

Saint Cards

St. Jeanne D'Arc



1412-1431

Feast Day:
May 30

Jeanne D'Arc was born in a French village to a Catholic family. Her father was a farmer. Her mother could not read or write, but she taught Jeanne how to pray and how to work hard. During this time, England and France were at war. England ruled over the northern part of France, including the place where French kings were coronated (received their crowns).

When Jeanne was 13 years old she began hearing the voices of saints. Soon she began having visions as well. The archangel Michael, St. Margaret, and St. Catherine appeared to her and told her to help the French king fight the English. The king sent her into battle, and Jeanne led her troops to victory. The French won several more battles. The king was finally able to receive his crown at Reims Cathedral, and Jeanne was there for the ceremony. The French were on their way to winning the war with Jeanne's help.

But not everyone was happy with the French victories. Some French people wanted England to win. In 1430, Joan was captured by some of those people. She was put in an iron cage with chains on her neck, hands, and feet. At her trial, her captors questioned Jeanne about her visions. They knew she was a simple peasant girl, and they tried to trick her into saying that she was practicing witchcraft. But she refused to say she had not seen and heard the saints. She told the judges: "I saw them with these very eyes, as well as I see you."

Throughout of her trial, the French king did nothing to help her. Jeanne was convicted of witchcraft and heresy and burned alive. She was 19 years old. Thirty years later, a Church court declared that her trial had been unfair, and she was declared innocent of all crimes.

St. Francis of Assisi



1181-1226

Feast Day:
October 4

Francis was born into a rich Italian family. He enjoyed his wealth with wild, popular parties. One night while camping on his way to join the Fourth Crusade, God told him in a dream to return home. He did, and he started forming habits of prayer. While praying in a chapel, Christ spoke to him from the crucifix, “Francis, repair my church.” Francis obeyed literally, fixing the chapel’s walls and roof. Then he literally obeyed Christ’s commands throughout the Gospels: Francis gave what he had to poor people and he preached the Good News. Many men joined Francis, gave away their possessions, and lived in poverty. They begged when they needed food and gave to poorer people whatever they did not need. Francis and his followers preached in Italy, Tunis, Morocco, and Egypt.

Francis wrote a rule to set out how he wanted himself and his followers to live. Pope Innocent III approved it. After several revisions, Pope Honorius III also approved it. A woman named Clare joined Francis, and she started a group of women called the Poor Clares. These women supported the Franciscans by praying before the Eucharist.

During the Crusades, Francis tried to make peace with the Sultan who was fighting the Christians. The Sultan was impressed by Francis, but refused to convert. While praying one evening, Francis received the stigmata. He died several weeks later. Franciscans and Poor Clares continue to live according the rules of St. Francis and St. Clare.

St. Augustine of Hippo



354-430

Feast Day:
August 28

Augustine was born on the northern coast of Africa, in the country we now call Algeria. His mother, St. Monica, was Christian. His father worked for the Roman Empire and was a pagan, but he allowed Augustine's mother to teach the family's three children about following Jesus.

Augustine was very bright, and his parents worked hard to send him to the best schools. He read the most challenging authors of the day. He became a popular speaker and teacher. But even though Augustine was achieving success in the eyes of the world, he was living a wicked life. Over time, thanks to the influence of his mother and the Bishop of Milan, St. Ambrose, Augustine came to believe that God's grace could save even a terrible sinner like him. He was converted to Christianity. He became a priest and, later, the Bishop of Hippo.

Augustine became one of the most important Christian writers in history. In his book *Confessions*, we wrote about his conversion. He explained how all of us naturally yearn to be with God. Augustine also spent time correcting people who had wrong ideas about Christianity. He spoke about love, and said the Church should always show mercy to those who repent. He argued against those who thought humans could achieve moral perfection through their own free will alone. Augustine knew that we need God's grace to be saved. When the most important city in the world was destroyed by the Visigoths (a barbarian tribe), many people felt like it was the end of the world. But in his book *De Civitate Dei (City of God)*, Augustine assured people that no pagan city on Earth could compare to Christians' true home: Heaven. He wrote more than 300 sermons.

Augustine was 75 when another barbarian tribe, the Vandals, started to attack his hometown of Hippo. He died that summer. He is one of the most important Church Fathers, and a Doctor of the Church.

St. Teresa of Ávila



1515-1582

Feast Day:
October 15

Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada was born in the Ávila region of Spain. When she was younger she was caught up in her social life. She wanted to love God, but felt like she did not deserve to be close to Him. Her father sent her to a convent to help her straighten out her life. But the convent turned out to be more like a hotel, with frequent visitors and socializing. Teresa prayed to be closer to Jesus, but felt like He wasn't answering her. After 18 years, she felt like giving up.

When she was 41, a priest encouraged her to turn back to prayer. But it was hard for her. She felt like her mind was too busy and distracted to be able to focus on Jesus. But soon she felt very close to God. Praying became such an intense experience that she would cry. She would feel pain, and all her senses would be overwhelmed. Sometimes her whole body would even levitate (be raised up from the ground). These experiences scared Teresa and she especially disliked when they happened in public. But she knew Jesus was with her when He came to her in visions. Then she felt peaceful and encouraged.

Two years later she decided to start a new convent focused on prayer and living simply. Her reforms made a lot of people angry, but new Discalced Carmelite communities eventually spread throughout Europe. She wrote books, most famously *Inner Castle*, about her life and her visions, even though many people said women shouldn't do those things. In 1970, Pope Paul VI named her a Doctor of the Church. This is a very special title that means her writings helped form Catholic doctrine.

Bl. Chiara Luce Badano



1971–1990

Feast Day:
October 29

Chiara was born in a small Italian village to Catholic parents who had prayed for 11 years for a child. In kindergarten, she started saving her money for African missions. She gave her best toys to poor children. At school, she gave her snacks to poor classmates; when her mom packed extra snacks for her, she gave them all away. One day she took an apple from a neighbor's tree without asking. Her mother told her that though it would be embarrassing, she must return the apple and apologize. Chiara did. The neighbor gave Chiara a box of apples because she had learned something important that day.

When Chiara was nine, she joined the Focolare Movement, a Catholic organization devoted to worldwide unity in Christ. She also enjoyed tennis, hiking, swimming, singing, dancing, and spending long evenings with friends.

Chiara struggled with school and failed the first year of high school, but she persevered. When she was sixteen, she went on a Focolare retreat in Rome and developed a deep devotion to Jesus. While playing tennis, she felt pain in her shoulder. The pain continued and doctors found she had bone cancer. Chiara offered her pain to Jesus, praying, "It's for you, Jesus; if you want it, I want it too." She cheered other patients, her doctor, parents, and friends with her joyfulness. She gave all her money to a friend who was becoming a missionary to Africa. As she grew more ill, she told her mother not to be sad for her: "Don't shed any tears for me. I'm going to Jesus." She died in October 1990 before her 19th birthday.

St. Josemaría Escrivá



1902-1975

Feast Day:
June 26

Josemaría was born in a Spanish Catholic family. One winter day, he saw footprints of bare feet in the snow. A monk was walking in the snow to the church. Josemaría decided he wanted to suffer for God too and do whatever God wanted. He became a priest so that he could live always listening to God's call. Fr. Escrivá moved to Madrid, where he gathered university students and people of many professions to help him care for poor, sick people.

When he was twenty-six, he founded Opus Dei, an institution within the Church for evangelization. Opus Dei is a Latin phrase for "the work of God." Its first members were the university students he knew. Fr. Escrivá had to flee to survive persecution during the Spanish civil war. When the war ended, he traveled through Spain holding retreats for priests. He established the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross so that Opus Dei could include priests and lay people. Opus Dei spread to many countries, including Portugal, Italy, France, Ireland, Great Britain, Kenya, and the United States.

Fr. Escrivá moved to Rome to oversee the many projects of Opus Dei: elementary, secondary, and professional schools, universities, agricultural training centers, hospitals and clinics, and retreat centers. Fr. Escrivá helped in Vatican Council II. He journeyed through Europe and Latin America speaking to people about God's love, the sacraments, and the sanctity in daily work and family life. He was devoted to Our Lady. He hung a picture of her in all his rooms. He was sitting before a picture of her when he died.

St. Maximilian Kolbe



1894-1941

Feast Day:
August 14

Raymund Kolbe was born in Poland. He entered a Franciscan monastery when he was 16. There he received the name Maximilian. He was ordained a priest in 1919. He taught men who were preparing to be priests and opened friaries (religious communities) in Poland, Japan, and India.

When he returned to Poland, the Nazis had invaded the country. Fr. Kolbe organized a shelter for thousands of Polish refugees. In 1941, the Nazis raided the shelter. They took Fr. Kolbe and his companions to Auschwitz, a Nazi death camp.

Fr. Kolbe was tortured and beaten by the Nazi guards. Though he was suffering, he offered to help the other prisoners. At night he would ask each one, "I am a Catholic priest. Can I do anything for you?" He would hear their confessions and tell them about God's love. He wouldn't ask for medical help until all his fellow prisoners had been treated.

One day a prisoner from the camp escaped. The guards announced that to prevent future escape attempts, 10 prisoners would be starved to death. The guards choose 10 men, including one young man who cried out in anguish for his wife and children. Fr. Kolbe stepped forward and volunteered to take the man's place. Fr. Kolbe was put in a cell with the other 9 men, where he prayed and read the Psalms with them. After two weeks of hunger and thirst, Fr. Kolbe was still alive. The Nazis injected poison into Fr. Kolbe's arm and he died.

The man Fr. Kolbe saved survived the war. At first that man felt regret. He felt like he had caused Fr. Kolbe's death by allowing himself to be saved. But then he understood: "A man like Fr. Kolbe could not have done otherwise. Perhaps he thought that as a priest his place was beside the condemned men to help them keep hope. In fact he was with them to the last."

St. Thérèse of Lisieux



1873-1897

Feast Day:
October 1

Thérèse Martin was born in Alençon, France. Her mother and father had nine children, and Thérèse was one of five who survived. Thérèse's mother died when Thérèse was only 4 years old. Her father moved the family to Lisieux, and Thérèse's older sisters helped take care of her.

For much of her life, Thérèse was delicate and sensitive. She would cry if she thought someone was criticizing her. Then she would feel even worse about herself because she had cried.

Two of her sisters were nuns at a Discalced Carmelite convent. Thérèse also received a call to religious life, but she was too young to join the convent. But Thérèse did not give up. When she was 15, she went on a pilgrimage to Rome. Her group was able to visit the Pope, and she asked him for special permission to enter the convent. One of the Pope's officers saw her and was impressed with her courage. She was given permission to enter the convent. Thérèse would be a cloistered nun, meaning she would spend her days in prayer, away from other people and the world.

Thérèse knew that Jesus wanted the little ones to come to Him. In fact, Jesus Himself had become a child! So Thérèse was glad she was little. Thérèse also wanted to be holy. At first she felt discouraged when she compared herself to the saints. But instead of feeling discouraged, she persevered. She wrote: "In spite of my littleness, I can aim at being a saint. ... I will look for some means of going to heaven by a little way which is very short and very straight, a little way that is quite new." St. Thérèse is known for this "Little Way" of seeking holiness in ordinary, everyday things.

In 1896 she started coughing up blood. She had tuberculosis, which is a painful and deadly illness. She died less than a year later at age 24. The wisdom in her writings was so profound that Pope John Paul II named her a Doctor of the Church.

St. Gianna Beretta Molla



1922–1962

Feast Day:
April 28

Gianna was the tenth of thirteen children in a Catholic Italian family. When she was twenty, she went to Milan to study medicine. After graduating medical school, she opened an office. Her patients were children. One of her brothers was a missionary priest in Brazil. She wanted to join him and help care for the people there, but her own health problems kept her in Italy.

When she was 32, she met a man named Pietro Molla. A year later, Pietro and Gianna married; they had four children. While Gianna was pregnant with their fourth child, Gianna grew very sick. She had a tumor growing in her womb near her unborn baby.

Gianna was given three choices: she could have an abortion. She could ask the doctors to take out her womb. Or she could ask the doctors to take out only the tumor. Gianna refused to have an abortion, because it is a sin to kill an unborn baby on purpose. Gianna did not want the doctors to take out her womb because that would kill her baby too. Instead, Gianna asked the doctors to take out only the tumor. The doctors did. But Gianna was still sick. She told her family that if she became so sick that the doctors could save only her life or the baby's, she wanted the doctors to save her baby's life. Finally on Holy Saturday, her baby was born, a little girl. Gianna lived for one more week and then she died. She was 39 years old.

St. Monica



331–387

Feast Day:
August 27

Monica was born in Northern Africa to Christian parents shortly after Christianity was legalized. Her parents gave her in marriage to a pagan man, Patricius. Patricius frequently criticized Monica and lost his temper, but Monica loved him still. She asked God to help her husband abandon his sins. Patricius and Monica raised three children, Augustine, Navigius, and Perpetua. Augustine became deadly sick, and Monica asked that he be baptized. At first, Patricius agreed. But when Augustine grew healthier, Patricius denied Monica's request. Augustine left home to study law at the university in Carthage. He lived a wicked life there. Monica prayed patiently for him and for her husband. After nearly twenty years of marriage, her husband converted to Christianity and was baptized. He died one year later.

When Augustine came home from school, he told his mother his beliefs. His beliefs were heretical. Monica sent him away from the dinner table, and he left the house and went to Rome. Monica later saw a vision that made her want to reconcile with her son. So Monica went to Rome, but Augustine had gone to Milan. Monica joined him in Milan and introduced him to the bishop there, St. Ambrose. Under St. Ambrose's instruction, Monica learned to pray more simply and give what she had to the poor. Augustine converted to Christianity. Monica and Augustine lived happily together as Augustine prepared for baptism. He was baptized that Easter at age 33 by St. Ambrose. Monica told her son, "There was indeed one thing for which I wished ... and that was that I might see you a Catholic Christian before I died."

While Monica and Augustine were waiting for a boat back to Africa, Monica became ill with a fever and died.

St. Thomas More



1478-1535

Feast Day:

June 22

Thomas More was born in London. From an early age he was very bright and interested in subjects like logic, Latin, history, and music. He went to good schools, and impressed his teachers. One said he spoke Latin as easily as he spoke English! He became a successful lawyer, and gave lectures on St. Augustine. Many of his friends were scholars and writers. More was also a successful writer. His book *Utopia* was a story about a “perfect” society. Later authors borrowed that idea and the utopian genre (or type of literature) is still very popular. He considered religious life, but he discerned that it was not his calling. He continued the practice of law, and served in Parliament, England’s lawmaking body. He got married and had four children before his wife died suddenly.

By the early 1500s, More had married again and was serving as an advisor to King Henry VIII. The Protestant Reformation was tearing Europe apart. But More remained faithful. King Henry VIII wanted to divorce his wife and he tried to use the Bible to say divorce was okay. But More knew that the King was wrong. King Henry VIII finally broke England away from the Catholic Church. More refused to swear allegiance to the King as head of the Church of England. He knew that, going back the Apostles, the Pope was the true head of the Church Jesus had founded. The King put him in prison and took away his property. While he was in prison he wrote letters to his family and essays about Jesus. When the King found out, he had his writing materials taken away. More was convicted of treason and beheaded in 1535. His last words were: “I die the good King’s servant, but God’s first.”

St. Paul



Died 67 A.D.

Feast Day:
June 29

Paul was a Jew, and a Roman citizen. For years, Paul persecuted Christians because he thought Christianity was false. He traveled to Damascus to persecute Christians, but a light shone from heaven and Paul fell to the ground. A voice said: “Why do you persecute me?” Paul asked, “Who are you?” The voice answered, “I am Jesus.” Then Paul believed that Jesus is God. When Paul stood up, he could not see, so his friends led him to Damascus. God sent Ananias, a Christian man, to Paul; Ananias miraculously healed Paul’s eyes and baptized him.

Immediately, Paul preached the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles, worked miracles in Jesus’ name, and established Christian churches in many cities. Some Roman politicians who hated Christianity ordered Paul to be beaten and imprisoned. An earthquake shook the prison doors open. Paul, however, did not escape; he stayed and preached to the guard, and baptized him and his family.

Paul went to Jerusalem to preach, and some Jews took him to their court for preaching Christianity. Paul’s case was brought to the local Roman court where the Jews falsely accused him. Paul, being a Roman citizen, appealed to Caesar. On his way to Rome, Paul preached to his guards and to the sailors. A storm brought the boat to an island, and Paul preached to the island natives. When he arrived in Rome, he preached to crowds of Jews while waiting for his trial before Caesar, who released him. Paul preached in many countries and returned to Rome, where he was accused and imprisoned again, and then beheaded. He wrote fourteen letters to the people he converted to Christianity, and these letters are in the Bible.

St. Pope John Paul II



1920–2005

Feast Day:
October 22

Karol Wojtyła was born in Poland. His father was an army lieutenant and his mother was a schoolteacher, and his dream was to be an actor. When Nazis invaded Poland, his college education and his acting came to an end. He worked to avoid being deported to Germany. When he was 22, he secretly entered seminary. After World War II, the seminary re-opened publicly. He was ordained a priest soon after. After further study in Rome and Poland, he was made Bishop of Krakow in the 1960s, a time when Poland was suffering from atheistic and Communist ideas. He participated in Vatican II and helped write many of its documents. When he was elected Pope, he chose the name John Paul II.

As a Polish pope, John Paul II inspired the Poles to form Solidarity, a trade union that regained rule of Poland from the Communist party. Pope John Paul II worked to convert England back to Catholicism. He allowed Anglican priests (who can marry) to keep their wives and families and become Catholic priests.

Pope John Paul II founded World Youth Day, when young Catholics from around the world gather in one city to meet the Pope, pray with him, listen to him, and attend Mass he offers for them. He wrote influential encyclicals such as *Evangelium Vitae*, which is about the value of human life. His lectures on the human person, purity, and marriage are together known as Theology of the Body. He died in April 2005. Thousands of people, including nearly a hundred political and religious leaders, attended his funeral.

St. Peter



Died 64 A.D.

Feast Day:
June 29

Simon was a fisherman. His brother Andrew introduced him to Jesus, and Jesus called Simon and Andrew to be Apostles. When Jesus asked His Apostles who they thought He was, Simon answered that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus answered Simon, “You are Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church.” The word “Peter” means “rock,” and Jesus built the Church on the foundation of the papacy, with Peter as the first pope. Jesus allowed Peter to see the Transfiguration and also to pray with Him before He was arrested to be crucified. When men came to arrest Jesus, Peter cut off a man’s ear with his sword, but Jesus healed the man’s ear.

Jesus warned Peter that he would deny Jesus. Peter promised he would not, but while Peter waited for Jesus outside the courthouse, people asked Peter if he knew Jesus. Peter lied and said he did not; then Peter remembered Jesus’ prediction and left, weeping.

Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead, and came to Peter, saying to him, “Feed my sheep.” After Jesus had ascended into Heaven and the Holy Spirit descended to the apostles, Peter was the first Apostle to preach and to work miracles in Jesus’ name. Peter was imprisoned, but an angel freed him and he continued to preach to Jews and to Gentiles. With St. Paul’s help, Peter led the first Church council in Jerusalem. He wrote two letters that are in the Bible. The Roman emperor condemned Peter to be crucified; Peter asked to be crucified upside down because he was not worthy to die as Jesus did. His relics are in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.

Bl. Miguel Pro Juárez



1891-1927

Feast Day:
November 23

Miguel was born in Guadeloupe, Mexico. His family was devoutly Catholic. Young Miguel enjoyed doodling and drawing cartoons, and he was very good at it! When his sister entered a convent, Miguel began to hear the Lord calling him to be a priest. He entered a Jesuit seminary. (A seminary is a school that prepares future priests.) He was there when people who hated Catholics began taking over Mexico. The seminary was forced to close. He and his classmates escaped to the United States. He continued his preparation, and was made a priest in Europe in 1925.

Back in Mexico, being Catholic was illegal. Churches had been forced to close. Priests had to hide. Even though it was dangerous, Fr. Pro wanted to return to Mexico. He got permission to go. He began helping people in secret. He would wear disguises to stay safe while he tended to people's needs. Sometimes he would dress as a beggar. When he went into rich neighborhoods to ask people to help the poor, he would dress as a businessman. He even dressed as a policeman to offer Holy Communion to prisoners.

Someone told the police what Fr. Pro was doing, and he was arrested. The government lied and said Fr. Pro had tried to kill the president of Mexico. Fr. Pro was sentenced to death for a crime he did not commit. He was sent to a firing squad. He forgave his executioners, and prayed out loud for God to forgive them. He stood before them with his arms stretched out at his sides. He held a rosary in one hand and a crucifix in the other. His last words were "Viva Cristo Rey," which means "Praise Christ the King!"

St. Stephen



Died 37 A.D.

Feast Day:
December 26

Stephen was a Jewish man who became one of the first Christians. He was full of wisdom and faith from the Holy Spirit. The disciples of Jesus ordained him a deacon. He had the task of taking care of widowed women who became Christian, and Stephen also worked miracles. Some Jewish men who hated Christianity tried to argue with Stephen, but they could not outsmart the wisdom he received from the Holy Spirit. They were so angry that they bribed other men to falsely accuse Stephen of telling wicked lies about the Old Testament prophet Moses.

On these false accusations, Stephen was brought to the Jewish court. Stephen defended himself by telling the story of Moses. Moses saved the Israelites from the pagan Egyptians. But the Israelites betrayed Moses and God by worshiping a pagan idol. Stephen told the Jewish men that like Moses, every Old Testament prophet was betrayed and persecuted by the Jews, although the prophets tried to tell the Jewish people about Jesus. When Jesus came, He was also betrayed, persecuted, and killed by Jewish people, including by the men who arrested Stephen.

Then the Jewish men were filled with rage because they did not want to hear the truth. Then Stephen looked up, and he saw heaven, with Jesus standing at the right of God the Father. Stephen told the men what he saw, but they refused to listen. They dragged him out of the city and stoned him. Just before he died, Stephen prayed that Jesus would be merciful to the men who were killing him. A martyr is someone who is killed for his or her religious faith. St. Stephen is the first martyr of the Church.

Bl. Teresa of Calcutta



1910-1997

Feast Day:
September 5

Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu was born in Skopje, Yugoslavia, (now Macedonia) to a devoutly Catholic family. Her father died suddenly when she was only 8 years old. When she was 18, she set out for a convent in Ireland. She would never see her mother again. When she arrived, very few people there understood her language. One sister remembered her as “very small, quiet, and shy.” She received the name Teresa after St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

Her community sent her to India, where she taught high school history and geography for many years. She learned to speak the local languages. One day in 1946, Mother Teresa was on a train to a retreat in Darjeeling. On that train she received a call to found her own religious order, the Missionaries of Charity. She said, “I heard the call to give up all and follow Christ into the slums to serve him among the poorest of the poor.” Mother Teresa helped throughout India. She taught children the alphabet by writing in the dirt. She visited the poor and the ill, asking what they needed and helping them. Pope Paul VI and St. Pope John Paul II praised her work. She helped lepers, orphans, AIDS patients, alcoholics, and many others. Her order opened houses in over 100 countries. She tried to bring help to China, but she wasn’t able to.

Mother Teresa won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. In her acceptance speech, she urged people to protect unborn babies. She continued to help throughout the world even as her health got worse. She died in 1997.