

Catechetical Saints
Saints: Living Theology
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‘That great heritage... *the “lived theology” of the saints.* The saints offer us precious insights which enable us to understand more easily the intuition of faith’

John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 27

Leading us to the Blessed Trinity

Saints offer us living theology. How do we draw on the saints for this living theology, both for our own lives and for our work as catechists?

In my experience as a catechist, I have found that, in general, people relate to saints in one of three basic ways.

First, there are those who have little or no relationship with saints. They may perceive the saints to be hindrances in their quest for a personal relationship with Christ, or they may have been introduced to the saints through some overly-sweet stories they had read to them as children and have subsequently ‘grown out of the saints’.

Secondly, there are those whose love for the saints may indeed replace their relationship with the members of the Blessed Trinity, or may border on superstition. They may be unbalanced about ‘their’ particular saint and believe that others have no authentic spirituality at all unless they have such a singular devotion.

Thirdly, there are those who understand that the saints lead us to the intense relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that the saints themselves experienced and that led to their canonization. They also appreciate that there are so many saints - as we have seen in this series – and that all of us can find the saint, or saints, that ‘speaks’ to them personally.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has some wonderful words on this:

‘By canonizing some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace, the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of holiness within her and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the saints to them as models and intercessors. “The saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult moments in the Church's history.” Indeed, “holiness is the hidden source and infallible measure of her apostolic activity and missionary zeal.” ’ (CCC 828)

Not in isolation

The key to understanding the saints is that they *lead us into relationship with God and with others.* In our desire to follow the example of the saints, we cannot just be configured into a narrow relationship of the ‘saint and me’. Saints did not, and we do not, live in isolation.

‘It is not merely by the title of example that we cherish the memory of those in heaven; we seek, rather, that by this devotion to the exercise of fraternal charity the union of the whole Church in the Spirit may be strengthened. Exactly as Christian communion among our fellow pilgrims brings us closer to Christ, so our communion with the saints joins us to Christ, from whom as from its fountain and head issues all grace, and the life of the People of God itself’ (CCC 957).

*What is the Church if not the assembly of all the saints?
The communion of saints is the Church*

The saints loved Christ unquestionably; they loved the Church unquestionably; and they loved their fellow men and women unquestionably, no matter what their state in life or condition.

Loving the saints, loving the Church

We have love for Christ and for His Church, and for those around us. Our biggest challenge to unconditional love for our brothers and sisters can come from specific persons whom we are catechizing, or from the parents of children whom we are catechizing. Those who do not want to receive the Gospel often frustrate our work. They can be indifferent or antagonistic. Do we love them in their antagonism and indifference? They may be deeply wounded by events in their lives. Do we love them in their woundedness? They may have disabilities in their bodies, their speech, or their ability to learn easily. Do we love them in their disability? They may be in sin. Do we love them in their sin?

In *Catechesi tradendae*, whose 30th Anniversary we celebrate in October, John Paul describes the mission of Jesus. ‘In doing so, I am not forgetful that the majesty of Christ the Teacher and the unique consistency and persuasiveness of His teaching can only be explained by the fact that His words, His parables and His arguments are never separable from His life and His very being’ (CT 9). John Paul often said that the true catechist is a saint. In order for us to do this, our words and actions can never be separable from who we are – baptized, confirmed, Eucharistic people who desire sainthood, and who know that we cannot put people in touch, in intimacy, in union with Jesus Christ unless we are profoundly seeking it ourselves (cf. CT 5).

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