

COLUMNISTS

Saints model realistic forms of Christian life

The veneration of saints has been an integral part of the church's life since the death of its first martyr, Stephen. As Cardinal Avery Dulles once wrote, "Hardly any practice is so distinctively Catholic as the cult of the saints."

Millions of people, Catholic and non-Catholic, have been named after saints. Not so long ago, priests refused to baptize a child if the parents had not chosen a saint's name for their son or daughter.

One has only to review a list of major U.S. cities to realize how prominently saints figure in their names: St. Louis, St. Augustine, St. Paul, San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Anna, Santa Barbara, San Bernardino, and San Antonio.

The most famous golf course in the world is named after the apostle, St. Andrew (although we cannot claim that the world's most famous golfer, Tiger Woods, falls under the same category). One of the world's most beloved mythical characters, Santa Claus, is named after St. Nicholas, a fourth-century bishop who is so universally admired that he is patron of Russia, Greece, Sicily, of many cities and dioceses, and of children.

There have been popular novenas to St. Anne, the Little Flower (St. Theresa of the Child Jesus), and St. Jude. Children, and even some adults, wore medals



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

around their necks imprinted with the images of St. Joseph, St. Benedict of Nursia and St. Christopher.

Saints were so much a part of the culture that there was a kind of firestorm of concern when St. Christopher, patron of motorists whose medal was pinned inside thousands, perhaps millions, of cars, was dropped from the liturgical calendar in 1969. Many believe the church had dropped Christopher because it had reluctantly concluded that he never existed. Not so. The church was only trying to prune its calendar so proper attention could be given to more important saints.

National or ethnic parishes were also readily identified by their patron saints: Anne (French), Anthony of Padua and Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Italian), Boniface (German), Casimir (Polish and

Lithuanian), Stanislaus (Polish), Martin de Porres (African American) and Our Lady of Guadalupe (Hispanic).

Many Protestants have been cautious, to say the least, about Catholic preoccupation with saints. They have been concerned about the encroachment of superstitious practices, but especially about the risk of interposing a network of mediators between ourselves and Christ, to the detriment of Christ's role as sole mediator between God and humankind.

They should be heartened to some extent, however, by the shift of emphasis brought about by the Second Vatican Council. The saints are seen now less as miracle workers and more as models or exemplars of the Christian life.

"In the lives of those companions of ours in the human condition who are more perfectly transformed into the image of Christ (see 2 Corinthians 3:18), God shows, vividly, to humanity his presence and his face," the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church declared. "He speaks to us in them and offers us a sign of his kingdom, to which we are powerfully attracted, so great a cloud of witnesses are we given (see Hebrews 12:1), and such an affirmation of the truth of the Gospel" (n. 50).

The council called for the removal or

correction of "any abuses, excesses, or defects which may have crept in here and there," insisting that "the authentic cult of the saints does not consist so much in a multiplicity of external acts, but rather in a more intense practice of the love of Christ for all" (n. 51).

The great 16th-century Christian humanist Erasmus, a contemporary of the Protestant Reformers, had made essentially the same point: "No devotion to the saints is more acceptable to God," he wrote, "than the imitation of their virtues. ... Do you want to honor St. Francis? Then give away your wealth to the poor, restrain your evil impulses, and see in everyone you meet the image of Christ."

As the great 20th-century Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner put it, the saints function as "the initiators and the creative models of the holiness which happens to be right for, and is the task of, their particular age. They create a new style; they prove that a certain form of life and activity is a really genuine possibility; they show experimentally that one can be a Christian even in 'this' way; they make such a type of person believable as a Christian type."

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

Use time for loved ones and to gain eternity

19th Sunday of the Year (Aug. 12): (R3) Luke 12:32-48; (R1) Wisdom 18:6-9; (R2) Hebrew 11:1-2, 8-19.

Patrick Morley and his wife's schedules were filled with business and civic responsibilities. And they had young children at home who needed their attention.

As they reviewed their time-consuming responsibilities, the thought came, "Why not prioritize everything we do on the basis of who will be crying at our funerals? Why give ourselves to people who don't love us at the expense of those who do?"

It's a question of priorities!

Jesus was concerned about how we manage our time. He told about a landlord who went on a trip and left his servants in charge of the estate. They didn't know when he would return but that they were to have the house ready when he did.

We are like those servants. Do we say, "The cat's away and we will play," or do we put our house in order and act responsibly until our master returns?

Time management is a spiritual concern. The use of time is as much a measure of our spiritual well-being as the use of money. Our Lord said: "Wherever your treasure lies, there your heart will be." Time is even more important than money. What the souls in hell would give for just



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

one more moment of time on earth! Somebody said, "We don't pay for things with money. We pay for them with time."

Are we good stewards of our time? Up to the age of 20, we are exposed to at least 20,000 hours of television. And 10,000 hours for each decade after that. Think of what could be done with even some of those hours! All that is needed to get a bachelor's degree is 5,000 hours. In 10,000 hours you could become an astronomer or engineer. You could learn to speak several languages fluently. Are we using time just for money or to purchase eternity?

Do we use time for our children, our spouses, our friends? So often we spend time on what really does not matter and neglect the things and persons that do.

In Homer's *Iliad*, after Odysseus and his

men rescue Helen of Troy, they spend 10 years on the high seas, seeking adventure.

Odysseus' wife and son have been waiting for him, remaining faithful to his memory. His wanderlust keeps Odysseus from returning to those who love him.

Odysseus sailed to the very edge of the world, to the land of shadows that the Greeks called Hades. In Hades dwelt all of Odysseus' heroes, the great Greek warriors whom he had emulated. Here they had no glory. Their chief concern was for news of their family and friends: What had become of the people who had loved them? Suddenly Odysseus realized that all his adventures meant nothing compared to the love of those he had left behind. It was a different Odysseus who left Hades that day. He sailed for new adventure: home. He returned to the wife and son who had always loved him.

Finally, do we give enough time to God? An unfortunate by-product of a frantic schedule is that we neglect to spend time with God. Even worse, few people train their children to include God in their busy lives. One of the most important practices that can be taught children is that of family prayer: grace at meals and the rosary.

Ask lovers waiting to meet, the value of an hour. Ask someone missing his plane,

the value of a minute. Ask a person who has survived an accident, the value of a second. Use time wisely!

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

Daily Readings

- Monday, August 13**
Deuteronomy 10:12-22; Psalms 147:12-15, 19-20; Matthew 17:22-27
- Tuesday, August 14**
Deuteronomy 31:1-8; (Ps) Deuteronomy 32:3-4, 7-9, 12; Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14
- Wednesday, August 15**
Revelation 11:19A, 12:1-6A, 10AB; Psalms 45:10BC, 11-12AB, 16; 1 Corinthians 15:20-27; Luke 1:39-56
- Thursday, August 16**
Joshua 3:7-10A, 11, 13-17; Psalms 114:1-6; Matthew 18:21-19:1
- Friday, August 17**
Joshua 24:1-13; Psalms 136:1-3, 16-18, 21-22, 24; Matthew 19:3-12
- Saturday, August 18**
Joshua 24:14-29; Psalms 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 11; Matthew 19:13-15

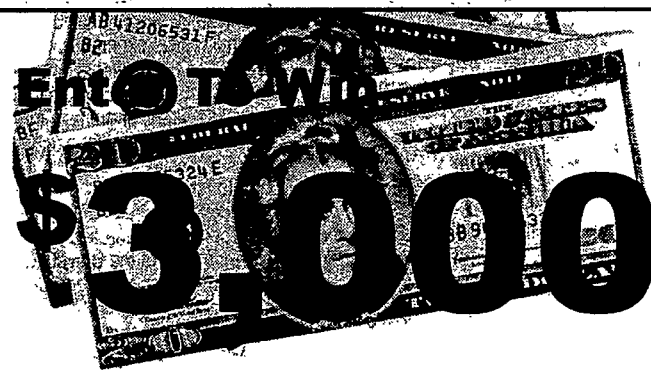
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