
SAINTS EXPERIENCE AND EMULATE

Faith Formation Series Additional Text

STD IX

- 1. St. Augustine**
- 2. St. John Vianney**
- 3. St. Agnes**
- 4. St. Martin De Porus**



Department of Catechesis
Faridabad Diocese
8 A/13, W.E.A., Karol Bagh
New Delhi-110 005
Phone : 011-25759160
E-mail : dsmcatechism@gmail.com
Website : www.faridabaddiocese.in

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MESSAGE

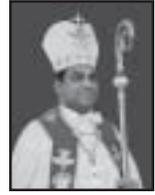
I am very happy to know that the Catechism Department of the Delhi Syro Malabar Mission publishes the life histories of saints as a supplementary to the catechism regular texts.

Saints are our life models. Their life histories are inspiring forces to all who like to grow in faith. The lives of saints teach us how they experienced God in their lives. Study of these life histories enables us to be faithful to the Word of God as well as to the teachings of the Catholic Church which we transmit to the next generation through catechism books. I pray that all who read these lives of saints may be inspired to follow them in their footsteps aspiring for sanctity of life to which every Christian is called by God.

I congratulate all who worked to bring out these books and pray that their efforts may bear fruits of holiness in the lives of many.

+ Varkey Vithayathil

Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil
Major Archbishop of the Syro Malabar Church



Date : June 19, 2012

MESSAGE

I am pleased to learn that our Catechism Department is preparing a new edition of the life histories of saints as a supplement syllabus to the catechism text books. This is all the more pertinent as the first version after the erection of the new Diocese of Faridabad. First of all, I congratulate our Director of Catechism, his team and all who cooperated in this venture.

Role models are necessary in our life, especially for those who are trying to give shape to the foundation of their religious life. Saints are those inspiring personalities who practiced the divine virtues of faith, hope and charity in a heroic manner. Their examples of deep faith and selfless love teach us how to give witness to gospel values in modern times. Saints are not extraordinary men and women, but who lived an ordinary life, but practiced these virtues in an extraordinary manner. Already in their childhood, saints were exemplary and it goes without saying that our boys and girls can take them as role models in Christian life.

Parents, grandparents as well as elder members of the family should foster devotion to saints in the children and try to introduce their inspiring stories to them. Teachers of catechism have a special responsibility to inculcate devotion to saints to the pupils and the current publication will be a useful instrument in that attempt. May the contents of this book inspire the readers and enable them to practice faith, hope and charity in their daily life.

The quintessence of sainthood is the attempt “to become perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect”. May this booklet facilitate forming little saints among the catechism boys and girls of newly erected Diocese of Faridabad.

The image shows a handwritten signature in dark ink. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read 'K. Bharanikulangara'. The signature is positioned above the printed name of the Archbishop.

Archbishop Kuriakose Bharanikulangara
Bishop of Faridabad

GREETINGS

Faith formation of the People of God is an important ministry of the Church. It is through faith education the young generation is integrated into the faith and faith life of the Church. In such an education the introduction of the life histories of saints who lived the Christian faith is very important. Such an introduction will help them to personalize the values and models of the saints. It is with this objective the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamally had published the life-history series of the saints named, *Vishudhare Ariyan Anukarickan*, as subsidiary textbooks for faith formation from Std. IV to IX. Now I am happy to know that the Delhi Syro-Malabar Catechetical Centre is publishing an English edition of these textbooks. I am sure that this will benefit the children to know the saints, to love them and to imitate them in their lives. I appreciate this venture and congratulate all who contributed to the publication of these text books. I wish and pray that let the publication of these books help to inspire our children to lead a model Christian life.

Once again wishing every success,

Kochi
3.7.2006

Fr. Jose Puthiyedath
Secretary, Syro-Malabar Catechetical Commission



Catechesis is the primary duty of the Church. It is the process by which church permeates its life to the generations to come. The child initiated to the church by baptism always looks for role models in their spiritual and social life. They get enough role models in politics, social work, films, sports, music, arts etc. Church has to be genuinely serious about presenting role models so that the children may be enabled to take Christian life as a big challenge. Individuals who have responded to the invitation of Jesus and spent their life as a sacrifice are presented as saints to be loved, admired and imitated. So we have selected a few of them for our young children to love, appreciate and imitate. This is a beautiful step in the modern times and I do advise the teachers to learn about the saints seriously and present them as role models for the children.

Wishing every success in this beautiful mission,

New Delhi
4. 7. 2006

Fr. Jose Edassery
Coordinator, Delhi Syro-Malabar Mission

P R E F A C E

Saints are the guiding lights of Christian life. Their way of life stands as sign and motivation to us. Their intercession gives us strength. Learning more about the life and history of saints encourages us to follow their example. Children have a tendency to imitate others. Learning about saints at an early age will help the children to emulate the saints.

The Delhi Syro-Malabar Catechetical centre is publishing the English Edition of “*Visudhare Ariyan, Anukarikan,*” an additional catechism text for use in the Personal Parishes under the Delhi Syro-Malabar Mission. This is to help children learn and adapt the lifestyle of these venerable persons, who are shining examples of Christian life. The life story of 24 holy persons is included in six books, which are meant for the children of classes IV to IX. For each class, the life stories of four saints are included. I have no doubt these books will have a lasting impact on the faith formation of children. Catechism teachers are requested to understand the usefulness and importance of the short biography of these blessed saints in the faith formation of children. You are requested to take extra care to introduce these books to children to achieve the desired result.

This Additional Text book, *Saints - Experience and Emulate* - was originally written in Malayalam by a catechism teacher Shri Shaji Malippara and was published by the Catechetical department of Ernakulam-Angamally Archdiocese. I express my wholehearted thanks to Shri Shaji and Fr. Jose Puthiyedath, Director, Department of Catechesis, Archdiocese of Ernakulam – Angamally, for permitting us to publish its English edition. I extend my sincere thanks to Mrs Rija Mathew, Mr. Jose Kaviyil and Mrs. Marys Antony for their sincere support in publishing this book. I also remember with gratitude each and every person who have extended their help and support in many ways in brining out this book. I wish that by using this book, children will know about saints and will get motivated to adapt their lifestyles. I dedicate these books to the children of the Delhi Syro-Malabar Mission and pray that the almighty God may help us to succeed in all our endeavors.

7 – 7 - 2006

Fr. Joshy Vezhaparambil
Director, Delhi Syro-Malabar Catechetical Centre

ST. AUGUSTINE



This is the story Saint Augustine. At the same time it is the story of the son of a saint, Saint Monica. The sainthood of Augustine is the result of Monica's tears and prayers. Augustine's life story is an example of how God raises the spirit of a man who had fallen into the deep waters of sin and placed him on a high pedestal of holiness.

Augustine was born on Nov. 13, 354 A.D in Tagaste, a provincial Roman city in North Africa. His father was a government officer, Patricius. He was a pagan while his mother Monica was a devout Catholic. Though she wanted to bring up her son in this faith, she could not. Augustine received the highest education of those times. He had studied Greek language. Though he had achieved great laurels in that, it was the Latin language, which attracted him more and later led him to the study of theology.

A small incident is known about his childhood. Once Augustine stole some pear fruits from his neighbourhood. Often such acts are considered as mere adventures of childhood. But Augustine, later assesses the incident in the light of theology. Actually there was no

need for him to steal the fruit, since his own farm had a tree, which bore delicious and nutritious pears. Despite this he stole, because of the tendency to do wrong, as he later found out. He indulged in several such wrongful acts during his growing years. All this caused a lot of pain to his mother and her heart cried for him. But she continued to love him abundantly.

As a youth, his life was a journey in search of happiness. He was ready to do anything that gave pleasure to his body and mind. His attraction to Sizro's writings, got him engrossed in stoic theology. In his quest for greater pleasure and fame, he left his country, for a town called Carthage. He arrived there in 371 A.D. His aim was to achieve honours in rhetoric – the art of persuasion and public speaking. It was then that his father expired. Augustine joined the University of Carthage to study law with an aim to become a lawyer. In his desire to make money, he spent a lot of time on teaching and rhetoric. The twin processes of learning and teaching helped him to grow intellectually. He was attracted to the work of Greek theologian, Plato. At the same time he was drawn to Manichaeism theology. This knowledge acquired by him favoured material pleasures of life. Manichaeism led Augustine to astrology. He remained engrossed in it for sometime. At that time he developed a relationship with a young woman who would be his concubine for over a decade, with whom he had a son. By now he had achieved everything desired by his body and mind but had completely forgotten about his soul. As a result, his soul was disease-ridden. He failed to realize it then. He never valued his mother's tears in the midst of his pleasures. It was then that he was extremely grieved by a close friend's death.

After completing his education in rhetoric, he took up a teaching

position in Tagaste and Carthage. Later he went to Rome for establishing an academy for this art. He became a teacher in 384 A.D in Milan. Before long, he became a famous rhetorician. His knowledge and reasoning ability made his rhetoric skills, overwhelming.

In Milan, Augustine met St. Ambrose. The presence and influence of Bishop Ambrose brought changes in Augustine's life.

Mean while, Monica was praying constantly for her son's repentance. She had prayed with tears that he should not go to Rome. But it was God's will that he should go there and meet Ambrose. How wonderful are the ways of God! That mother had hoped and prayed that her son should not fall into greater evils on reaching Rome. But God had decided that from there, should his days of salvation begin.

One day Monica went to St. Ambrose. She cried to him for her son's spirit. He replied: "Do not be afraid. For, the woman who has shed so many tears will never lose her son." Those soothing words really became meaningful. Monica's love for her son followed him everywhere.

Even when Augustine was falling deeper and deeper into the desires of the flesh, his mother continued to following him. She pleaded him to leave the evil path. But he did not take into account her words life. God, who intervenes in man's life at the right moment, finally touched Augustine's life. Augustine himself began realizing the sick state of his spirit. The presence of sin became clear. But he could not get out of it. At the same time, he could no longer ignore the sick state of his spirit. He was in turmoil. He could not decide whether he should hate sin and embrace holiness or should he continue in sin, ignoring holiness. He could neither not hold on to faith, nor could

leave the evil path and embrace chastity. The knowledgeable and learned Augustine found himself helpless.

Finally it happened. Augustine, the sinner died. In his place was born a saint. It happened in this way. One day in the town of Milan, Augustine was sitting bewildered in a garden. Then he heard a gentle voice: “Take and read”, “Take and read”, the Bible. Augustine opened the Bible at random and fell upon a passage from St. Paul (Romans, 13:13, 14). He read like this: “Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

These words opened the path to repentance for Augustine. And he was freed from an unrestrained materialistic life. Now a new man, he received Baptism from Bishop Ambrose on Easter day, 25 April, 387. Mother Monica, a witness to the event, was overwhelmed with joy. She died after a few months, with the satisfaction that her tears and prayers had borne fruit. She was buried at a place called Austhiya. Later Augustine decided to lead a solitary life. For this, he returned to Africa. In 391, he was ordained a priest in Hippo Regius by Cardinal Valerius. He led a life full of zeal like that of St. Paul. He spent a lot of time on prayers, studies, rhetoric and writing. He also created a monastic foundation separately for men and women. He could give strong witness to Christ and Church. In 396, he was made coadjutor bishop of Hippo. After the death of Bishop Valerius, he was appointed in his place. In this way, after having died in sin, not only was he born again in holiness but God also gave him the chance to help many to be reborn in faith.

Augustine, “the knowledgeable one” (as he is known) was one of the

most important figures in the development of Western Christianity. In Roman Catholicism, he is a saint and pre-eminent Doctor of the Church. Many Protestants especially Calvinists, consider him to be one of the theological fountainheads of Reformation teaching on salvation and grace. His works – including “The Confessions” which is often called the first Western autobiography – are still read by Christians around the world. He had detailed his spiritual journey in this work, which went on to become a classic of both Christian theology and world literature.

Augustine died on Aug.28, 430 A.D. during the siege of Hippo by the Vandals. Augustine remains a central figure both within Christianity and in the history of western thought. In both his philosophical and theological reasoning, he was greatly influenced by Stoicism, Platonism and Neo-Platonism. His generally favourable outlook upon Neo-platonic thought contributed to the ‘baptism’ of Greek thought and its entrance into the Christian and subsequently the European intellectual tradition. His early and influential writing on the human will, a central topic in ethic, would become a focus for later philosophers.

It is largely due to Augustine’s arguments against the Pelagians, who did not believe in original sin, that Western Christianity has maintained the doctrine of original sin.

Augustine’s writings helped to formulate the theory of the *just* war. The latter part of Augustine’s “Confessions” consists of an extended meditation on the nature of time. Catholic theologians generally subscribe to Augustine’s belief that God exists outside of time, in the “eternal present”, that time only exists within the created universe.

Augustine’s arguments against magic, differentiating it from miracle,

were crucial in the early Church's fight against paganism, and became a central thesis in the later denunciation of witches and witchcrafts.

The life of St. Augustine helps us to understand the everlasting mercy of God and the interest of God in the salvation of mankind. God made Augustine an instrument to teach us certain lessons and we are bound to understand them and lead a perfect Christian life.



LIFE AT A GLANCE

Birth	: 354 November 13
Reaches Carthage	: 371
Meets Ambrose	: 384
Baptism	: 387 April 25
Ordination	: 391
Canonization	: 396
Death	: 430 August 28

Feast Day : August 28

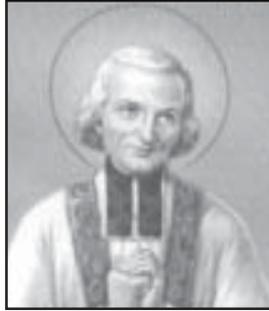
Gems

“Lord, You created me for You and my soul is restless until it rests in You”.

Message

God’s grace helps one to become a saint from the depth of sin.

ST. JOHN VIANNEY



Cure of Ars – Patron of Priest

St. John Maria Vianney was born on May 8, 1786 at Dardilly, near Lyons in France. John enjoyed the priceless advantage of being born of truly Christian parents.

His father was a farmer. His mother was a native of the small village of Ecully, which also lies near Lyons. John was the fourth of the family of six children. Both parents and children were compelled to spend laborious days in field and vineyard. Kindness to the poor and the needy was an outstanding virtue of the Vianneys. No beggar or tramp was ever driven away from their doorstep. His pious mother considered it as her highest duty to teach her children to know and love God.

John used to accompany his parents to the fields where he tended the sheep and the cows. He would often seek some thicket where he would place a little statue of Our Lady. He would then kneel down and recite the rosary. Sometimes he would gather some little shepherds and teach them what he had learnt from his mother. Even at that

early age he used to make the sign of the cross when the clock struck the hour. John attended the village school. As he grew up, he became convinced that he must become a priest. "If I were a priest I could win many souls for God," he once told his mother.

It was during that time that Fr. M. Balley, parish priest of Ecully, opened a small school for boys who wanted to become priests. John was 19 when he joined the school. But the first step in his scholastic career proved arduous. Many writers and preachers opined said that John Vianney was dull. His judgment was never at fault, but his memory failed him. He could never remember what he read. He was so poor in Latin grammar, that in an hour of despair, he almost decided to go home. But Fr. Balley asked his pupil to go on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Francis Regis.

On his return, a crisis arose. War was declared in France and Vianney was summoned to join the army. But the camp atmosphere was so immoral, that he soon fell ill. When he left the hospital, he found that his draft had set out long ago. As Vianney could not catch up with it, he had been to lie low for sometime. He was now a deserter and he had to stay in hiding in the house of a widow. There he opened a school for the village children.

In 1810, an imperial decree granted an amnesty to all deserters. John was free to return home and resume his studies. Shortly after this happy reunion his mother died on Feb. 8, 1811. He was then 24 years old. Soon the young man returned to Fr. Balley in Ecully. Fr. Balley sent his pupil to the seminary of Verrieres. Here young Vianney suffered and toiled much but never shined as a philosopher.

In 1813, he entered the Grand Seminary of Lyons. His inadequate acquaintance with Latin made it impossible for him either to grasp

what the lecturers said or to reply the questions put to him in Latin. At the end of his first term he was asked to leave. His grief and disappointment were indescribable.

Once again Fr. Balley came to the rescue and studies were privately resumed at Ecully. But the student failed at the examination preceding ordination. A private examination proved more satisfactory and was deemed sufficient - his moral qualities being rightly judged to outweigh by far any deficiencies in his academic knowledge.

On Sept.13, 1815, Jean Baptiste Vianney was raised to priesthood. He was 29 years old when he said his first Mass in the chapel of the seminary of Grenoble where the ordination ceremony took place.

On his return to Ecully, his happiness knew no bounds when he learnt that he was to be curate to his saintly friend and teacher. The diocesan authorities had decided that for the time being he should not have faculties to hear confessions. However, Fr. Balley secured them for him within a few months and himself became his first penitent. Between rector and curate, sprang up a holy rivalry as to who should outdo the other in fasts and penances. On Dec.17, 1817, Fr. Balley died in the arms of his beloved pupil who wept for him as one weeps for ones father. Not long after Balley's death, Father Vianney was appointed to Ars – a tiny village, which was destined to become famous for all time.

Parish Priest of Ars

On Feb.9, 1818, Vianney received official notification of his appointment to Ars. Vianney journeyed on foot to Ars, a distance of some 30 kilometers.

In Ars, religion was at the low ebb. The holy priest resolved to do his

utmost to remedy the situation. His first care was to establish contact with his flock. He made it a point to visit every house in the parish.

Above all, he prayed intensely. He would go without food for several days at a stretch. He delivered his sermons with immense energy, often in a high pitched voice, so that he was utterly exhausted at its conclusion. One day a parishioner asked him why he was speaking so loud when preaching and so low when praying. He replied, “When I preach I speak to people who are apparently deaf or asleep, but in prayer I speak to God who is not deaf.” He used to gather the children in the church as early as 6 am. He was a stern disciplinarian and demanded that the children should know every word in the catechism books.

In those days profanation of the Sunday was rampant in rural France. In the morning, the villagers worked in the fields and in the afternoon and evening they were at dance or in numerous taverns. “The tavern”, the saint declared in one of his sermons, “is the devil’s own shop, the market where souls are bartered, where the harmony of families is broken up, where quarrels start and murders are done.”

So great was his influence that eventually a time came when every tavern of Ars had to be closed due to lack of patrons. The saint was also determined to suppress dancing as far as his authority and jurisdiction reached. Here he met with the most obstinate resistance but finally he succeeded in persuading young women to stay away from such entertainments. Instead of the dance they attended some sodality meeting.

The saint wished to have good schools in the village. To start with he opened a free school for girls that he called “Providence”. It soon became a boarding school as well as a day school.

From 1827, he received only destitute children as boarders. For them he had to find both food and clothes. More than once God intervened miraculously, multiplying a few grains of wheat in the attic or the dough in the kneading trough of the bake-house. It took about two and a half years to bring about a change in Ars. Sunday was now indeed the Lord's Day. The whole village attended Vespers.

The holy priest dearly loved the ceremonies of the Church. He personally trained his altar servers. He became famous for his pastoral care and ability to understand his flocks. He believed that the priest was responsible for expiating the sins he had heard in confession and so he practiced extreme mortifications.

One of the most amazing features of the life of the saint is that during a period of about 35 years he was frequently tormented by the devil. This was primarily due to his hearing of confessions for long hours, sometime even upto 16-18 hours per day. The holy priest's confessional was the real miracle of Ars. His experiences of torment with demons were minor at first, but grew more severe with time.

Ars became famous for its piety and in a single year, it hosted over 100,000 pilgrims. So powerful was the work of God in him that the obscure town of France became a pilgrim centre that a line of train track was laid from Lyons. Vianney himself personally became the object of a pilgrimage, people flocking to Ars in hundreds and thousands just to get a glimpse of him, to hear him, to exchange a few words with him, above all, to go to him for confession.

It may be said that the confessional was Fr. Vianney's habitual abode. In dealing with souls he was infinitely kind. His exhortations were brief and to the point. When his bishop knelt at his feet he merely said: "Be Kind to your priests."

Towards the end of October 1852, the bishop of Belley arrived unexpectedly at Ars. The bishop produced a red cap and put it over the saint's head, hailing him as Canon Vianney. Not long after Napoleon III bestowed on him the "Legion of Honour", but Fr. Vianney declined it.

Father Vianney spent 41 years in Ars. He tried several times to leave all this and live a simple and quiet life but his bishop and the people did not agree to it and he remained in his parish. By 1859, he was completely worn out, by his austere life and work. July 1859 was extraordinarily hot, but the saint remained in his confessional. July 29 was the last day he appeared in his church. That morning he had entered his confessional about 1 a.m. but after several fainting fits he was compelled to take rest. That night he could scarcely crawl up to his room. One of the Christian Brothers helped him to bed. The illness progressed rapidly. In the morning of Aug.4, 1859, the saint gave up his soul to God.

More than 300 priests attended his funeral. The numerous visitors to Ars and the miracles soon confirmed the reputation for sanctity that the man of God had enjoyed during his lifetime. On Jan 8, 1905 Pope Pius X beatified Fr. Vianney. On May 31, 1925, Pope Pius XI declared him a saint.



LIFE AT A GLANCE

Birth	:	May 8, 1786
Ordination	:	Aug 13, 1815
Death	:	Aug 4, 1859
Declared Venerable	:	Jan 8, 1905
Canonization	:	May 31, 1925

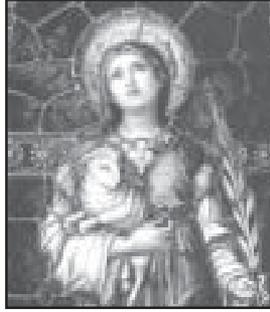
Gems

“Only our body will return to the soil but our soul will live eternally in heaven”.

Message

Sanctity of life is greater before God than intellectual knowledge.

ST. AGNES



In the early centuries of the history of the Catholic Church, there were many saints who became martyrs for the sake of faith and chastity. The brightest among them is Saint Agnes, a virgin.

She dedicated her life to the proclamation of the virtue of chastity. She became the guardian of history by protecting her own life through self-confidence. Today when the circumstances and human deeds are increasingly against the virtue of chastity, her life stands out with a relevant message.

Agnes was born in Rome in 290 A.D. The word ‘Agnes’ means ‘lamb’. She is often portrayed with a lamb in her hands. The successors of the Roman town lords were called governors. With their power and wealth they were also called patricians. Many among them got attracted to Christianity and received baptism. Our protagonist, Agnes is also known to be born in a patrician family. Nothing much is known about her family. It is presumed that her home was the palace of Cloudy situated in the heart of Rome.

By that time, the trend of giving baptism during childhood had started. Thus Agnes was also fortunate to receive it when she was small. According to the custom at that time, the children of rich families were put under the care of governesses. These governesses looked after them till they reached the marriageable age. For this job, the Romans appointed Greek women as they were both well-mannered and highly educated. So, it won't be wrong to presume that Agnes was also brought up under such a person's care.

Before we enter into the story of Agnes, it is important to understand the Roman society of that time. Though some rich families had adopted Christianity, the majority of Romans still followed their old traditions and continued to lead an immoral life. The Christians who kept away from all kinds of wrong ful celebrations and lifestyles were considered enemies by the Roman authorities. Gradually they came to be considered as rivals of the Roman kingdom.

Hence, faith and prayers were kept secret. It was also necessary to maintain secrecy to avoid any disrespect to the Christian beliefs and symbols. It created a lot of suspicion and doubt in the Romans, whenever the Christians came together for prayers and paschal meals. They believed that the Christians were conspiring against their state. Any natural calamities and perils in the state were attributed to the Christians since they did not worship their pagan gods. For this reason, several Christians were thrown before the lions.

Rome's *Colosseum* came to be known as an important Christian-torture centre. Nero, Diocletian and Domician were some of the rulers who inflicted severe torture upon the Christians. Burning them up like a torch in public places or throwing them into boiling oil was some of the atrocities inflicted upon them. Agnes was born at that

time. She had received the best education that a girl from an affluent family could get. Her later life also proved that she had received knowledge in religious matters in her early childhood itself.

Often, during the days of misery our faith in Christ increases. Same happened in Rome. In the middle of torture, they made arrangements to learn move on Christ's teachings. In order to share their faith, they met in cemeteries built in the basement of galleries. This helped in strengthening the faith of all those assembled there.

Both children and adults took part in such meetings. There were many young girls, at that time, who wanted to live their lives in purity of body and soul. These maidens came to be known as "handmaids of God". One among them was Agnes who wanted to follow Jesus.

She craved for the salvation of souls. For this purpose she did all what was possible for her and kept herself away from all worldly pleasures. She taught the illiterate, nursed the sick and reconciled to God's love all those who had gone astray. In the various versions (writings) about her life, her community service is the most outstanding feature.

Several Roman women received help from Agnes. Many received favours from her during their trials in life. People longed for her friendship and company. Her clean nature and piety (virtuousness) brought many closer to her. She taught whom met and inspired them to accept Jesus as the Son of God.

Such was the holy life that she led. It was in all respect a completely dedicated life. Agnes was well-behaved and beautiful. She was full of self-confidence and faith. The virtues that grew in her made her life significant. She became a worthy handmaid of God.

The beauty of Agnes, who had already accepted Jesus as her bridegroom since her childhood, attracted a young man named Prokuss. He was the son of a prefect who occupied a high position in the social and political circles of Rome. Prokuss arrived at Agnes' house with a marriage proposal carrying valuable gifts. But Agnes refused, saying: "Forget me, for I already have a bridegroom. He has given me gifts, which are more valuable than these. He is definitely more superior to you in every respect. With all my love, I have surrendered before Him."

"Who is this prince, who got you as his bride?" Prokuss asked. Agnes explained. She was talking about the spiritual gifts that Jesus gives during the Eucharist. When Prokuss' father heard about all this, he was furious to know that Agnes was a Christian and that she had rejected his son's proposal. He summoned her to his court.

At first, the prefect tried to persuade her to change her mind by showering praises on her. When he could not succeed, he resorted to threats. He also tried to influence her parents. But all was in vain. She did not retreat from her decisions. Furious, he ordered her to be tied up and imprisoned. But they could not bind her since chains and handcuffs slipped off her body. Despite this, she quietly accompanied the guards to the prison and stayed there for the day. The hearing was held on the next day. As nothing seemed working, Prefect accused her of blasphemy and as punishment, asked her to offer sacrifice to the pagan goddess (idols). Agnes refused it outrightly. Prefect said: "If you do not obey, you shall be sent to the brothel where you shall be ruined."

To this, Agnes said: "I know my God's power. My enemies cannot make me impure. My bridegroom will protect me." Hearing this, Prefect was furious. He gave out the ruling: "Since she had committed

blasphemy, she should be disrobed and sent to the brothel.”

About this Therthulian, a religious scholar (scribe) states in this way: “The virgin was given away not to the lions but to the brothel. They knew that the biggest punishment that she could be given was not death but impurity. In this way, though unknowingly, they were proclaiming the significance of chastity.”

The court’s decision had to be implemented. Agnes did not panic (deter). She strongly believed that Jesus would protect those who are his own. Her clothes were removed. But she did not become naked. God intervened miraculously. Within seconds, her hair grew to her feet and covered her body. And thus the innocent girl escaped a very humiliating situation. God protected her even inside the prison. Those who came with impure thoughts, left in fear. God’s power became visible to everyone in the form of a light that surrounded her. Then she saw a garment which was white as snow. She continued to thank God. She praised God and said: “I thank you for blessing me with a garment made by angels.”

Prokuss was not ready to forget Agnes. Her words did not affect him. He thought that as a prisoner she would bow before his wishes. So he went towards the prison. As he entered it, he saw a divine light, all around, but he did not retreat. As he moved towards Agnes to lay hands on her, suddenly a lightning struck him. The news of his death spread all around.

People said that it was a girl’s courage that killed the prefect’s son. On hearing this, the prefect came rushing and shouted at Agnes. Agnes replied calmly: “Your son approached me with impure thoughts. So God’s angel killed him. It was his deadly desire that brought him this end.”

“If that is so, then you should ask that angel to give back life to my son,” the father demanded. Agnes agreed. She asked everyone to leave that room. Agnes prayed to God. Soon the door opened and Prokuss came out alive. He ran towards the people and shouted “there is only one God. And that is the God of Christians.” But the Roman people ignored him. For them, their gods and goddesses were more important. They considered Agnes as their enemy. They thought that she was a witch. And a witch who refused to surrender before their gods should die, they decided. They compelled the prefect to condemn her to death but he could not do that.

By now, he had believed her words. It was his duty now, to save her, who brought back his son alive. But people did not want to set her free. The priests were leading and supporting them. It was difficult for the authorities to go against the Roman priests. Prefect was in a dilemma. Finally he decided to send Agnes to Aspasius, the pro-prefect.

When Agnes arrived at Aspasius’ place, he gave a ruling in favour of the masses. She should be burnt alive. Immediately a pyre was made in the public place and Agnes was led to it. Hands and legs all tied up, she was laid down on the logs. And they set fire to the woods. People waited to see her burning alive. But an invisible power separated her from the burning fire. Even after a while, nothing happened to her. She was protected inside a circle made of fire.

She rose up her eyes and prayed: “Almighty Father, I worship you. For you have saved me from these people who do not fear God. Till this moment, you had led me through the path of purity. Here now, the Holy Spirit is giving me new vigour. Father, I praise you for giving me courage even in the midst of the burning fire, I long to be

with you. Here, I embrace you.”

The people did not stop their cruelties even after seeing that Agnes was safe inside the fire. They continued shouting, “may the Christians perish”.

On this, Prefect was unhappy. He wished to postpone the hearing for some other day but could not do so. The people kept shouting for Agnes’ life. They wanted to see her blood being shed. Finally to save himself, that judge decided to make her the victim of the sword. And thus Agnes was again sentenced to death. The executioner approached Agnes with a sword in his hand. And she said courageously: “Probably your sword will be stained by my blood, but you cannot stain my body which is dedicated to Jesus.” Saying this, she knelt down, raised her eyes to heaven and surrendered her spirit into her bridegroom’s hands. The executioner struck at her throat with the sword. Her sacrifice was complete. Agnes became a martyr in 304 A.D. She was known as the virgin martyr. Through her life, she explained the divine happiness of purity to a nation, which took pleasure in impurity.

A story of two lambs is related to the memory of St. Agnes. Later, a Basilica was built at the place where Agnes had fallen to death. It is still a favourite centre for worship for Christian pilgrims across the world. Every year special prayers are held here on Jan.21, which is the feast day of the saint.

After the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, two white lambs are brought here. They are then placed on the altar, built on the grave of St. Agnes. The priest then blesses the lambs and then gifts them to the Pope. The lambs thus become Pope’s own and thereafter they are brought up by the nuns. When they grow, their wool is used to make a pallium which bears four signs of the cross on it. Earlier, the Popes

used to wear these as a sign of jurisdiction. Nowadays, cardinals and patriarchs wear it.

The epitaph on St. Agnes' grave contains words of Pope Damascus: "She overcame fear with a childlike vigour. When she was disrobed, her hair grew miraculously to cover her like a new cloth. O divine symbol of holiness, please hear our prayers happily."

In every age, prayers to St. Agnes are conducted in the Church. The author of the famous literary work named "Following Christ", Thomas Akhembus has noted the following in a prayer: "Through the intercession of the blessed virgin, gospel witness and your bride St. Agnes – please allow us your divine help so that, with your blessings I would also become worthy to own the eternal crown of light along with St. Agnes and all other saints in your kingdom."

Though the story of Agnes is not contemporary, her life gives out a message which is new even today. In this age, when worldly pleasures are given more importance, the lesson of her life gives us new energy. This saint's intercession would definitely help us to lead a pure (holy) life.



LIFE AT A GLANCE

Birth : 290 A.D

Death : 304 A.D

Feast Day : January 21

Gems

“Perhaps your sword may contaminate my blood but you cannot contaminate my body which is fully dedicated to Christ”.

Message

Your self confidence will keep you high in any unfavorable circumstance.

ST. MARTIN DE PORUS



Shining Black

Human beings are of many colours. Some are white and some are black. The features of each human being is different from the other. There are taller, shorter, beautiful and strange looking people. All are human beings and are the children of God. God never sees the colour of the skin, but their soul. The shining of the soul is all important. St. Martin De Porus teaches this truth to us. The life story of Martin De Porus, better known as the Black Saint is much inspiring.

Martin was born in the city of Lima in Peru in the year 1579. At that time Peru was under the colonial rule of Spain. His father Don Jawan De Porus was a European soldier and a lord and his mother Anna Velesquze was a Negro. Martin had a sister also. Like their mother both of them were deep black in colour. The birth of a black son and daughter to the soldier Don was a subject of joke and fun to the groups of Lords. The marriage of Martin's father was not conducted as per the custom. Don was not ready to accept any dishonour on the basis of the colour of the skin. He also thought about the possible loss of his official status due to his martial

status. At last, he divorced his Negro wife and two children.

Anna had to do hard work to upkeep the children. As there was no alternative, she used to wash clothes from morning to evening. She was very sad, as her children did not get the colour of their father. But the little Martin's heart was pure and glittering. The little boy was very kind towards the poor. He even offered money to the penniless poor from the money he got from his mother for other needs. His mother used to punish him for this but he was not able to stop the kind gestures. The fact is that his mother was not in a position to accept the goodness of her son as she was struggling to get enough money for their livelihood.

God's Way.

God always has special plan for each of the human being. In Martin's case the plan of God was wonderful. It was God's will that Don Evan returned to Lima. He lived with them for a short period and on his return journey he took the children with him. When Martin reached the harbour to board the ship, he saw the Negros with heavy loads on their head and he was very upset.

The children reached the house of their father's younger brother. Their life was very pleasant there. There was a special teacher to teach them reading and writing. Martin studied well and also did other works. They stayed there for two years. By that time Don Jawan was appointed governor of Panama. Before going to Panama Don decided to send back Martin to his mother. Don asked Martin about his future plan and Martin replied that he wanted to be a doctor, so Don found out Dr. Rivorio at Lima to teach Martin. Later Martin joined his mother and Jainin stayed back with Don's brother.

Martin shifted near to the hospital of Dr. Rivoro. He worked there as his assistant and also carried out the studies. He learned the art of treating very fast. He was very clever in looking-after giving medicines to the patients. One day, when the doctor was not at the clinic, a patient with severe knife wound was brought to the clinic. Martin checked the patient and dressed the wounds and gave medicines. The patient got relief and he recovered very fast. This news was spread in Lima. Anna was very proud about her son.

Small Candle

Once Martin asked for a candle from his landlady. The landlady was in doubt about the use of candle as Martin used to attend the mass in the morning and thereafter left for his job and reached back only late night. However, the woman gave him a candle. Martin loved his small room and used to light the candle till late night. Out of curiosity, the landlady looked inside his room through the key-hole and she was astonished to see Martin kneeling before the crucifix on the wall and his eyes were moist and he was in deep meditation.

Martin was enthusiastic to read spiritual books in candlelight. One such meditating day Martin took a bold decision about his future life. He wished to sacrifice his life like a burning candle in serving God and humanity. He felt that he did not have the qualification either to become a priest, or a brother. In order to fulfil his desire, he decided to join the Dominican congregation as an ordinary servant.

His mother was quite upset to learn about his decision because she was dreaming of his bright future. Dr. Rivero was also shocked to hear the news. He tried to convince Martin about his capabilities in the medical field. But the decision of that 15 year old was so firm that he said good-bye to the hospital and the doctor where he was employed for three years.

On reaching a Dominican house, Martin told the priests that he had no intention of becoming a priest or brother, and requested to let him remain among them as a servant. He received a dress similar to the dress of a brother. That dress was made up of white woolen thread. Thus dressed in white dress, Martin started his religious life.

Simplicity And Decency

Martin De Porus is said to be the saint of simplicity. The inner strength of his soul is simplicity. He was innocent like a child. Martin followed the rules of the Dominican monastery as God's will. He displayed through his acts that the law is the God's will.

Martin's another goodness was his decency. Martin was quite conscious about the way he had to behave with everybody as God created everyone; all are our brothers and sisters. The black, the white, the rich, the poor, the small boy, the aged, all living beings, the nature etc. are all the creations of God. His acts, big or small reflected his decency.

Martin's routine was like this. He used to get up from his coarse bed when the bell at the seminary gate rang at 5:00 a.m. and offered thanks kneeling before the crucifix, then asked for the mediation of Mother Mary and St. Dominic. Later, he went to the church to help at the Holy Mass. By regularly assisting the Mass, his devotion to prayer was strengthened and he felt the beginning of the day becomes blessed.

Thereafter, he used to be very busy inside the monastery with many works such as washing the vessels, sweeping and cleaning the house, folding the cloths and looking after the sick brothers. Outside the building, there were other seasonal jobs. In between, he had to feed the poor and help the sick and the people who were in despair. There was be lot of other jobs also.

Though it was small and common jobs he used to finish them in an extraordinary manner and that was his greatness.

Wonder, Great Wonder!

We can see many miracles in Martin's life. God converted his good deeds, which were full of simplicity as miracles. The following example is one such miracle.

One day, the brother who kept costly linen clothes of the church saw that the rats had cut the cloth. He was very angry at the rats and complained to the prior about it and the superior told that "Martin can do something in the matter". Brother Michael ran to Martin, who was working in the medicinal garden. Martin used to make medicines for the inmates and poor patients. When Michel told him about the problem of rats, Martin accompanied Michel and checked the cloths and said, this is my mistake; this happened because I have not fed the rats. He used to feed wandering dogs and cats and dress wounded rabbits, but he had never fed a piece of bread to the rats. He thought of doing penance to it and he went to the place where rats used to hide and called the rats loudly. One rat came out and he started to talk to it, "You and your friends had eaten the linen cloths because of my mistake. We can make a contract that all you rats will leave this monastery and live at some useless place, then I will feed you whenever you have no food."

How did the rats reply? All the rats left from the house. What a simple miracle! On another occasion, a wandering dog and cat were fed in a single vessel. Then he saw a rat also and invited the rat to share the food. The dog, cat and the rat ate together. It was a normal sight that Martin entered the house with unwanted dogs, cats and rats.

On another occasion, the prior entrusted the responsibility of the patients

to Martin as Martin had the experience in the hospital. A priest who was suffering from deep wounds in leg was in the monastery. He hated anyone entering his room or dressing his wound because he was in deep pain and lost hope because the doctor had said his leg needed amputation.

What could Martin, a Negro servant. do? He prayed for a while and God showed him a way. He made a good salad and went to the priest's room. As usual, the priest was murmuring, but when he saw the salad he was happy because he had not eaten salad for long. When he was eating the salad Martin opened the wound and dressed it. The priest did not mind it. After a few hours the priest started to walk happily in the room. It was a miraculous healing. The two incidents are the examples of Martin's simplicity.

Messiah of Love

The Dominican monastery was in deep financial crisis. Martin was ready to work outside but who would employ a Negro. He felt sad about it. The superior found money for the routine expenses by selling some articles. One day Martin saw the superior taking out two foreign paintings to sell. Martin knew the superior did so because of difficulty. He ran to the superior and said, "Father, please do not sell this picture, you can sell me, if you sell me as slave you will get money to pay back the debts." Martin's gesture surprised the superior. He said, "You are the most expensive one in the world, I cannot think about it."

After selling the picture, the superior decided to make Martin, a brother. Finally, Martin took his pledge as a brother after 9 years in the monastery. Martin continued to do his routine job with more vigor and enthusiasm.

Martin was sure that his service he to the poor is a service to Jesus. Martin used to take his breakfast very early to reach to the Gate where

poor people were waiting for the free food that he served. Martin used to distribute food for about an hour, but miraculously the food never exhausted.

Martin used to help the seminarians. God had given him special charism to use words of solace and encouragement. Blessed Rose of Lima and Martin were known to each other and they encouraged each other. Martin's miraculous work steadily increased. Even a mere touch or a prayer was enough for miracles.

Prediction Come True

Martin joined the Dominicans as a servant but he was the servant of God forever. Once Martin was sweeping the floor, he felt acute pain and the pain increased gradually. He felt that his work of this world was coming to an end.

Once Martin dressed in a glamorous dress and appeared before the people in the monastery. They were surprised to see Martin in good dress as he used to dress in very old dress. To those who asked for the reason for his new dress, Martin replied, "I need a new dress for my funeral service and I may die in four days time."

Within two days Martin became bedridden. The news spread in Lima and a big crowd gathered at the monastery to rescue him. The viceroys of the king also arrived. But none could do anything. The man who had done many small things in simple ways left for his heavenly journey. St. Martin died at the age of 60 in 1639.

People from all walks of life assembled at the monastery gate. Two bishops, one viceroy and one lord carried Martin's body to the cemetery.

We should follow the life of St. Martin De Porus. The world and we need his simplicity, brotherly love, innocence and decency. Let St. Martin

De Porus bless us to lead a simple life and do good deeds and thereby we can also open the gates of heaven for us.



LIFE AT A GLANCE

Birth : December 9, 1597
Religious Profession : 1599
Death : November 3, 1639
Blessed : September 10, 1837
Canonization : May 6, 1962

Feast Day: November - 03

Gems

“Charity consists in forgiveness and kindness”.

Message

God does greater things through simple hearted people

GLOSSARY

1. Amnesty - pardon given to people who have committed an offence against the government.
2. Arduous - difficult and tiring.
3. Attic - space or room inside the roof of a building.
4. Austere - severe or strict in appearance or manner, lacking comforts.
5. Bewildered - confused.
6. Concubine - a woman who lives with a man but has lower status than his wife of wives.
7. Contrite - feeling sorry for something that one has done.
8. Curate - an assistant to a parish priest.
9. Debauchery - morally corrupt.
10. Destitute - extremely poor and without home or other things necessary for life.
11. Ebb - move away from the land.
12. Engrossed - absorb all of someone's attention.
13. Exhortation - appeal to someone strongly; urging them to do something.
14. Legion - great in number.
15. Licentiousness - unprincipled in sexual matters.
16. Mortification - cause someone to feel embarrassed or ashamed.
17. Obscure - not discovered or known about.
18. Overwhelming - having a strong emotional effect on.

- 19. Pedestal - the base or support on which a statue is mounted.
- 20. Penitent - one who feels sorrow and regret for having done wrong.
- 21. Peril - situation of serious and immediate danger.
- 22. Piety - the quality of being religious in a respectful and serious way.
- 23. Pious - being religious in a very respectful and serious way.
- 24. Platonism - ideas propagated by Plato a Greek philosopher.
- 25. Profanation - not religious, secular
- 26. Rampant - flourishing or spreading in an uncontrolled way.
- 27. Rhetoric - effective public speaking.
- 28. Stoicism - enduring pain and hardship without complaining.
- 29. Stringency - strict and precise.
- 30. Tavern - an inn or pub.
- 31. Turmoil - a state of great disturbance, uncertainty.
- 32. Vandal - person who deliberately destroys or damages property.