

## Saint of the Day March 7th-11th

**March 7th Monday:**

### **Saints Perpetua and Felicity's Story**

**"When my father in his affection for me was trying to turn me from my purpose by arguments and thus weaken my faith, I said to him, 'Do you see this vessel—water pot or whatever it may be? Can it be called by any other name than what it is?' 'No,' he replied. 'So also I cannot call myself by any other name than what I am—a Christian.'"**

**So writes Perpetua: young, beautiful, well-educated, a noblewoman of Carthage in North Africa, mother of an infant son and chronicler of the persecution of the Christians by Emperor Septimius Severus.**

**Perpetua's mother was a Christian and her father a pagan. He continually pleaded with her to deny her faith. She refused and was imprisoned at 22.**

**In her diary, Perpetua describes her period of captivity: "What a day of horror! Terrible heat, owing to the crowds! Rough treatment by the soldiers! To crown all, I was tormented with anxiety for my baby.... Such anxieties I suffered for many days, but I obtained leave for my baby to remain in the prison with me, and being relieved of my trouble and anxiety for him, I at once recovered my health, and my prison became a palace to me and I would rather have been there than anywhere else."**

**Despite threats of persecution and death, Perpetua, Felicity—a slave woman and expectant mother—and three companions, Revocatus, Secundulus and Saturninus, refused to renounce their Christian faith. For their unwillingness, all were sent to the public games in the amphitheater. There Perpetua and Felicity were beheaded, and the others killed by beasts.**

**Felicity gave birth to a daughter a few days before the games commenced.**

**Perpetua's record of her trial and imprisonment ends the day before the games. "Of what was done in the games themselves, let him write who will." The diary was finished by an eyewitness.**

## **Reflection**

**Persecution for religious beliefs is not confined to Christians in ancient times. Consider Anne Frank, the Jewish girl who with her family, was forced into hiding and later died in Bergen-Belsen, one of Hitler's death camps during World War II. Anne, like Perpetua and Felicity, endured hardship and suffering and finally death because she committed herself to God. In her diary, Anne writes, "It's twice as hard for us young ones to hold our ground, and maintain our opinions, in a time when all ideals are being shattered and destroyed, when people are showing their worst side, and do not know whether to believe in truth and right and God."**

**March 8th Tuesday:**

## **Saint John of God's Story**

**Having given up active Christian belief while a soldier, John was 40 before the depth of his sinfulness began to dawn on him. He decided to give the rest of his life to God's service, and headed at once for Africa where he hoped to free captive Christians and, possibly, be martyred.**

**He was soon advised that his desire for martyrdom was not spiritually well based, and returned to Spain and the relatively prosaic activity of a religious goods store. Yet he was still not settled. Moved initially by a sermon of Saint John of Avila, he one day engaged in a public beating of himself, begging mercy and wildly repenting for his past life.**

**Committed to a mental hospital for these actions, John was visited by Saint John, who advised him to be more actively involved in tending to the needs of others rather than in enduring personal hardships. John gained peace of heart, and shortly after left the hospital to begin work among the poor.**

He established a house where he wisely tended to the needs of the sick poor, at first doing his own begging. But, excited by the saint's great work and inspired by his devotion, many people began to back him up with money and provisions. Among them were the archbishop and marquis of Tarifa.

Behind John's outward acts of total concern and love for Christ's sick poor was a deep interior prayer life which was reflected in his spirit of humility. These qualities attracted helpers who, 20 years after John's death, formed the Brothers Hospitallers, now a worldwide religious order.

John became ill after 10 years of service, but tried to disguise his ill health. He began to put the hospital's administrative work into order and appointed a leader for his helpers. He died under the care of a spiritual friend and admirer, Lady Ana Ossorio.

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## Reflection

The utter humility of John of God, which led to a totally selfless dedication to others, is most impressive. Here is a man who realized his nothingness in the face of God. The Lord blessed him with the gifts of prudence, patience, courage, enthusiasm, and the ability to influence and inspire others. He saw that in his early life he had turned away from the Lord, and, moved to receive his mercy, John began his new commitment to love others in openness to God's love.

March 9th Wednesday

## Saint Frances of Rome's Story

Frances' life combines aspects of secular and religious life. A devoted and loving wife, she longed for a lifestyle of prayer and service, so she organized a group of women to minister to the needs of Rome's poor.

Born of wealthy parents, Frances found herself attracted to the religious life during her youth. But her parents objected and a young nobleman was selected to be her husband.

As she became acquainted with her new relatives, Frances soon discovered that the wife of her husband's brother also wished to live a life of service and prayer. So the two, Frances and Vannoza, set out together—with their husbands' blessings—to help the poor.

Frances fell ill for a time, but this apparently only deepened her commitment to the suffering people she met. The years passed, and Frances gave birth to two sons and a daughter. With the new responsibilities of family life, the young mother turned her attention more to the needs of her own household.

The family flourished under Frances' care, but within a few years a great plague began to sweep across Italy. It struck Rome with devastating cruelty and left Frances' second son dead. In an effort to help alleviate some of the suffering, Frances used all her money and sold her possessions to buy whatever the sick might possibly need. When all the resources had been exhausted, Frances and Vannoza went door to door begging. Later, Frances' daughter died, and the saint opened a section of her house as a hospital.

Frances became more and more convinced that this way of life was so necessary for the world, and it was not long before she requested and was given permission to found a society of women bound by no vows. They simply offered themselves to God and to the service of the poor. Once the society was established, Frances chose not to live at the community residence, but rather at home with her husband. She did this for seven years, until her husband passed away, and then came to live the remainder of her life with the society—serving the poorest of the poor.

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## Reflection

Looking at the exemplary life of fidelity to God and devotion to her fellow human beings which Frances of Rome was blessed to lead, one cannot help but be reminded of Saint Teresa of Calcutta, who loved Jesus Christ in prayer and also in the poor. The life of Frances of Rome calls each of us not only to look deeply for God in prayer, but also to carry our devotion to Jesus living in

**the suffering of our world. Frances shows us that this life need not be restricted to those bound by vows.**

**March 10th Thursday**

**Saint Dominic Savio's Story**

**So many holy persons seem to die young. Among them was Dominic Savio, the patron of choirboys.**

**Born into a peasant family at Riva, Italy, young Dominic joined Saint John Bosco as a student at the Oratory in Turin at the age of 12. He impressed Don Bosco with his desire to be a priest and to help him in his work with neglected boys. A peacemaker and an organizer, young Dominic founded a group he called the Company of the Immaculate Conception which, besides being devotional, aided John Bosco with the boys and with manual work. All the members save one, Dominic, would, in 1859, join Don Bosco in the beginnings of his Salesian congregation. By that time, Dominic had been called home to heaven.**

**As a youth, Dominic spent hours rapt in prayer. His raptures he called "my distractions." Even in play, he said that at times, "It seems heaven is opening just above me. I am afraid I may say or do something that will make the other boys laugh." Dominic would say, "I can't do big things. But I want all I do, even the smallest thing, to be for the greater glory of God."**

**Dominic's health, always frail, led to lung problems and he was sent home to recuperate. As was the custom of the day, he was bled in the thought that this would help, but it only worsened his condition. He died on March 9, 1857, after receiving the Last Sacraments. Saint John Bosco himself wrote the account of his life.**

**Some thought that Dominic was too young to be considered a saint. Saint Pius X declared that just the opposite was true, and went ahead with his cause. Dominic was canonized in 1954. His liturgical feast is celebrated on March 9.**

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## Reflection

Like many a youngster, Dominic was painfully aware that he was different from his peers. He tried to keep his piety from his friends lest he have to endure their laughter. Even after his death, his youth marked him as a misfit among the saints and some argued that he was too young to be canonized. Pope Pius X wisely disagreed. For no one is too young—or too old or too anything else—to achieve the holiness to which we all are called.

March 11th Friday

## Saint John Ogilvie's Story

John Ogilvie's noble Scottish family was partly Catholic and partly Presbyterian. His father raised him as a Calvinist, sending him to the continent to be educated. There, John became interested in the popular debates going on between Catholic and Calvinist scholars. Confused by the arguments of Catholic scholars whom he sought out, he turned to Scripture. Two texts particularly struck him: "God wills all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth," and "Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you."

Slowly, John came to see that the Catholic Church could embrace all kinds of people. Among these, he noted, were many martyrs. He decided to become Catholic and was received into the Church at Louvain, Belgium, in 1596 at the age of 17.

John continued his studies, first with the Benedictines, then as a student at the Jesuit College at Olmutz. He joined the Jesuits and for the next 10 years underwent their rigorous intellectual and spiritual training. At his ordination to the priesthood in France in 1610, John met two Jesuits who had just returned from Scotland after suffering arrest and imprisonment. They saw little hope for any successful work there in view of the tightening of the penal laws. But a fire had been lit within John. For the next two and a half years he pleaded to be placed there as a missionary.

**Sent by his superiors, he secretly entered Scotland posing as a horse trader or a soldier returning from the wars in Europe. Unable to do significant work among the relatively few Catholics in Scotland, John made his way back to Paris to consult his superiors. Rebuked for having left his assignment in Scotland, he was sent back. He warmed to the task before him and had some success in making converts and in secretly serving Scottish Catholics. But he was soon betrayed, arrested, and brought before the court.**

**His trial dragged on until he had been without food for 26 hours. He was imprisoned and deprived of sleep. For eight days and nights he was dragged around, prodded with sharp sticks, his hair pulled out. Still, he refused to reveal the names of Catholics or to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the king in spiritual affairs. He underwent a second and third trial but held firm.**

**At his final trial, he assured his judges: "In all that concerns the king, I will be slavishly obedient; if any attack his temporal power, I will shed my last drop of blood for him. But in the things of spiritual jurisdiction which a king unjustly seizes I cannot and must not obey."**

**Condemned to death as a traitor, he was faithful to the end, even when on the scaffold he was offered his freedom and a fine living if he would deny his faith. His courage in prison and in his martyrdom was reported throughout Scotland.**

**John Ogilvie was canonized in 1976, becoming the first Scottish saint since 1250. His liturgical feast is celebrated on March 10.**

## **Reflection**

**John came of age when neither Catholics nor Protestants were willing to tolerate one another. Turning to Scripture, he found words that enlarged his vision. Although he became a Catholic and died for his faith, he understood the meaning of "small-c catholic," the wide range of believers who embrace Christianity. Even now he undoubtedly rejoices in the ecumenical spirit fostered by the Second Vatican Council and joins us in our prayer for unity with all believers.**

