

COLUMNISTS

Ground-breaking saints still influence church

Saints are saints, but some have had a more profound and lasting impact on the church than others. In the coming days the church celebrates the feasts of two such saints, only a day apart: St. Francis de Sales on the 24th and the Conversion of St. Paul on the 25th.

Both were innovators. The one made us realize that spirituality is not just for priests and nuns, but for lay people as well — in every walk of life. The other showed that the Gospel itself is not just for the few, but for the many.

Francis de Sales (1567-1622) authored the classic work, *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Congregations founded under his patronage include the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, the Salesians of Don Bosco, and the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Francis earned a doctorate in law, but decided against a civil career and was ordained a priest in 1593, distinguishing himself as a preacher and a servant of the poor and the sick.

He became bishop of Geneva in 1602, an unreformed diocese of some 450 parishes — all of which he visited at great physical cost in his first four years there. He excelled not only in preaching, but also in administration, catechesis, clerical education, and spiritual direction.

He developed a deep friendship with



essays in
theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Jane Frances de Chantal (feast day, Dec. 12), a young widow who founded the Order of the Visitation under his guidance. Francis de Sales' voluminous correspondence with her over the years included the line, "With you I speak as I do with my own heart," reminding us that some of the church's greatest priests have had close relationships with supportive women. Jane Frances was personally devastated by his death in 1622.

Francis de Sales challenged his contemporaries' obsession with life after death and the fear of hell. We must have a wholly disinterested love of God, he insisted, without regard for whether one will go to heaven or hell. "Whatever happens, Lord," he wrote, "may I at least love you in this life if I cannot love you in eternity since no one may praise you in hell."

The central message of his *Introduction to the Devout Life* was also novel for the times: the quest for spiritual perfection is neither for the elite few nor requires great austerities or withdrawal from everyday life of the world.

Francis de Sales was canonized in 1665 and declared a doctor of the church in 1877. He is patron saint of writers and the Catholic press.

Paul (c. 1/5-c. 62/67) was the most prominent early Christian missionary, known as the "apostle to the Gentiles." A self-described Pharisee (Philippians 3:5), he was zealous in his persecution of the early disciples of Jesus. However, he had a profound conversion-experience, liturgically commemorated on this day, while on his way to Damascus around the year 35 (Galatians 1:15-16).

He saw the experience as a call to preach the risen Christ to the Gentiles, convinced that "in Christ" there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Galatians 3:28; Romans 3:22). All are saved through faith in Christ, not observance of the Mosaic law (Romans 3:21-30).

Christians were now to be guided, not by the Law but by the presence of the Holy Spirit and by faith working through love, and their lives were to be marked by service to each other (Galatians 5-6).

In the pastorally crucial dispute about how to deal with new converts (Acts of the Apostles 10-15), Paul adopted a moderate position: Gentile converts need not be circumcised nor follow Jewish dietary laws, while Jewish Christians should be free to celebrate the great Jewish feasts and maintain the practice of circumcision and obedience to the Law.

Soon after that controversy was resolved, Paul embarked on three major missionary journeys: in Syria and Asia Minor; in Corinth, Greece, of which he is patron saint today; and again in Asia Minor, centered in Ephesus (present-day Turkey). During these journeys, especially the third, he wrote the letters that form part of the New Testament.

In the year 57, Paul returned to Jerusalem, where he was arrested and imprisoned for two years. Exercising his rights as a Roman citizen, he appealed his case to Caesar and was sent to Rome, where he was held under house arrest for about two more years (59-60). Sometime between 62 and 67 he was executed in Rome by order of the local authorities.

The life and work of the church continue to be shaped by these saints today.

...
Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

We're all players on Christ's team

3rd Sunday of the Year (Jan. 21): (R3) Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21; (R1) Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10; (R2) 1 Corinthians 12:12-30.

The second reading next Sunday is about the Mystical Body of Christ. Each of us is a member of that body. Just as in the human body every member is important, so it is with the body of Christ: each of us has a different role to play, but each is important.

A few years ago Kenny Rogers of the Texas Rangers baseball team pitched the 12th perfect game in modern major league history. The opposing team had no hits, no runs and no one even reached first base. The game featured a diving catch by rookie outfielder Rusty Greer in the ninth inning to preserve this perfect game.

Now here's the question: Did the pitcher hurl a perfect game, or was the entire team — particularly Rusty Greer — responsible for that no-hitter? The answer is, of course, that the pitcher could not have done it alone.

St. Paul, in writing to the church in Corinth, says we are a team. He compares the church, not to a baseball team, but to the human body. Some of us are hands, says St. Paul, some of us are eyes, some of us are toes. All are important.



a word
for
sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

Ralph Daniel, a salesman in Singapore, moved briskly about on foot and by bus, going from client to client. One day he accidentally injured the small toe of his left foot. The doctor told him to rest and not to wear his left shoe for two weeks. Ralph had to cancel all his appointments for 18 days. He was healthy and fit otherwise save for the toe. An injured toe prevented him from earning income! This confirms St. Paul's statement that "members of the body which seem less important are in fact indispensable."

The wife of Jerome Kern and the wife of Oscar Hammerstein II were guests at the same party. Jerome Kern had written the music for the successful Broadway musical "Showboat" while Oscar Hammerstein had written the lyrics.

A woman came up to Mrs. Kern and gushed, "Oh my goodness, your husband is the man who wrote that wonderful song, 'Old Man River.'"

And Mrs. Hammerstein spoke up and said, "No, dear, my husband wrote 'Old Man River.' Her husband wrote, 'Dum-dum-dum dum, da-dum, dum, dum ...'"

And that's true. Both lyricist and composer are necessary to produce a successful Broadway musical — as is the director, the costume designer, the person who takes the tickets, etc. Each is important in his or her own way.

There is a story of an ancient king of Babylon who came back to life and visited one of our modern cities. His host showed him the underside of the city: gambling and drug dens, brothels, taverns, and the like. The king was polite but bored. "We had all these in Babylon 3,000 years ago, and better. Have you nothing new to show me?"

The guide reversed his field and took his guest to churches, day-care centers, libraries, schools, health centers, institutions for the disabled, and soup kitchens.

"Ah," said the king, "all this is new. We didn't have these things in Babylon."

They didn't, because they didn't have the church of Jesus Christ. No institution

in the world has done so much for man. For its founder is still with us. He breathes life into his followers and still beckons them to "Follow me." We are his body. All of us have something important to do in his service.

...
Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, January 22

Hebrews 9:15, 24-28;

Mark 3:22-30

Tuesday, January 23

Hebrews 10:1-10; Mark 3:31-35

Wednesday, January 24

Hebrews 10:11-18; Mark 4:1-20

Thursday, January 25

Acts 22:3-16 or Acts 9:1-22;

Mark 16:15-18

Friday, January 26

2 Timothy 1:1-8 or Titus 1:1-5;

Mark 4:26-34

Saturday, January 27

Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19;

Mark 4:35-41

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