

WHO'S YOUR FAVORITE SAINT?

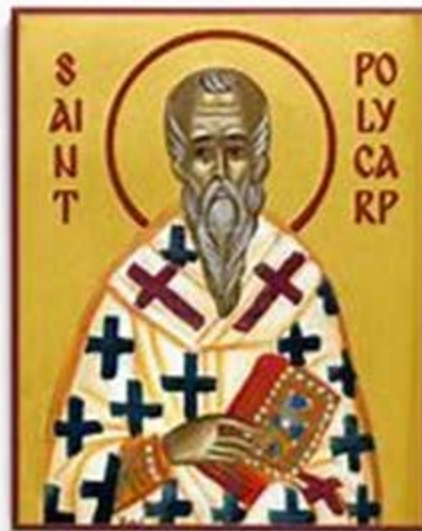
As a typical West-Side Cincinnati Catholic of the 50's and 60's faith seemed to permeate just about every facet of my life—even family dinner conversations often started with “Guess whose feast day it is?” This led to discussion about the person's life, ministries, and death. We learned about saints with unusual names like Polycarp, Hilarius, and Emerentiana. We talked about martyrs—the gorier the better, like St. Sebastian who was shot to death with arrows and St. Lawrence who was grilled over a fire and was said to have asked to be turned over because “I'm done enough on this side.” There also were mystics like Clare, John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila. When it came time for Confirmation and a chance to pick a name for myself I pored over *Butler's Lives of the Saints*. Though there were hundreds of names to choose from, I picked Teresa like most of the girls in my class.

My mother and paternal grandfather had great devotion to the Blessed Virgin and each of my sisters and girl cousins had Mary in their name. On the Italian side of my family each girl had Angela as a first or middle name. I was a combination of both being named Angela Mary. I think about this each April around my birthday as I celebrate another year of life and the gift of my heritage of faith.

Over the years, I've developed my own list of favorite saints like wonderfully impetuous Peter, who believed, doubted, loved, denied, repented, became a leader and eventually died because of his commitment to Jesus. I've always had a fondness for Mary who stood by the foot of the cross with the mother of Jesus, wept at the tomb, asked the “gardener” if Jesus' body had been taken, then recognized him as he said her name and went to share the good news of the resurrection with the apostles. Blessed Dorothy Day who fought for justice, saw the face of Jesus in those on the margins and was fiercely faithful to her religion. Her autobiography *The Long Loneliness* changed the direction of my life.

I was a young adult when Pope John XXIII, called Vatican II to “let some fresh air into the church.” Imagine what it was like to hear Mass in English for the first time and see what was going on at the altar! There was so much hope and promise. It was almost intoxicating. I've been blessed by knowing many holy Jesuits and I like the sneaky way God intervened in the life of the wounded warrior Ignatius by having a book on the lives of the saints the only

available reading matter when he was recuperating. It changed everything for him and led to a rich spirituality that is still vibrant today. I attended St. Teresa of Avila school and loved hearing how she ranted at God after being thrown into the mud as the result of a carriage accident: “If this is the way you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few of them!” And I can't forget my patron saint Angela Merici, the founder of the Ursuline sisters who were the first to make their ministry the education of girls, and St. Leo the Great, our parish patron, who saved Rome from destruction by Attila the Hun.



With this familiarity with saints as a background when I became a mother it was natural for my husband and me to choose strong saint or biblical names—Joseph Anthony, Jeremy Francis, Sara Elizabeth—as models for our children. It was also important to us to reinforce connections with their patron saints and I found a book that offered me a fun way to do this. I don't remember the author, but I think the title was: *It's My Feast Day—Come for Dessert*. In addition to birthdays and baptism anniversaries we began celebrating saint feast days by having the child choose the meal and the special dessert. My children were quick to buy into this and soon discovered that some saints had more feasts than others, which led to

expanding the number of saints who shared their name. Though the custom eventually waned as they grew older, it deepened an awareness of how holy heroes could be part of our daily lives.

There are patron saints for just about every career and life situation one could encounter. St. Anthony, for example is patron not only of those seeking lost items, but for women looking for a husband. St. Cajetan is patron of the unemployed, and job seekers; St. Vitus, of comedians and dancers; St. Lidwina, ice skaters; St. Jerome, librarians and translators; St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, hospital administrators and immigrants; St. Cecilia, musicians; St. Gregory the Great, teachers; St. Isidore, framers; St. Pantaleon, doctors and midwives; St. Rose of Lima, embroiderers and gardeners; and St. Aloysius Gonzaga, youth, to name just a few.

If you don't know much about your patron saints take some time to get to know them. You just might find yourself developing a favorite list of your own.

~ Angela Anno

