

Saints of the Month

A selection of lives of the saints for September



1st September – St Giles

St Giles has many churches, hospitals and hospices dedicated to him, especially those which date from medieval times, which shows that he was a popular saint in the middle ages – but we know very little about him!

He was living in the 7th century and was probably born in Athens from a wealthy family. But he longed for a more solitary life and he headed to France to live a life of prayer.

First of all he lived alone in the French countryside, but news of his prayerful life grew and people came to him to live alongside him and seek out his advice and counsel. He then founded a monastery where he and his followers could live. This monastery was a place of hospitality, especially for those making pilgrimage to the Holy Land or Santiago de Compostella.

He is regarded as one of the fourteen ‘Holy Helpers’ whose intercession is believed to be especially effective, particularly against disease.

Grant, we beseech you, O Lord,
that the prayers of your holy Abbot, Saint Giles
may commend us to you:
that we, who have no power of ourselves to help ourselves,
may by his advocacy find favour in your sight.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Your Son, who being God,
lives and reigns with You
in the unity of the same Holy Spirit,
for ever and ever. Amen.

3rd September – St Gregory the Great

Gregory was Pope between 590 and 604.

He became a monk at an early age, and it was the monastic life that he loved, but he reluctantly accepted the burden of being Pope.

He was famous for his missionary work, and sent many people out to proclaim the Gospel. Including sending 40 monks from his own monastery, led by St Augustine of Canterbury, to England in the year 597.

He was strict with his clergy, and felt it was important that they went out onto the streets to serve the poor, and he removed those who did not live up to this ideal. It was something that he practised himself as he always dined with a dozen poor people at each meal. He also saw the role of Deacons as being very important in the service of the poor.

Alongside his missionary work, he was a great theologian and wrote, amongst others, a book called 'Pastoral Care' which outlined the roles and duties of bishops in caring for their people and being preachers and teachers of the faith.

Gregory also made many changes to the liturgy of the Eucharist, some of which survive today, such as at what point the Lord's prayer is said during the service.

Merciful Father,
who chose your bishop Gregory
to be a servant of the servants of God:
grant that, like him, we may ever long to serve you
by proclaiming your gospel to the nations,
and may ever rejoice to sing your praises;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

4th September – St Cuthbert

Cuthbert was probably born in Northumbria around the year 635.

He entered the monastery at Melrose where he stayed for 13 years. The monastery was given land at Ripon and Cuthbert was one of a party of monks who went to found a new monastery at Ripon. He then returned back to Melrose to take up the position of Prior.

Cuthbert was on the move again and moved to the monastery at Lindisfarne, after the Irish monks had left there, and he became Abbot of Lindisfarne.

He was an active missionary and his outgoing, cheerful and compassionate nature helped him in his missionary work. He was also much in demand as a spiritual guide. But, he felt called to a greater solitude and went to live the life of a hermit – but people would still seek him out for his wisdom and advice.

Aged 50, he was asked to become a Bishop, something to which he reluctantly agreed and for two years travelled extensively with his missionary work. He then ended his life in the solitude of being a hermit.

His body was taken back to Lindisfarne and it became a place of pilgrimage. The monastery was abandoned after Viking raids and Cuthbert's remains were taken back to the mainland. They were interred at Durham Cathedral and a shrine erected in his honour, which remains a place of pilgrimage to this day.

20th March is the date sometimes celebrated as Cuthbert's feast day, but as this always falls in Lent, today is sometimes celebrated as it is the anniversary of the enshrinement of his remains at Durham Cathedral.

Almighty God,
who called your servant Cuthbert from following the flock
to follow your Son and to be a shepherd of your people:
in your mercy, grant that we, following his example,
may bring those who are lost home to your fold;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

5th September – St Teresa of Calcutta

Perhaps one of the most famous faces of the 20th century, Mother Teresa was known throughout the world for her work with the poor.

She was born in Albania and given the name Agnes. She joined the Loreto nuns aged 18 and lived the first part of her life as a nun in Dublin, taking the name Teresa. In 1928 she went to live in India and worked in the local high school for girls, but she could not escape the realities of the poverty around her. She felt called to leave the convent and to help the poor whilst living amongst them.

She sought permission to leave her order, and to establish a new order, which was known as the 'Missionaries of Charity'. Teresa took a nursing course and devoted her life to helping the poor and sick. She dressed in a white sari, which was the ordinary dress of an Indian woman. Volunteers began to join her in her work and others donated food and supplies.

In 1952 she was given a former hostel which became a home for the dying and those poorest in society. The services the Missionaries of Charity offered expanded to include orphans, alcoholics, the elderly and homeless people.

Mother Teresa worked tirelessly on behalf of the poor. She travelled around the world to raise awareness of the needs of the poor, and establish branches of her religious order. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, and when she died in 1997 there were 4,000 sisters of her order in 600 foundations located in 123 countries.

Jesus,
you made Saint Teresa an inspiring example of firm faith and burning charity,
an extraordinary witness to the way of spiritual childhood, and a great and esteemed
teacher of the value and dignity of every human life.
Hear the requests of all those who seek her intercession.

May we follow her example in heeding Your cry of thirst from the Cross and joyfully
loving You in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor, especially those most
unloved and unwanted.

We ask this in Your name and through the intercession of Mary, Your Mother and the
Mother of us all.
Amen.

8th September – Birthday of Our Lady

The Church has celebrated Mary's birthday since at least the 6th century. We don't know the actual date of her birth, but September was chosen as that is when the Eastern church begins its church year.

Every human birth is a call for new hope in the world. If Jesus is the perfect expression of God's love, then Mary is the foreshadowing of that love. Next to the birth of Jesus, Mary's birth offers the greatest possible happiness to the world. Each time we celebrate her birth, we can confidently hope for an increase of peace in our hearts and in the world at large.

Almighty and everlasting God,
who stooped to raise fallen humanity
through the child-bearing of blessed Mary:
grant that we, who have seen your glory
revealed in our human nature
and your love made perfect in our weakness,
may daily be renewed in your image
and conformed to the pattern of your Son
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.



13th September – St John Chrysostom

Chrysostom means 'golden mouthed' and today's saint is one of the greatest preachers in Christian history.

He was ascetic, unimposing but dignified, and troubled by stomach ailments from his desert days as a monk, John became a bishop under the cloud of imperial politics.

If his body was weak, his tongue was powerful. The content of his sermons, his exegesis of Scripture, were never without a point. Sometimes the point stung the high and mighty. Some sermons lasted up to two hours.

His lifestyle at the imperial court was not appreciated by many courtiers. He could not stand people who gathered around him expecting favours.

His zeal led him to decisive action. Bishops who bribed their way into office were deposed. Many of his sermons called for concrete steps to share wealth with the poor. The rich did not appreciate hearing from John that private property existed because of Adam's fall from grace any more than married men liked to hear that they were bound to marital fidelity just as much as their wives were. When it came to justice and charity, John acknowledged no double standards.

Aloof, energetic, outspoken, especially when he became excited in the pulpit, John was a sure target for criticism and personal trouble. He was accused of gorging himself secretly on rich wines and fine foods. His faithfulness as spiritual director to the rich widow, Olympia, provoked much gossip attempting to prove him a hypocrite where wealth and chastity were concerned.

His sermons were misinterpreted by some which led him to be forced into exile, where he died in 407.

God of truth and love,
who gave to your servant John Chrysostom
eloquence to declare your righteousness in the great congregation
and courage to bear reproach for the honour of your name:
mercifully grant to those who minister your word
such excellence in preaching,
that all people may share with them
in the glory that shall be revealed;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

14th September – Holy Cross Day

In the 4th century, St Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine went to Jerusalem in search of the holy places associated with the life of Jesus.

On the spot believed to be the site of Jesus' tomb had been built a pagan temple to Aphrodite. Helena had this temple removed, in order to build what is now called the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – one of the holiest places in Christianity.

During excavations three crosses were found. One was said to have healed the sick who touched it and it was believed that this was the cross on which Jesus died. This sacred relic became an object of devotion and veneration.

On this day we celebrate the anniversary of the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the year 335, and give thanks for the cross – the sign of our salvation.

The cross is today the universal image of Christian belief. Countless generations of artists have turned it into a thing of beauty to be carried in procession or worn as jewellery. To the eyes of the first Christians, it had no beauty. It stood outside too many city walls, decorated only with decaying corpses, as a threat to anyone who defied Rome's authority—including Christians who refused sacrifice to Roman gods. Although believers spoke of the cross as the instrument of salvation, it seldom appeared in Christian art unless disguised as an anchor or the Chi-Rho until after Constantine's vision of the cross in the sky.

Almighty God,
who in the passion of your blessed Son
made an instrument of painful death
to be for us the means of life and peace:
grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ
that we may gladly suffer for his sake;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

15th September – Our Lady of Sorrows

In Luke's Gospel, as Jesus was presented in the Temple, Simeon prophesied to Mary that "a sword will pierce your own soul too" (*Luke 2:35*). This prophecy was fulfilled as Mary stood by the cross, watching Jesus die.

In this moment of intense pain for Mary, Jesus gives her to us as our mother and us as her children (*John 19: 26-27*). Mary knows sorrow at the foot of the cross, the unimaginable pain of watching her son die. But she also knows the unbounded joy of the Resurrection – she knows that death is not the end. And so, as our mother she stands with us in our own moments of sorrow, grief and pain and shows us her motherly love. But she also points us beyond that to the joy of the Risen Jesus.

At the foot of the cross, Mary is a sorrowful figure; but she is also a powerful one. She stood watching Jesus die; but she did so fearlessly while the other disciples has fled. She looked on the wounds of his broken body, but she saw in them the salvation of the world. By being at the cross at that moment, she too faced persecution – but her faith was strong.

May Mary, our mother, guide us through our times of sorrow and pain, and that we may follow her example to stay faithful as we face the crosses we must carry in our lives.

O God, who willed
that, when your Son was lifted high on the Cross,
his Mother should stand close by and share his suffering,
grant that your Church,
participating with the Virgin Mary in the Passion of Christ,
may merit a share in his Resurrection.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

17th September – St Hildegard of Bingen

Hildegard, living in the 12th century is a really remarkable woman. She was an abbess, author, artist, composer, mystic, pharmacist, poet, preacher and theologian – an impressive list of skills!

She became a Benedictine nun at the age of 18, but she had had intense religious experiences since the age of 3 when she had visions of Jesus. When she became a nun, her spiritual director told her to dictate these visions to a monk which she did.

She was an avid letter writer and produced commentaries on the Gospels, the Creed and the Rule of St Benedict; as well as short works on medicine and composing monastic chant.

In her day she was very famous and travelled throughout Germany preaching.

She saw humans as ‘living sparks’ of God’s love. Perhaps with a thinking that still feels very fresh to our modern thinking about creation, she saw God’s harmony in the world, as this quote from her shows:

Glance at the sun. See the moon and the stars.

Gaze at the beauty of earth’s greenings.

Now, think.

What delight God gives to humankind with all these things. . . .

All nature is at the disposal of humankind.

We are to work with it.

For without we cannot survive

Hildegard was canonised by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012

Most glorious and holy God,
whose servant Hildegard, strong in the faith,
was caught up in the vision of your heavenly courts:
by the breath of your Spirit
open our eyes to glimpse your glory
and our lips to sing your praises with all the angels;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

21st September – St Matthew

Like many of the Apostles, the information we have about St Matthew is sketchy.

We know from the Gospel accounts that he was a tax collector. He was working for the occupying Roman forces and so, his job would have caused him to be despised. Yes, Jesus called him to follow him, and Matthew followed. It goes to show that Jesus calls the most unlikely people to be his followers.

After he had heard Jesus' call to follow him, Matthew invited Jesus to eat with him. This caused uproar with the scribes and Pharisees, as they thought it was awful that Jesus should eat in the house of such a sinner. Jesus responded by saying that he had not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

There are no records of Matthew's death, or accounts of what happened to him after the Ascension, but the tradition is that he left to spread the Gospel to other countries, perhaps in Persia or Ethiopia.

O Almighty God,
whose blessed Son called Matthew the tax collector
to be an apostle and evangelist:
give us grace to forsake the selfish pursuit of gain and the possessive love of riches
that we may follow in the way of your Son Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

23rd September – St Pio of Pietrelcina

Perhaps more affectionately known as ‘Padre Pio’, he is one of the best loved saints of the 20th century.

Born in Italy in 1887, he decided that, aged 5, he wanted to dedicate his life to God. It was said that as a child he could see the guardian angels and spoke with Jesus and Mary, and this was so natural to him that he assumed that other people could also do the same.

His father moved to America to work so that he could send money home for his son’s education. Francesco (his birth name) entered the novitiate of the Franciscan order aged 15, and took the name Pio. His studies for the priesthood were hampered by ill health, and he spent time at home to convalesce, which continuing his studies, and even after his ordination he was allowed to stay at home as his health was so precarious. In 1916, he returned to community life at the Friary in San Giovanni Rotondo, where he would remain until his death in 1968.

Padre Pio received the stigmata (the marks of the wounds of Jesus in his hands and his feet). He first received the pain of the wounds and then the physical appearance of them. He prayed that God would take them away, not the pain, but the physical appearance as he found them to be an unbearable humiliation. It is said that the blood which flowed from his wound smelled of flowers, and although the wounds continued to weep they never became infected. Doctors who examined the wounds were amazed at their perfectly round shape. News of the stigmata spread and people began to flock to San Giovanni Rotondo to attend Padre Pio’s Mass, which caused concern for Church authorities.

Padre Pio was also an extraordinary confessor and would spend many hours each day hearing confessions. He often gave the advice to people to ‘pray, hope and don’t worry’ - words which we all still need to hear today.

He died on 23rd September 1968 and his funeral was attended by over 100,000 people.

Almighty ever-living God, who, by a singular grace,
gave the Priest Saint Pio a share in the Cross of your Son
and, by means of his ministry, renewed the wonders of your mercy,
grant that through his intercession
we may be united constantly to the sufferings of Christ,
and so brought happily to the glory of the resurrection.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

24th September – Our Lady of Walsingham

In 1061 the lady of the manor, Richeldis de Faverches, had a vision of the Virgin Mary where she was taken by Mary to be shown the house in Nazareth where Gabriel had announced the news of the birth of Jesus. Mary asked Richeldis to build an exact replica of that house in Walsingham. This is how Walsingham became known as England's Nazareth. The vision was repeated three times, according to legend, and retold through a fifteenth century ballad. The materials given by Richeldis were finally constructed miraculously one night into the Holy House, while she kept a vigil of prayer.

Geoffrey de Faverches left instructions for the building of a Priory in Walsingham. The Priory passed into the care of Augustinian Canons somewhere between 1146 and 1174. It was this Priory, housing the simple wooden structure Richeldis had been asked to build, which became the focus of pilgrimage to Walsingham. Royal patronage helped the Shrine to grow in wealth and popularity, receiving visits from several kings including Henry VIII, who finally brought about its destruction in 1538.

After nearly four hundred years, the 20th century saw the restoration of pilgrimage to Walsingham as a regular feature of Christian life in these islands, and indeed beyond. In 1897, there was a Roman Catholic pilgrimage to the restored 14th century Slipper Chapel, now at the centre of the Roman Catholic National Shrine.

Fr Hope Patten, appointed as Vicar of Walsingham in 1921, ignited Anglican interest in the pre-Reformation pilgrimage. It was his idea to base a new statue of Our Lady of Walsingham on the image depicted on the seal of the medieval Priory. In 1922, this statue was set up in the Parish Church of St. Mary, and regular pilgrimage devotion followed. From the first night that the statue was placed there, people gathered around it to pray, asking Mary to join her powerful prayer with theirs. This work of intercession continues to this day.

O Mary, recall the solemn moment when Jesus, your divine son, dying on the cross, confided us to your maternal care. You are our mother, we desire ever to remain your devout children. let us therefore feel the effects of your powerful intercession with Jesus Christ. Make your name again glorious in the shrine once renowned throughout our land by your visits, favours, and many miracles.

Pray, O holy mother of God, for the conversion of England, restoration of the sick, consolation for the afflicted, repentance of sinners, peace to the departed.

O blessed Mary, mother of God, our Lady of Walsingham, intercede for us.
Amen.

27th September – St Vincent de Paul

St Vincent de Paul was a French priest living in the 17th century (he died 27 September 1660). His initial ideas about the priesthood were that it would be a successful career for him, and to give some financial stability for his family. Indeed, he did have a successful career, and was chaplain to a wealthy family and tutor to their children. But one day all of that changed, as he was called to give the last rites to one of the tenant farmers on the family's land. Vincent was appalled by both the material and spiritual poverty that the man was living in – not only was he living with hardly enough food to live, he was living in total fear of hell. The man had not heard of the loving nature of Jesus. Vincent was able to minister to the man, but through this, he was also converted.

From this time on, he spent his life ministering to the poor and encouraging others to do so, founding a society of zealous and able priests (the Congregation of Mission) to work with the poorest people in rural areas, this work was also done alongside the Daughters of Charity.

This was at a time when there were not many priests in France and what priests there were, were neither well-formed nor faithful to their way of life. Vincent helped reform the clergy and the manner in which they were instructed and prepared for the priesthood. He did this first through the presentation of retreats and later by helping develop a precursor to our modern day seminaries.

His life and work were behind the establishment of two societies for Anglican priests, the Society of the Holy Cross (SSC) and the Company of Mission Priests. Do pray today for those two societies and the priests who belong to them, that they may live their lives in the model of St Vincent de Paul.

Merciful God,
whose servant Vincent de Paul,
by his ministry of preaching and pastoral care,
brought your love to the sick and the poor:
give to all your people a heart of compassion
that by word and action they may serve you
in serving others in their need;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

29th September – Ss Michael, Gabriel and Raphael

Angels are messengers from God, and today we celebrate the feast of the three 'archangels', Michael, Gabriel and Raphael.

Angels are found throughout scripture, but only the three we celebrate today are named.

Michael appears in Daniel's vision in the Old Testament and defends Israel against its enemies. We also read about Michael in the Book of Revelation, as he leads God's armies into the final battle over the forces of evil.

Gabriel also appears in Daniel's vision, and announces Michael's role in God's plan. Gabriel is also very familiar to us in Luke's Gospel as he visits Mary and gives her the news that she is going to bear a son, Jesus.

We read about Raphael in the book of Tobit, and Raphael guides Tobit's son through a series of adventures.

So traditionally:

Michael – protects

Gabriel – announces

Raphael – guides

Everlasting God,

you have ordained and constituted the ministries of angels and mortals in a wonderful order:

grant that as your holy angels always serve you in heaven,

so, at your command,

they may help and defend us on earth;

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. Amen.

30th September – St Jerome

We can often imagine that saints are people who live great and holy lives that are very serene and placid, well St Jerome had a famously bad temper and could write sarcastic and cutting letters to people, and had a reputation for being outspoken – but despite these failings he had an intense love for Jesus.

He was born around the year 347, and was initially sceptical about Christianity, but he did become a convert and was baptised. He travelled extensively and furthered his studies.

He was a great scriptural scholar and translated most of the Bible into Latin, in what is known as the Vulgate translation.

He also wrote many commentaries on the bible and also works on several areas of theology, as well as lives of the saints and the history of the Church. Indeed his knowledge was so wide ranging that St Augustine said of him that ‘what Jerome is ignorant of, no mortal has ever known’.

He died near Bethlehem on 30 September 420.

O God, who gave the Priest Saint Jerome
a living and tender love for Sacred Scripture,
grant that your people
may be ever more fruitfully nourished by your Word
and find in it the fount of life.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.