

# SAINT OF THE DAY



# JANUARY

## **January 1:**     *Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God*

This feast of Mary is considered to be one of the oldest and most important feasts of Our Lady. In 431, the Council of Ephesus met to correct false teachings about Christ's divinity. The Council affirmed that Jesus is true God and true man. Since Mary is the Mother of Jesus, who is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, she can truly be called the Mother of God. Devotion to Mary as the Mother of God continued to spread from this time to the present.

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## **January 2:**     *St. Basil the Great, Bishop*

Born to wealthy family in 330, Basil's family had been Christians for generations. He was well educated, and eventually settled in Caesarea to practice law in 356. There, he met a bishop named Eustanthius and radically changed his life. He wrote, "I beheld the wonderful light of the Gospel truth, and I recognized the nothingness of the wisdom of the princes of this world." He was baptized and founded a monastic community on his family estate. St. Basil wrote many works about monastic life which has deeply influence the Eastern Church. He attended the Council of Constantinople in 360 and supported the Nicene Creed. He was made a bishop in 370 and focused on serving the poor and reforming criminals. He died in 379.

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## **January 3:**     *The Most Holy Name of Jesus*

Today we remember that, by conferring the name Jesus on His Son, God set that name above all other names. This devotion dates back to the very earliest days of Christianity. The letters *IHS* are a Christogram (abbreviation) of *IHSOUS*, the Greek name for Jesus, as well as the Latin title *Iesus Hominum Salvator*, which means "Jesus, savior of mankind" and is commonly seen in Christian art. When we honor the name of Jesus, we are reminded of the many blessings we receive from God, as Christ said, "If you ask the Father anything in my name he will give it you." (John 16:23).

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## **January 4:**     *St. Elizabeth Ann Seton*

Elizabeth Ann Bayley was born in 1774 in New York. She was raised in the Episcopal Church, and after her mother died she was influenced greatly by the charitable works of her step-mother. When she was 19, she married a wealthy businessman named William Seton. They had five children. Inspired by St. Vincent de Paul, she founded a ladies group

committed to charity towards the poor. When her husband became sick in 1803, they traveled to Italy to see doctors. After his death, she became a Catholic in 1805 because of the influence of the Italian family with whom she stayed. Elizabeth Ann Seton opened a school in Baltimore, the first Catholic school in America, and started a community of sisters called the Sisters of Charity. She died in 1821 and was canonized in 1975. She was the first person born in North America to become a saint.

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### **January 5:**    *St. John Neumann*

Born in Bohemia on March 20, 1811, John dedicated his life to missionary work in the United States especially in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. He was ordained a priest in New York in 1836 and first worked with German immigrants near Niagara Falls. As a priest and later as a bishop, he worked tirelessly to educate the members of the Church. He became Bishop of Philadelphia in 1853. He increased the number of parochial schools in Philadelphia, founding the first Catholic diocesan school system in the US. He also instituted the Forty Hours Devotion, and constructed a cathedral. Bishop Neumann died on January 5, 1860, at the age of 48 when he collapsed from a sudden stroke. He was beatified in 1963, and canonized by Pope Paul VI in June 1977.

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### **January 6:**    *Epiphany*

The word Epiphany means “to appear.” Today we celebrate that Jesus, the Son of God, was born as a human child. The three Wise Men, or Magi, were the first to recognize the appearance. They knew that the baby Jesus was the Son of God, and so travelled far to visit Him in the manger in Bethlehem.

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### **January 7:**    *St. Raymond Peñafort, Priest*

Born in a small town near Barcelona in 1175, St. Raymond studied civil and canon law. He was a celebrated professor of law for many years before entering the newly-founded Dominican order in 1216. He wrote a book to help priests in confession, making sure they understood the correct canon laws. Pope Gregory IX read this book and asked St. Raymond to become his personal confessor. He also commissioned him to organize all the various canon laws together in one book. This book was used for canon law reference for 700 years until 1917. Later in life, he was head of the Dominicans for a time, and worked to convert Muslims in Spain. He died at the age of 100 in 1275.

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## **January 8:** *St. Thorfinn of Norway, Bishop*

We know very little about the life of St. Thorfinn. He was a Cistercian monk during the 13<sup>th</sup> century who eventually became Bishop of Hamar. After returning from a pilgrimage to Rome, St. Thorfinn died in Belgium in 1285. All that we know of his character comes from a priest named Father Walter who wrote a poem about how good, gentle, and Godly St. Thorfinn was. He left the poem in his tomb. Years later, the tomb of Bishop Thorfinn was opened. His body was incorrupt and the tomb was filled with a sweet and pleasant smell, and Father Walter's poem was found. Many peasants reported miracles that took place near the tomb. After this, many became devoted to St. Thorfinn.

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## **January 9:** *St. Adrian of Canterbury, Abbot*

St. Adrian was from North Africa and eventually became abbot of a monastery in Naples, Italy. Pope Vitalian wanted to make him the Archbishop of Canterbury, the most important position in England. Adrian refused the position because he felt unworthy, but agreed to go with and advise Theodore, the man who did accept the job. In 668, Adrian and Theodore set out for England, which was mostly pagan at the time. Theodore made Adrian the abbot of St. Peter in Canterbury. Adrian was highly educated, and while he was abbot the monastery flourished and became an important and influential center of learning. St. Adrian was abbot until his death thirty-nine years later in 710.

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## **January 10:** *St. Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop*

St. Gregory was the younger brother of St. Basil the Great. Although less known than his brother, Gregory was an exceptional theologian who made important contributions to the early Christian church. He became the Bishop of Nyssa in 372 and spent many years helping to resolve disputes in the churches in the Middle East and Greece. He helped the Council of Constantinople define the doctrine on the Trinity in 381. He died in 394.

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## **January 11:** *St. Léonie Aviat*

Léonie Aviat was born in a small town in France in 1844. She was educated at a boarding school run by Venerable Mother Marie de Sales Chappuis, who deeply influenced her

spiritual life. Together with Mother Marie, St. Léonie founded the Sister Oblates of St. Francis de Sales. The purpose of the new order was to help educate and protect the many poor young women who were coming from the country to work in the city's new factories. Under her guidance as Mother Superior, the order grew and opened many schools. In 1903, religious persecution in France forced St. Léonie and the order into exile in Perugia, Italy. She died there in 1914. She was canonized by St. John Paul II in 2001 after the miraculous healing of a 14 year old Bernadette McKenzie from Drexel Hill, who had been paralyzed and in pain from a birth defect.

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### **January 12:** *St. Marguerite Bourgeoys*

St. Marguerite Bourgeoys founded the first religious order of women who were not cloistered. Born in France in 1620, Marguerite spent her early life helping to raise her younger siblings and doing charitable work in her parish. When the Governor of the new French colony of what is now Montreal, Canada visited and asked her to come to the New World to start a school, she knew she was called to missionary life. She arrived in 1653 and first worked alongside the settlers in the harsh life of the Canadian pioneer. By 1658, she founded the first school in a horse stable, with the goal to educate women and young girls. She gathered many young women to aid in her work and they formed the Congregation of Notre Dame. Over the next 25 years she resisted many attempts to join her order with the cloistered Ursuline nuns, insisting that they needed to be out among the people they served. The Congregation finally received approval in 1698. Sister Marguerite died in 1700.

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### **January 13:** *St. Hilary of Poitiers, Bishop and Doctor*

St. Hilary was born into a noble pagan family around 300. He was given a good education and eventually came to study the Old and New Testament. Through this study, he eventually chose to forsake his paganism and embrace Christianity. Although he was married and had a daughter, he was elected Bishop of Poitiers in 350. He spent much of his life working to rid the Church of heresy, most especially promoting the doctrine on the divinity of Christ. This led to a period of exile, which he used to write and study. He encouraged St. Martin of Tours to found his monastery. He also wrote many hymns, using the songs to spread the Christian faith. He died in 368.

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## **January 14:** *St. Felix of Nola*

St. Felix was born in the early years of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century near Naples, Italy. When he inherited his father's property, he sold it and gave all the money to the poor and became a priest. St. Felix was arrested for his faith during the Christian persecutions under Emperor Decius, who ruled from 249-251. He was imprisoned and beaten, but escaped. According to legend, he was freed by an angel. Although many wished to make him a bishop, St. Felix chose instead to farm the last plot of land he had in order to help the poor. He died peacefully around 255.

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## **January 15:** *St. Paul the Hermit*

Paul was born in 229 in Egypt to a wealthy Christian family and was highly educated. During the persecutions of Decius from 249-251, he fled into the desert to escape imprisonment. He found a cave and spent the rest of his life there devoted to prayer and contemplation. In 342, late in his life, he was visited by St. Anthony of Egypt. St. Paul was over the age of 100, and when St. Anthony returned again he had passed away. St. Anthony buried him and saved the cloak of St. Paul. It is believed that St. Paul was the first Christian hermit.

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## **January 16:** *St. Berard and Companions*

St. Berard was received into the Franciscan Order by St. Francis of Assisi himself in 1213. Berard had given up his life of privilege to join Francis in a life of poverty. Because Berard was well educated and spoke Arabic, Francis sent him with four others to evangelize to Muslims. They first went to Seville, but their preaching did not convert anyone. Traveling to Morocco in 1220, they began to preach the Gospels in the markets. Arrested soon after for denouncing Islam, they were martyred by the sultan himself. Their bodies were returned to Portugal and upon hearing of their heroic death, one young man immediately joined the Franciscans. That young man became St. Anthony of Padua.

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## **January 17:** *St. Anthony of Egypt, Abbot*

St. Anthony of Egypt played an important role in spreading monasticism throughout the West. He was born in Egypt in 251. As a young man, he gave away all his possessions and became a Christian. He set out into the desert and cut himself off from the world. Soon, he

inspired others to follow his example. These men and woman joined together in small groups which were some of the first monastic communities. The people who followed St. Anthony were taught to divide their days between prayer and work. The cave in which he lived is now the site of the monastery of St. Anthony. He died in 356.

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### **January 18:** *St. Margaret of Hungary, Virgin*

Born in 1242, St. Margaret was the daughter of King Bela IV of Hungary. During this time, Hungary was invaded by the Mongols. Her parents made a vow to offer Margaret to the Church if Hungary would be saved. It was, and so Margaret was entrusted to the care of a Dominican monastery when she was just four years old. As she grew up, her father went back on his vow and wished to arrange a political marriage for her. However, Margaret, piously devoted to her life in the monastery, refused. She took her vows as a Dominican nun when she was eighteen years old. She engaged in severe fasting and penance, as well as worked with the sick and dying. This took a great toll on her health, and she died in 1271 at the age of twenty-eight.

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### **January 19:** *St. Henry of Sweden, Bishop and Martyr*

Despite living during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, St. Henry traveled quite a lot. While we do not know when he was born, we know that he was an Englishman living in Rome. He was asked to go to Scandinavia with the papal legate and was consecrated as the Bishop of Uppsala, Sweden. When the king of Sweden, St. Eric, conquered Finland, St. Henry baptized many of the Finnish people. One convert was convicted of murder and was excommunicated by Henry as a penance. In a rage, the man struck Henry with an axe and killed him in 1156. St. Henry is the patron saint of Finland.

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### **January 20:** *St. Sebastian, Martyr*

St. Sebastian was an early Christian martyr, likely from the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Although we know few facts about his life, he is one of the most important figures in Christian art. Most legends tell us that he was a Roman soldier who joined the army so he could secretly aid imprisoned Christians before they were martyred. When his Christian faith was discovered, St. Sebastian was tied to a post and shot full of arrows. Miraculously, he did not die. St. Irene nursed him back to health, but St. Sebastian immediately

denounced the emperor for his persecutions. He was taken away and martyred. Thousands of paintings show St. Sebastian tied to a tree full of arrows.

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### **January 21:** *St. Agnes, Virgin and Martyr*

St. Agnes was born to a noble Christian family in Rome in 291. She vowed to protect her chastity and declared Christ as her spouse. Her youthful beauty attracted the son of the Governor, who denounced her as a Christian when she refused to marry him. The Governor gave her lavish gifts to convince her to give up her faith and Agnes refused. Despite her young age of thirteen, Agnes was martyred in 304.

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### **January 22:** *St. Vincent, Deacon and Martyr*

St. Vincent was the first martyr in Spain. He was a deacon in the city of Saragossa, where he worked with the bishop, Valerius. They were both arrested for being Christians, and although Valerius was banished, Vincent was imprisoned. There, he suffered greatly for a long period of time. His jailor was amazed by St. Vincent's resolve that he converted. St. Vincent died in prison in 304.

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### **January 23:** *St. Marianne Cope*

Marianne Cope emigrated to the US from Germany with her family in 1839 when she was a baby. At age thirteen, she worked in a factory to support her poor family. Marianne entered the Sisters of St. Francis at age twenty-three. She taught at a school for new German immigrants, eventually ran two Catholic hospitals and soon became Superior General. In 1883, Mother Marianne responded to a letter from King Kalākaua of Hawaii to bring sisters to the islands to care for people with leprosy. She spent her first years reforming the hospitals on Maui and Oahu, but eventually agreed to work in the leper colony of Molokai with St. Damien. She took over the work when St. Damien died and remained devoted to serving the lepers on Molokai until her death in 1918. She was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in October of 2012.

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## **January 24:** *St. Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor*

In 1567, Francis de Sales was born the first of six sons to a noble French family. He was educated to become a magistrate, but heard a theology lecture that led him to be so concerned about his soul that he was in despair and physically ill for three years. Then, in 1587, he prayed before a statue of Our Lady of Good Deliverance and dedicated himself to God. He realized that, rather than live in despair and fear, God desires us to live in His love. This became St. Francis' unique spirituality, called the Way of Divine Love and he was ordained a priest. France became torn apart by the Protestant Reformation, and St. Francis worked to evangelize with a gentleness always focused on Divine Love. He became bishop of Geneva and wrote *Introduction to the Devout Life*, a book about everyday spirituality for lay people. In 1610, together with St. Jane de Chantal, he founded the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary. He was a noted spiritual director and died in 1622. St. Francis' gentle and loving approach to Christian life is called Salesian spirituality.

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## **January 25:** *The Conversion of St. Paul, Apostle*

Before his conversion, Paul (first called Saul) was an educated Jewish Roman citizen, probably born around the same time as Jesus. He zealously persecuted the first followers of Jesus. Then, while traveling the road to Damascus, "*suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'*" (Acts 9:1-5). He was blinded for three days and when his sight was restored he began to preach about Jesus. The conversion of Paul was a dramatic and important event that gave the Church one of her most vital instruments in the spread of the Christian faith immediately following the death and resurrection of Jesus.

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## **January 26:** *Sts. Timothy and Titus, Bishops*

St. Paul wrote a series of letters in the New Testament to two of his disciples, Timothy and Titus. St. Timothy was converted by St. Paul around 47 and helped him found the Christian Church in Corinth. We know from Paul's letters that Timothy was young, but a deeply faithful man. Paul consecrated Timothy the Bishop of Ephesus in 65. Timothy was martyred in 97 when he tried to stop a pagan procession. St. Titus was also a close companion of St. Paul and focused his ministry on the Gentiles. Paul consecrated him Bishop of Gortyn and it is believed he died in 107.

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## **January 27: *St. Angela Merici, Virgin***

St. Angela Merici, born in Italy in 1474, began her devotion to God when her much-beloved sister died suddenly before receiving the last sacraments. In order to pray for her sister's soul, St. Angela became a Third Order Franciscan. Soon, she felt there was a lack of Christian education for young girls, so she began a school in her home. She was so successful that nearby towns began to ask that she come and start schools for them. Eventually, she felt called to found an association of virgins who would devote their lives to educating young women. The association grew and in 1535, St. Angela chose twelve of these women to found the Company of St. Ursula, now called the Order of Ursulines. St. Angela died in 1540. Today, Ursuline sisters may be found all over the world, where they remain committed to St. Angela's mission of educating young girls.

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## **January 28: *St. Thomas Aquinas, Priest and Doctor***

Born the son of the wealthy Count of Aquino in 1226, St. Thomas was expected to become a Benedictine monk by his family. Although educated by the Benedictines, he joined the Dominicans after graduating from university. His family was so upset that they kidnapped and imprisoned him for two years. His mother helped him escape in 1244 and Thomas went to Paris to study with the Dominican scholar St. Albert the Great. Thomas proved to be a brilliant scholar and spent the rest of his life teaching and writing in Paris. His most famous work, *Summa Theologiae*, is still widely taught in theological and philosophical studies. It is because of St. Thomas that we better understand the important relationship between faith and reason. He died in 1274.

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## **January 29: *St. Dallan***

St. Dallan lived in Ireland in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. He went blind as a young man because he read and studied so intensely. He is best known for being named chief bard and poet of Ireland in 575, and we still have many of his poems today. One of his poems is the basis of the beloved hymn *Be Thou My Vision*. His poetry and reform of the Bardic Order helped to preserve the Gaelic language. In 598, he was living in a monastery on the island of Inniskeel when it was attacked by pirates and St. Dallan was killed.

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## **January 30: *St. Hyacintha Mariscotti***

The early life of Hyacintha Mariscotti was anything but saintly. Born in 1585 to a wealthy Italian family, she loved all of the luxury of her privileged life. She hoped to marry a local nobleman, but when he chose her younger sister, she entered the convent to avoid gossip. The nuns there lived by the rule of St. Francis, but Hyacintha secretly kept luxurious items and fancy food in her cell and wore a habit made of the finest materials. Although she was outwardly a model nun, she lived this life of secret wealth for ten years. Then she fell ill and a priest was obliged to bring her Holy Communion to her cell. He was shocked at seeing her secret wealth and convinced her to give it up and devote herself to poverty. She completely reformed herself and spent the rest of her life pious and penitent, caring for the poorest and sickest. By the time she died in 1640, her reputation for holiness was known everywhere.

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## **January 31: *St. John Bosco, Priest***

St. John Bosco came from a family of poor farmhands in Italy, born in 1815. His father died when he was two and he was raised by his pious mother. Because of the good influence of his mother and his parish priest, in addition to a series of dreams he had, St. John believed he was called to the priesthood. He believed that by being humble, kind and gentle like St. Francis de Sales he could be an example to others. He was ordained in 1841. In Turin, he saw many of the poor boys who came to work in the factories become homeless and wild. He began to shelter some of them, and eventually this grew into the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and was home to nearly 800 boys. Through his ministry with boys, St. John Bosco and his Salesian Order helped change ideas about how to educate children, always emphasizing their dignity and their right to know that they are loved. St. John Bosco died in 1888.

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