

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Saints of August

During these slow days of August, when a lot of us are vacationing and distracted by sand or surf, it might be worthwhile to take a glance at the church calendar. Squeezed into what we otherwise consider to be Ordinary Time, you find a surprising number of important saints.

On August 7, there is St. Sixtus II, pope and martyr, along with his companions.

On August 10, we have the Feast of St. Lawrence—deacon and martyr. It was Lawrence who, while being burned alive on a grill, said to his tormentors, “Turn me over. I’m done on this side.” For Lawrence’s grace and good humor, the Church has made him the patron saint of cooks.

Who says the Church doesn’t have a sense of humor?

Later this month (August 28), we honor St. Augustine, one of the greatest teachers and doctors of the Church. The day before (the 27th) we honor his mother, St. Monica—whose prayers helped to transform her pagan and promiscuous son into one of the greatest teachers and doctors of the Church. (Behind every great man there is a woman; very often, it seems, it’s a mother.)

Scattered throughout the month, we stumble upon giants: St. Bernard (August 20); St. Pius X (the 21st); St. Bartholomew (the 24th); St. Louis of France (the 25th); St. Clare (the 11th).

If you are looking for a month of All Star Saints, August is it.

This month, we even remember two recent additions to the roster, both of whom are martyrs and emblematic of our own troubled time: On August 9, the Church honors St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross—better known, perhaps, as Edith Stein, a Jewish convert who became a Carmelite nun, and who died in the Holocaust.

Then, just a few days later, on August 14, we memorialize St. Maximilian Mary Kolbe—the priest who was sent to a concentration camp and gave his life so that another man might live.

There are countless other saints and martyrs we can remember this month: men and women and children whose names may be unknown to us. There are those who have suffered for the faith (and continue to suffer) in China or the Middle East. There are evangelists and missionaries who died trying to preach God’s word in deserts and jungles, in cities and in swamps. The fact is, there are too many saints and martyrs for us to count—certainly too many to fit on any one calendar, in any one year.

But if you have a moment this month, find some time to remember. Whisper a prayer. Offer a thank you. And think, especially, about those martyrs.

If you find yourself on a warm beach under a blue sky, look up for a moment. Watch the waves, study the tide, as the ocean rises and ebbs. Wonder, if you can, about all those who have arrived on distant shores, bearing a bible and a rosary, promising salvation but meeting, instead, their own destruction. Think of them, and pray for them. Perhaps they will also think of you, and pray for you.

Certainly, they’ll appreciate the thought.

And so, no doubt, will the Queen of Martyrs.

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