



# Teaching the Saints

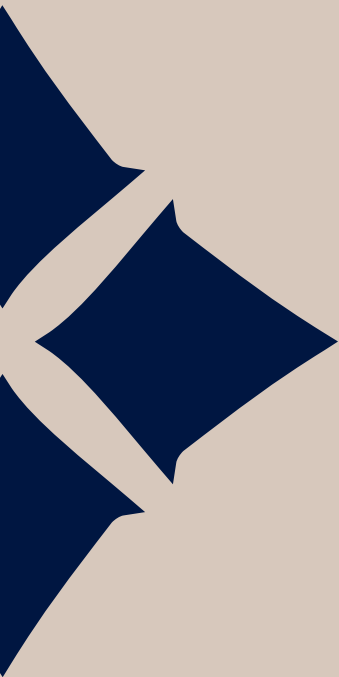
A Workbook for  
Faith Formation  
and Education

Saints for the month of  
**APRIL**

McGRATH INSTITUTE FOR CHURCH LIFE



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*The saints selected for this month are drawn from the "Witnesses to Holiness" collection from Notre Dame Vision, a high school conference hosted by the McGrath Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame. Notre Dame Vision asks teenagers to consider their God-given talents and how they will use their gifts to respond to God's call for their life. For more information, visit [vision.nd.edu](http://vision.nd.edu).*

*The illustrations of saints used in this workbook were created by Julie Lonneman, who holds exclusive rights to the further distribution and publication of the art.*

## *How to Use This Workbook*

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Turn to the witness and intercession of the saints to lead middle school and high school students toward a deeper sense of God's invitation to follow Him. This free teaching resource features the lives of the saints paired with short guided prompts for further reflection, discussion and action.

The worksheets can be used by youth, parents, teachers, religious educators and ministers to celebrate saint feast days during April. Adapt the worksheets for use in the classroom, home or parish to highlight the myriad and unique ways that God calls us to use our gifts to serve the Church and world.

Each worksheet includes the following:

- ◆ A short biography on each saint's life and witness
- ◆ A reflection inviting the student to consider ways each saint resonates with their faith journey
- ◆ A challenge prompting the student to put the saint's witness into action

## St. Gemma Galgani

- ◆ 1878-1903; Italy
- ◆ Feast Day: April 11
- ◆ Patron Saint of Tuberculosis, Patients and Pharmacists



Gemma Galgani fostered a devotion to Christ and to prayer very early in her childhood. By the age of fifteen, she knew that she wanted to become a nun. However, she spent much of her time battling various illnesses, particularly tuberculosis. These aspects of her life, among others, have led people to draw comparisons between Gemma and St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

Through her active prayer life, Gemma had visions and spiritual experiences of Christ. Her friends and family did not understand these experiences and often mocked her. She suffered much humiliation as a controversial figure and could not follow her dream to become a Passionist nun because of her illness. Nonetheless, she drew strength from her faith. During one bout with sickness, Gemma prayed to the Passionist St. Gabriel Francis Possenti and was miraculously healed.

More controversial than her healing or her visions, however, was the appearance of Gemma's stigmata. For nearly three years, the wounds of Christ appeared on her body and bled once a week. Gemma did not try to gain people's attention from these wounds. Rather, she tried to hide them and go about her daily routine. She did not lash out in anger at those who mocked her or distrusted her. She was nothing but kind to them.

Unfortunately, Gemma's cure did not last forever. Once again, she became very sick and this time she did not recover. In 1903, Gemma died at the age of twenty-five. She had lived a difficult life, but throughout her battles with illness and with her opponents, Gemma held on to her belief in God and her ability to see God working in her everyday life.

*Try to think of a light that fills the whole universe, that penetrates and kindles it. At the same time, a light that gives life and animation to all things, so that all things that exist are imbued with, or encircled in it, and in it and through it have life. Thus I see God and in [God] all creatures. —St. Gemma Galgani*

# *Reflect*

What about St. Gemma's life stands out to you?

Like many holy mystics, Gemma's experiences with God were misunderstood by many people including those closest to her. What do you think it might have been like for her to hide what she was experiencing? Imagine yourself in the same position. How might you have felt?

# *Act*

Remember Gemma and her story the next time you are tempted to jump to a quick judgment or dismiss what someone is saying. When the opportunity arises this week to listen to someone's story, try to be patient without being dismissive or writing them off.



## St. Bernadette Soubirous

- ◆ 1844-1879; Lourdes, France
- ◆ Feast Day: April 16



Bernadette grew up as an impoverished, sickly, and uneducated girl. She would have lived a life of anonymity if not for a few months in the year of 1858. During these months, Bernadette experienced eighteen visions of the Virgin Mary in a cave along a river in Lourdes, France. In her visions, Mary urged Bernadette to pray for sinners and to build a church at this site where others could come to pray.

The Virgin referred to herself as “the Immaculate Conception” and led Bernadette to a hidden spring that had never been seen before. At the young age of fourteen, Bernadette had to deal with the interrogations and ridicule from the leaders and people of the town and church who did not believe in her visions. Visitors who wanted to know more about the visions were constantly bothering her.

Bernadette never stopped believing in her visions. In 1866, she joined the Sisters of Notre Dame of Nevers and lived the rest of her life in the convent. She wanted nothing to do with the opening of the church that was built at the site of her visions of Mary. Rather, she was canonized in recognition of her prayerful devotion and her quiet faith and perseverance in the face of the others’ mockery and disbelief.

The Grotto on the campus of the University of Notre Dame, built in 1896, is a replica of the cave in Lourdes where Bernadette saw the Virgin Mary.

*I promise to make you happy, not in this world, but in the next.*

*—The Virgin Mary to Bernadette at Lourdes*

# *Reflect*

What about St. Bernadette's life stands out to you?

Despite relentless questioning from government and religious officials, Bernadette showed remarkable courage and never shied away from telling her story about her encounters with the Blessed Virgin Mary. What do you think that was like for her? What do you think allowed her to persevere?

# *Act*

While we may not be able to have a vision of the Virgin Mary like Bernadette, praying the rosary is a good way to ask for the Virgin Mary's intercession in our lives. Take a moment this week to pray a rosary or a decade of the rosary. What intention will you offer?

# St. Gianna Beretta Molla

◆ 1922-1962

◆ Feast Day: April 28



Gianna Beretta was one of thirteen children born into a family of great faith in Milan, Italy. At an early age, she excelled in the classroom, eventually becoming a pediatrician. During her training as a doctor, she devoted herself to serving the poor, something she felt was part of her baptismal vocation.

In 1952, she opened up a special clinic to serve the poor in Milan. On September 24, 1955, she was married to Pietro Molla, and strove to live out her vocation of medicine joyfully as a wife and mother. In addition to these vocations, Gianna loved to ski and hike in the Italian mountains.

After giving birth to three children named Pierluigi, Mariolina, and Laura, Gianna became pregnant again.

During the pregnancy, she began to feel pain throughout her body. Doctors discovered that

she had developed a benign tumor in her uterus, which had to be removed at risk to the child. She prayed for the child, and the doctor was able to save the life of the child and remove the tumor. Sadly, the pregnancy remained complicated. Two days before giving birth, Gianna, who had remained active in her medical practice and as a mother throughout the pregnancy, told the doctor, "If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate: choose the child - I insist on it. Save the baby." She gave birth to baby Gianna Emanuela on April 21, 1962. The mother remained in critical condition, though, and one week after the birth of her baby, despite the best efforts of doctors to save her, Gianna died, praying, "Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you."

Gianna is a model for all Christians, particularly those who are called to serve the Church as laity. In her position as a doctor, a wife, and a mother, she shared the life of Christ with each person that she met in a spirit of great joy. Eventually, her own vocation of self-gift was fulfilled in offering her own life so that her child might live. In this action, Gianna became an image of Christ for the entire world.

*Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you. -St. Gianna Beretta Molla*



# *Reflect*

What about St. Gianna's life stands out to you?

Gianna's courageous witness is a testament to the inherent dignity and worth of all human life. Name some examples from your family, friendships and wider community where you see people respected and celebrated. Do you see areas in your community where people are mistreated or disrespected?

# *Act*

Gianna's commitment to her child is but one example of the many ways in which we can recognize that all life is valuable. Think of an action you can do this week to better build a culture of life. You may choose to collect diapers for new mothers, serve a meal at a homeless shelter or write a letter to someone in prison. Be creative!

# St. Catherine of Siena

- ◆ 1347-1380; Italy
- ◆ Feast Day: April 29
- ◆ Patron Saint of Italy and Nursing; Co-Patron Saint of Europe



Catherine grew up in a large family – the twenty-fourth of 25 children! At age 7, she experienced a mystical vision. As she grew older, her family worried that she spent too much time praying so they tried to keep her busy with chores. When they tried to arrange a suitor for her, Catherine refused to marry. One day, her father watched her praying in her room and saw a dove hovering over her head. He decided to allow her to live the prayerful life she desired.

Catherine became a lay member of the Dominicans and spent several years in a solitary life of prayer. Soon, however, she felt called to serve the sick and preach God's Word. A group of disciples began to follow Catherine, serving Siena's poor and tending to those who were hungry in body and in soul. With her help and intervention, prison inmates and crime bosses turned their lives around. Priests found it difficult

to keep up with all those who sought penance after encountering Catherine.

As the Church experienced papal difficulties, Catherine felt it was her duty to work toward Church unity. In 1376, Pope Gregory XI was residing in Avignon, France, as a result of many political and civil divisions. Catherine gave him the confidence to return to Rome. After Urban VI succeeded Gregory, the Church experienced the Great Schism. For nearly 40 years, two and sometimes three men claimed to be the legitimate pope. Catherine urged Catholics to recognize Urban as the pope, although she gained many enemies along the way. She was greatly distressed by the turmoil in the Church. She knew that if the papal leadership was in disarray, then any reform in the Church would be all the more difficult. Catherine's work came to an end when she fell ill. On April 29, 1380, she died of a stroke.

Catherine wrote a great spiritual work titled *The Dialogue*. The Church recognized her great contribution to mystical theology by naming her the first lay Doctor of the Church in 1970. She is one of three women to hold this title (with Teresa of Ávila and Thérèse of Lisieux).

*If you see souls in danger and you can help them, don't close your eyes... Work, then, my daughter, in the field you see God calling you to work in, and don't trouble or weary your Spirit over what is said to you but carry on courageously. Fear and serve God selflessly, and then don't be bothered by what people say, except to have compassion on them. –St. Catherine of Siena*

# *Reflect*

What about St. Catherine's life stands out to you?

As different men tried to lay claim to the papacy, Catherine worked tirelessly to do her part in bringing unity and order to the Church. Has there ever been a time in your life when you were caught in the middle of a tricky situation? How did you react?

# *Act*

Take a moment to think about a situation or a conflict in your life or your community that may be unresolved. In the spirit of Catherine, what might you do to build unity?



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