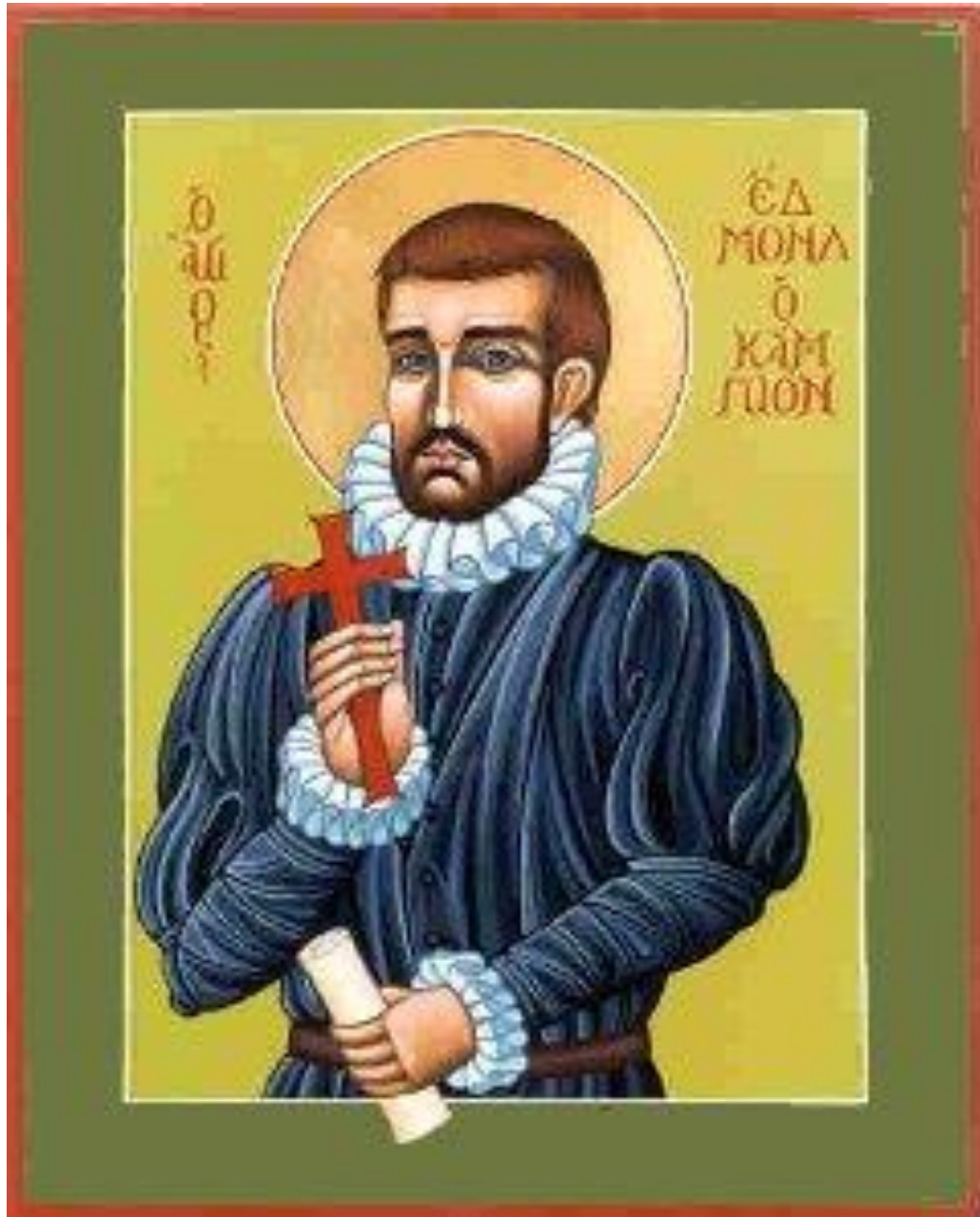


SAINT OF THE DAY



DECEMBER

December 1: *St. Edmund Campion, Martyr*

St. Edmund Campion was born in 1540 in Protestant London. An exceptionally bright child, he was given a good education. He went to Oxford in 1557, during the last year of Catholic Queen Mary's reign. In 1566, he was given the honor of leading a debate in front of Queen Elizabeth I, who was impressed by him. He became a deacon in Church of England, but soon regretted it. He left England to enter a Catholic seminary in France and became a Jesuit in 1573. He knew then that he desired to return to England and secretly minister to Catholics there, despite the dangers. In 1580, St. Edmund went back to England disguised as a jewel merchant. He secretly preached and said Masses for one year before he was arrested, imprisoned and martyred in 1581. St. Edmund is one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.

December 2: *St. Bibiana, Virgin and Martyr*

St. Bibiana was an early Christian martyr, probably living during the late 4th century in Rome. Christianity had been made legal by Constantine, but persecutions continued. Bibiana's parents were martyred, leaving Bibiana and her sister Demetria alone in poverty. They fasted and prayed, refusing to give up their faith. Demetria died of hunger and Bibiana, after undergoing harsh questioning, died a few days later. Their home was turned into a church, and is now the site of the Basilica of Santa Bibiana.

December 3: *St. Francis Xavier*

St. Francis Xavier was born in Spain in 1506. A student of St. Ignatius Loyola, he and St. Ignatius co-founded the Society of Jesus, known as the Jesuits, in 1534. They desired to send out missionaries all over the world. St. Francis spent much of the rest of his life founding missions in Asia, especially in India. His work throughout India, Japan and Malaysia was very difficult since he lived amongst the poor and ministered to the sick. He died on an island near Hong Kong in 1552.

December 4: *St. John Damascene, Priest and Doctor*

St. John Damascene lived near Jerusalem under Muslim rule in the 8th century. He is the last of the Greek Fathers of the Church. He is known for defending the veneration of icons, for

his writing on Christian dogma, and for his beautiful poetry. He was devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially her assumption, on which he preached many sermons.

December 5: *St. Sabbas*

St. Sabbas, born in 439, became fascinated with monastic life when he was just eight years old. It was in a monastery that he learned to read and was considered an expert in Scripture by the time he was seventeen. He became a monk and desired to live the life of a hermit. Over the years, many people were drawn to St. Sabbas and gradually a new monastic community formed around him. Monks lived alone in caves but worshipped together once a week. It is for this reason that St. Sabbas is considered the father of Eastern Monasticism and is an important figure in the Eastern Orthodox Church. St. Sabbas lived to the age of 91 and died in 532.

December 6: *St. Nicholas, Bishop*

Many legends surround the life of St. Nicholas, who was a 4th century bishop in Greece. One of the most famous legends is of a poor man with three daughters. The man could not afford to help them get married, so St. Nicholas secretly threw bags of gold coins through the man's window. The third time, in order to avoid being seen by the poor man, St. Nicholas threw the bag of gold coins down the chimney. The practice of gift-giving at Christmas is inspired by the generosity St. Nicholas showed to the poor man and his daughters.

December 7: *St. Ambrose, Bishop and Doctor*

St. Ambrose was educated and wealthy, but decided to study to be a Christian. While still a catechumen, he was chosen as Bishop of Milan in 374. He was a great preacher and defended the Catholic faith against the many heresies of the day. It was Ambrose who converted and baptized St. Augustine.

December 8: *Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception*

Under the title of the Immaculate Conception, Mary is revered as the patroness of the United States and of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. In 1854, Pope Pius IX declared: "From the first moment of her conception, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, by a unique grace and privilege of God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved from all stain of Original Sin." (CCC #490-91)

December 9: *St. Juan Diego*

Juan Diego was a native Mexican Indian living in the 16th century. He and his wife converted to Catholicism after Franciscan friars arrived in 1524. On December 9, 1531, he saw an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary and she asked for a church to be built in her honor. Juan Diego saw her again three days later, when she asked him to gather roses for the Bishop. It was then that the famous image, known as Our Lady of Guadalupe, appeared on Juan Diego's cloak. After convincing the bishop to build a church, Juan Diego spent the rest of his life living as a hermit and caring for the pilgrims who arrived to see the place where Mary had appeared. He died in 1548.

December 10: *St. Gregory III, Pope*

Elected Pope by popular acclaim in 731, St. Gregory III's biggest task was to protect the many works of religious art that were being destroyed at the time. Some people worried that looking religious art was like worshipping a false God. However, St. Gregory knew that paintings showing scenes from the Bible or the lives of the saints are very good ways of teaching people about God and reminding us of God's presence in our lives. He died in 741.

December 11: *St. Damasus I, Pope*

It was during the papacy of St. Damasus from 366-384 that Christianity first became the dominant religion in the Roman Empire. He changed the language of the liturgy from Greek to Latin and commissioned St. Jerome to create a new translation of the Bible into Latin. He encouraged the veneration of the early Christian martyrs and preserved their relics and catacombs.

December 12: *Our Lady of Guadalupe*

Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego, a poor Mexican Indian, on December 9, 1531. Mary told Juan to build a Church. Juan went to the Bishop to tell him the Lady's request. The bishop did not believe him. Three days later, on December 12, Juan saw the Lady again. She told him to gather roses to give to the bishop. Juan again went to the bishop and opened his cloak to give to him the roses which the Lady had arranged. There was an image of Mary inside Juan's cloak. The bishop then believed and built a church in honor of Mary. We honor Our Lady of Guadalupe because we recognize her concern for all people, especially the suffering and the poor.

December 13: *St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr*

St. Lucy came from a wealthy family in Sicily about the year 283. She was betrothed to a non-Christian man, but he denounced her for being a Christian to the governor and she was arrested. She was miraculously saved by God from much torture while in prison. She was martyred by the sword in the year 304.

December 14: *St. John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor*

St. John of the Cross was born into a poor family in Spain in 1542. He had a basic education, but once he entered the Carmelite Order he was sent to a prestigious university. After becoming a priest, he met St. Teresa of Avila, who asked him to help her in reforming the Carmelites. They formed the Discalced Carmelites in 1568 and spent ten years traveling through Spain reforming monasteries. However, by 1577 many people became upset by their reforms and John was imprisoned by his own Carmelite brothers for nine months. It was during this time that John wrote his mystical poetry about love, faith, and God's presence in darkness. Once he escaped from prison, he spent the rest of his life writing commentary to his poetry and founding new monasteries. He died in 1591. His poetry is considered one of the greatest masterpieces of the Spanish language.

December 15: *St. Maria Crocifissa di Rosa*

St. Maria founded the Handmaids of Charity in Italy in 1839. She has spent much of her life caring for others. Her mother died when she was seventeen and she devoted herself to caring for her father. He ran a saw mill and St. Maria looked after the women workers.

Deeply influenced by her experience nursing the sick during an outbreak of cholera, she founded a school to help women in poverty. In 1839, she founded a religious order of women dedicated to imitating the suffering of Christ by caring for the poor and sick. She died in 1855 at the age of 42.

December 16: *St. Adelaide of Italy*

St. Adelaide was a noblewoman living in the 10th century. She was first married at the age of fifteen and had a daughter. But when her husband was killed for political reasons, she fled rather than be forced into another marriage. She was captured and put in prison. A priest dug a passageway and rescued her from prison, but she was later captured again. Otto the Great, the Holy Roman Emperor, then rescued her a second time and they were married in 951. St. Adelaide was crowned empress and had four more children. Throughout the rest of her life, she used her power and influence to found monasteries and churches. Toward the end of her life, long after the death of her husband, St. Adelaide retired to a convent and spent the rest of her life in prayer until her death in 999.

December 17: *St. John de Matha*

St. John de Matha was a hermit living in France during the 12th century. With St. Felix of Valois, he founded the Order of the Most Holy Trinity (the Trinitarians). The Order worked to ransom Christian prisoners from Muslims throughout North Africa. They were very successful, and freed many captives. Today, the members of the Trinitarian Order are involved in prison ministry and education.

December 18: *St. Flannan*

Despite being the son of a powerful 7th century Irish chieftain, St. Flannan chose to become a student of the monk St. Molua. After becoming a monk himself, St. Flannan became a missionary and preached the Gospel throughout Ireland and Scotland. He even convinced his father to give up power and also become a monk. St. Flannan became the first bishop of Killaloe, Ireland.

December 19: *St. Anastasius I, Pope*

Pope for only two years, little is known about St. Anastasius's early life. He became pope in 399. His short papacy was marked by the hard work of fighting heresy. He is particularly known for condemning the writings of a theologian called Origen, whose work was widely read during this time. St. Anastasius knew St. Augustine and St. Jerome, and was known to be a very holy man.

December 20: *St. Dominic of Silos*

Dominic of Silo was born in the year 1000 in Spain. He came from a family of peasants and worked as a shepherd. Eventually, he became a Benedictine monk. He quickly rose up to become abbot of the monastery, which made others jealous of him. Driven out and exiled, he came under the protection of King Ferdinand I and became abbot of another monastery in Silos, now called St. Dominics. Under his leadership, this once failing monastery became a center of monastic art, scholarship and good works to the poor.

December 21: *St. Peter Canisius, Priest and Doctor*

St. Peter Canisius was the first Dutch Jesuit priest, and he lived during the Protestant Reformation in Europe. He had great intellectual gifts and helped found the first Jesuit colleges in German-speaking Europe. St. Peter's abilities as a preacher were so great that it is said hundreds of Protestants returned to the Catholic faith after hearing him speak. He did this by always striving to give an open and honest explanation of the faith, rather than simply attack the Protestant church. His strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary led him to write many books about her, and he added the line "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinner," to the Hail Mary prayer. He was declared a doctor of the church by Pope Pius XI in 1925.

December 22: *St. Zeno*

The reign of the Emperor Diocletian was a dangerous time for Christians living in 3rd century Rome. St. Zeno was a soldier who was caught laughing when Diocletian made a sacrifice to a pagan god. Once imprisoned, Zeno admitted to being a Christian. He was martyred a few days later.

December 23: *St. John of Kanty*

Born in Poland in 1390, St. John spent his life as a priest and professor. He was a teacher of theology, scripture and science, and known to be caring towards his students. Despite having a job at an important university, St. John lived a very simple, pious life. His charity towards the poor of Krakow, his generosity towards everyone he met, his love of learning, and his devotion to his ministry as a priest have made him a beloved saint in Poland. St. John Paul II was inspired by his example, saying "Knowledge and wisdom seek a covenant with holiness." St. John of Kanty died in 1473 when he was 83.

December 24: *St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen, Priest and Martyr*

St. Fidelis was born Mark Rey in 1577 in Germany. Always a modest and studious man, he became a lawyer. He attended Mass frequently, visited the sick, and loved the poor. Soon, he became known as the "poor man's lawyer." Eventually, he felt called to give up the law and join the Capuchin order and took the name Fidelis. He worked hard and became a good preacher and confessor. He lived in an area that had many Calvinist Christians, and many were converted back to the Catholic faith because of his good example. Other Calvinists became angered by this and in 1622, one of them attempted to shoot him while he preached. St. Fidelis escaped unharmed only to be set upon by Calvinist soldiers on the road. They killed him after St. Fidelis begged God to forgive them for their actions.

December 25: *Solemnity of Christmas*

Jesus Christ was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary. Mary remained a virgin before and after the birth of Jesus Christ. We call this the Virgin Birth. (CCC #499)

December 26: *St. Stephen, First Martyr*

Stephen, Protomartyr (New Testament), was a Jew raised beyond the area of Palestine. His life was influenced by Greek culture. His name in Greek means "crown." Stephen was one of the seven men designed for special tasks in the Acts of the Apostles. (Acts 6:1-6) Like Jesus, the deacon Stephen was accused of blasphemy. This young deacon delivered an eloquent

speech in defense of Christian beliefs. As a result, he angered the Jews. He was condemned to death by stoning. St. Stephen is the first martyr recorded in the New Testament.

December 27: *St. John, Apostle and Evangelist*

John, the brother of James, was one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. He and his brother were disciples of John the Baptist, but Jesus called them to follow Him with Peter and Andrew. Jesus, while dying on the cross, told John to look after Mary His mother. He was called “the beloved disciple.” John is given credit for writing the Gospel of John, three Epistles, and the Book of Revelation. Tradition tells us that he was the only Apostle who died peacefully of old age, in the year 100.

December 28: *The Holy Innocents, Martyrs (Mt. 2:16-18)*

On this day, we remember the very first martyrs for Christ, the innocent children killed by King Herod after the Wise Men did not return to him. In the Gospel of Matthew (2:16-18) we read: “Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: *‘A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more.’*”

December 29: *St. Thomas Becket, Bishop and Martyr*

St. Thomas Becket was born in London in 1118, the son of a merchant and property owner. He was given a good education, but by the time he finished university, his family had lost their fortunes. He became a court clerk to earn his living, but soon began to work for the archbishop of Canterbury and resolved to work for the Church. Because of his connections, he rose quickly through the ranks and was soon one of the most important officials of the Catholic Church in England. He became a friend and advisor to King Henry II, who appointed him as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1161, the highest Church office in England. Despite this, Thomas led a good and pious life. As Archbishop, he worked to protect and promote the Church above everything else, and this often made King Henry angry. In 1170, the king’s men believed that he wished Thomas to die, so four knights approached him in Canterbury Cathedral. They killed St. Thomas with their swords in the church, and he was

buried in the spot where he died. King Henry II claimed he did not order the killing and did public penance. Pope Alexander III canonized him just three years later in 1174.

December 30: *St. John Alcober, Martyr*

St. John Alcober was a Spanish Dominican priest and missionary in China. In 1724, Christianity was outlawed in China. St. John reached China in 1728 and spent the next sixteen years traveling through Fo-kien province disguised as a water seller. He often had to quickly hide from the authorities, and once climbed a tree only to discover another priest was also hiding there. Finally, in 1746, he was arrested with three other priests. After refusing to say where other priests were hiding, St. John Alcober was martyred with three others. Their executioners reported afterwards that his face was peaceful and radiant as he died. St. John Alcober is considered one of the Martyrs of China. Today, there are 12 million Roman Catholics in China who continue to worship secretly.

December 31: *St. Sylvester I, Pope*

St. Sylvester became the first Pope to lead the church after Christianity became a legally recognized religion in 313. Emperor Constantine I built some of the most important churches during Sylvester's papacy, including St. John Lateran and St. Peter's Basilica, and many churches dedicated to Christian martyrs. Several centuries after St. Sylvester's death in 335, a fake document was written about Constantine and the powers he conferred on Pope Sylvester. However, we know very few facts about his life. He remains one of the longest reigning popes, at nearly 22 years. He is buried in the famous Catacombs of Priscilla in Rome along with many early Christian martyrs.
