New York’s poor. The film’s title cites Heb. 13:2. Discussion of the film can ask whether students find her “saintly,” a saint, or neither.