

REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

I know this is a weird thing for a Congregationalist to say, but I love the saints.

I love the stories of Christian women and men who have sought to follow Jesus. I love their diversity, the thousands of different personalities, styles, gifts, nationalities, and backgrounds that demonstrate there's no single way to be holy. I love their presence: the way they hover close when we come around the Lord's table.

And I'm not alone. When the Council of Bishops and Judicatory Executives met last month, I asked them to name their favorite saints. Here's a glimpse of our conversation, which sheds light on the saints – but also on the men and women who seek to follow in their footsteps:

"We [Presbyterians] are not a tradition that canonizes people," said Dr. Sheldon Sorge, General Minister of Pittsburgh Presbytery, "but one who is important to me is St. Augustine. As I studied John Calvin and Martin Luther, they led me straight to Augustine, regarding who God is and what God requires of us. I was formed in a different way of answering those questions, and I am grateful for Augustine, who taught me about grace."

"One of my favorites is St. Josephine Bakhita," replied Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi of the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church, who learned about the saints during her studies at Loyola. "She was a Sudanese woman who was kidnapped and sold into slavery. She had very harsh owners, and eventually was sold to a family who brought her to Italy and left her with an order of nuns. It was there that she met Jesus and went through a miraculous process of forgiveness and healing. She was able to endure the evil that was done to her and pass it up to God, so God could do something beautiful with it. That's akin to the story of African Americans in this country who were abused by slavemasters but persevered in faith."



St. Josephine



St. Peter

Rev. Carl Johnson of the Mid-Northeast Mission District of the North American Lutheran Church commented, "I have a hate-love relationship with St. Peter. I hate him with all my heart because he does nothing but screw up, over and over and over again. And yet, I see myself in him. Every time I think the lightning bolt should come down or he should sink to the bottom of the sea, there is instead grace, forgiveness, and restoration, and therefore hope."

Fr. Ron Larko, who serves as a proxy representative to the Council for the Byzantine Catholic Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, said, "St. John Vianney was a priest who was sent into a town that was against him. He struggled to bring conversion to the parish and the town; he wasn't top-notch in intellectual prowess. But still, he was able to call on the Spirit. The Spirit moved in him, and he continually gave his life to God to do ministry. He is the patron of priests."

Peter Clement, who represents the Bruderhof Communities, chose St. Francis of Assisi. "My wife, Francisca, is named after him. While her mother was expecting her, she was reading the *Little Flowers of St. Francis*. Francis turned away from wealth and position to become a simple follower of Jesus; his love for the poor and for creation is inspiring."

As for me, I love St. Hilda, a seventh-century English abbess of a monastery for both men and women, host of the important ecumenical Synod of Whitby: a woman of administrative giftedness and pastoral sensitivity. She's my role model. Across the centuries, she's also my friend.

As Western churches commemorate All Saints Day this November, may you feel inspired and accompanied by the saints of the church in their glorious diversity. "O blest communion, fellowship divine! We feebly struggle, they in glory shine; yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine. Alleluia! Alleluia!"



St. Francis

Your sister in Christ,

Rev. Liddy Barlow
Executive Minister



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