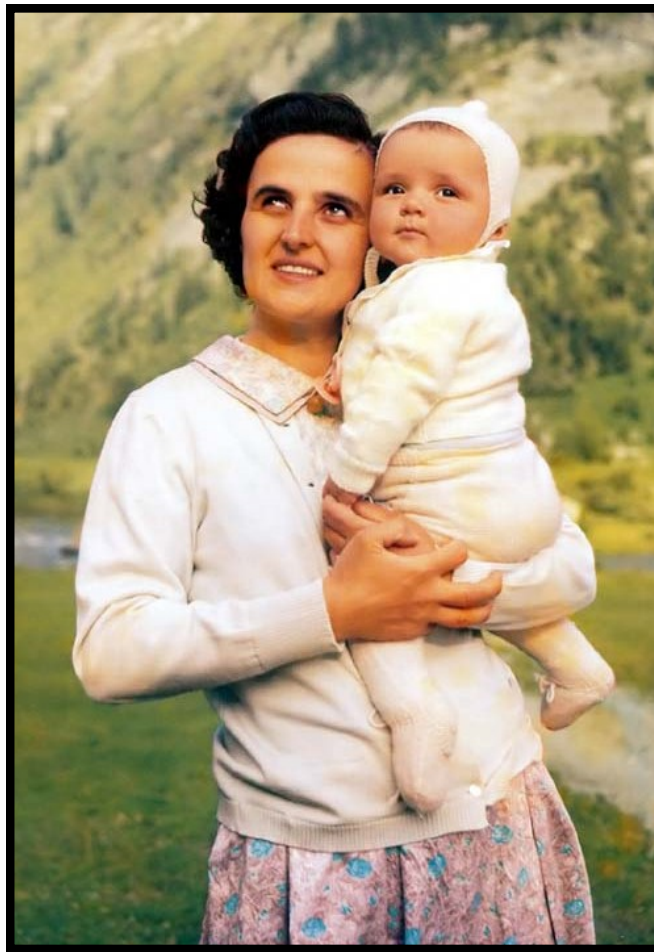


*Virtues
in Practice*



Hope

GRADES 6—8

Virtues
in Practice

Hope

GRADES 6—8

DOMINICAN SISTERS OF ST. CECILIA CONGREGATION
Nashville, Tennessee

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What is Virtue?

A virtue is a good habit.

The word virtue comes from the Latin *virtus*, which means “strength”. Our fallen nature is weak and can easily become entangled in vice, but the graces available to us through Christ enable us to overcome our weaknesses and develop strength, or virtue. People who are virtuous enjoy the freedom of being their best selves and growing closer to God—so don’t forget to pray for this grace!

Human/moral virtues are acquired by education, deliberate acts, and persevering effort. They are purified and elevated by grace. Four of these virtues play a pivotal role and so are called the *cardinal virtues*: *prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance*. They lead us to God through other things that are good for us.

The three *theological virtues* of *faith, hope, and charity* are given to us by God at baptism. These give life to the moral virtues by allowing God to dwell within us and by drawing us to be virtuous out of love for Him. They lead us directly to God.

The seven *gifts of the Holy Spirit* (*wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord*) are poured out by the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Confirmation. The gifts are different from the virtues because they are given directly by God rather than acquired by repeated good actions. The gifts of the Holy Spirit complete and perfect all the virtues by making us docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. (See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church #1803-1845*)

Who are the Saints?

A saint is a person who is in heaven.

God desires each of us to be with Him forever in heaven—to be a saint. The Catholic Church canonizes some saints so that we can look to them as role models and intercessors. Canonization is a process of verifying that the person lived a life of “heroic virtue” and is now in heaven, enjoying the full vision of God with inexpressible happiness, and eager to help those of us on earth. Promoting a cause for sainthood takes years of work and prayer by a group of people devoted to the cause.

Steps of Canonization*:

1. *Servant of God*: Rome and the local bishop have approved the opening of an investigation of the person’s life, writings, and miracles.
2. *Venerable*: the findings of this investigation have been presented at the Vatican and approved by the pope.
3. *Blessed*: a miracle attributed to the intercession of this person has been scientifically investigated and approved. (For a martyr, a first miracle is not required.)
4. *Saint*: a second miracle has been approved and the person is canonized.

**The Church has the authority to bypass this process, and does so at times.*

YR./MO.	VIRTUE	DEFINITION	GR. PK-2 SAINT	GR. 3-5 SAINT	GR. 6-8 SAINT
FAITH	(Theme: Service)				
SEP.	FAITH	Believing in God and all He has revealed	St. Martha	St. Jerome	St. Augustine
OCT.	REVERENCE	Showing your deepest respect for things of God	St. Hyacinth	St. Tarcisus	St. Margaret Clitherow
NOV.	STEWARDSHIP	Returning to God the first fruits of your time, talent, and treasure	St. Elizabeth of Hungary	Bl. Fra Angelico	St. Joseph Moscati
DEC.	GENEROSITY	Giving without counting the cost	St. Nicholas	St. Mary Magdalene	St. Maximilian Kolbe
JAN.	GRATITUDE	Seeing everything as a gift and being thankful	St. Francis of Assisi	St. Julie Billiart	St. Josemaria Escriva
FEB.	HONESTY	Being trustworthy and true	Bls. Jacinta & Francesco Marto	St. Kateri Tekakwitha	St. Athanasius
MAR.	MERCY	Caring for those who suffer	St. John Vianney	St. Faustina	Bl. Teresa of Calcutta
APRIL	JUSTICE	Being fair and giving each his due	St. Anthony of Padua	St. Katharine Drexel	St. Thomas More
MAY	ZEAL	Being driven by an intense love for God	St. Paul	St. Dominic	St. Francis Xavier
HOPE	(Theme: Study)				
SEP.	HOPE	Trusting in God's loving plan	St. Joseph	St. Elizabeth Ann Seton	Bls. Louis & Zelig Martin
OCT.	STUDIOUSNESS	Seeking knowledge to grow closer to Truth	St. Albert the Great	St. Thomas Aquinas	St. Edith Stein
NOV.	HUMILITY	Accepting your limitations and God-given talents	St. John the Baptist	St. Pio of Pietrelcina	St. Therese of Lisieux
DEC.	PATIENCE	Waiting or enduring without complaint	St. Monica	St. Isaac Jogues	St. Rita of Cascia
JAN.	FIDELITY	Being faithful to promises and commitments	St. Cecilia	Bls. Luigi & Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi	St. Gianna Molla
FEB.	CHEERFULNESS	Looking on the bright side	St. John Bosco	St. Philip Neri	Bl. Miguel Pro
MAR.	TEMPERANCE	Enjoying things in a proper, balanced way	St. Teresa of Avila	St. Camillus de Lellis	Ven. Matt Talbot
APRIL	OBEDIENCE	Saying "yes" to the loving will of God and those He has set over us	Our Lady	St. Juan Diego	St. Frances Xavier Cabrini
MAY	DILIGENCE	Doing your best and working hard until you're finished	St. Andre Bessette	St. Francis de Sales	St. Catherine of Siena
CHARITY	(Theme: Community)				
SEP.	CHARITY	Loving God with all your heart, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself	St. Gertrude	St. Vincent de Paul	Bl. Laura Vicuna
OCT.	FRIENDSHIP	Sharing a mutual love that seeks the good of the other	Sts. Benedict & Scholastica	Sts. Basil & Gregory	Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati
NOV.	COURTESY	Being thoughtful of others	St. Martin de Porres	Ven. Solanus Casey	Ven. Pierre Toussaint
DEC.	PURITY	Keeping your soul free of sin	St. Dominic Savio	St. Agnes	St. Maria Goretti
JAN.	FORTITUDE	Being brave and strong in the face of trials	St. Bernadette	St. Joan of Arc	Sts. Paul Miki & Companions
FEB.	PRUDENCE	Making good decisions in specific circumstances	Bl. Junipero Serra	St. John Neumann	St. John XXIII
MAR.	RESPECT	Recognizing the dignity of all people	St. Jeanne Jugan	St. Damien of Molokai	St. John Paul II
APRIL	FORGIVENESS	Pardoning those who offend you	St. Patrick	Bl. Margaret of Castello	St. Josephine Bakhita
MAY	RESPONSIBILITY	Being reliable in your duties and accountable for your actions	St. Peter	St. Henry II	Bl. Bartolo Longo

Table of Contents

September: HOPE, Bl. Louis & Zelig Martin.....	8
October: STUDIOUSNESS, St. Edith Stein.....	12
November: HUMILITY, St. Therese of Lisieux.....	16
December: PATIENCE, St. Rita of Cascia.....	20
January: FIDELITY, St. Gianna Molla.....	24
February: CHEERFULNESS, Bl. Miguel Pro.....	28
March: TEMPERANCE, Ven. Matt Talbot.....	32
April: OBEDIENCE, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini.....	36
May: DILIGENCE, St. Catherine of Siena.....	40
Image credits.....	44
Acknowledgements.....	45

September

PRAYER:

Act of Hope

VIRTUE OF THE MONTH:

Hope: trusting in God's loving plan

The virtue of hope enables us to suffer with joy in this life, knowing that even when the things that happen to us are difficult, the Lord will use them for our salvation. The virtue of hope reminds us that the sufferings of this life are short and small compared to the greatness of joy prepared for us in eternity. The Christian knows that hoping in wealth, in persons of power, in anything that is of this world, is foolish, since these will all fail us at some point. God alone will never fail us, and heaven is the only world which shall not pass away. Like the light shining at the end of a long and sometimes uncertain pathway, hope gives us the strength and direction we need to continually orient our steps toward God, recognizing that it is a journey toward eternal life with Him.

SAINTS OF THE MONTH:

Blesseds Louis & Zélie Martin
(1823-1894 & 1831-1877, France)
Feast: March 12

Louis Martin and Marie-Azélie Guérin (Zélie) both felt called to the religious life. Louis, son of a devout French Army officer, attended Catholic schools and decided as a young man to enter the Great Saint Bernard Hospice as a lay brother. However, unable to master the Latin required for entrance to the community, he gave up his dream and instead concentrated on his business of watchmaking. At the same time, young Zélie Guérin determined to follow her sister's example and join the Daughters of Charity, but was refused. Saddened by this rejection, Zélie trained herself in the art of making lace, coming to the attention of Louis Martin's mother, who believed Zélie would be the perfect match for her son! Louis and Zélie trusted in God's unfolding plan for their lives, were married, and happily welcomed the nine children God gave them, directing all their efforts toward the sanctification of their family. They taught their children to love God first and always, and to give Him a true offering of their lives in the ordinary events of every day.



Bls. Louis and Zélie Martin

In the midst of their joy and peace, Louis and Zélie also knew great suffering. Of their nine

HOPE: trusting in God's loving plan

children, four died in infancy or early childhood. One of their daughters suffered from great emotional difficulties. Zelig's own life would be cut short by cancer, leaving Louis to raise their five remaining children, all girls, who each entered religious life.

Perhaps the greatest testimony of the unfailing hope of this holy couple is that of one of their own daughters, Saint Therese of Lisieux, who considered her parents "more worthy of heaven than of the earth." Louis and Zelig Martin were the second married couple to be beatified together.

DISCUSSION:

1. What aspects of Louis and Zelig's lives were "times of hope" for them?
2. Based on the ordinariness of their family life, give some examples of how being parents might have helped Louis and Zelig to grow in holiness. (Hint: think of the things *your* parents do!)

HOME PROJECT: Due September _____

PRAYER:

V. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created.

R. *And you shall renew the face of the earth.*

V. Let us pray.


R. *O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant us through the same Spirit a love and relish for what is right and just and a constant enjoyment of His consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read and reflect on Romans 12:9-12 and 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.

VIRTUE ACTIVITY:

Create a poster titled "My Life is a Pilgrimage." Include the following elements:

1. Indicate heaven in a top corner (keep it small);
2. Make a path from the opposite lower corner leading to heaven;
3. Near the beginning of the path, put yourself walking on it;
4. Add Christ, your guardian angel or the Holy Spirit walking next to you;
5. Along the edges of the path, write the *Act of Hope* (on back page), in your own words;
6. Outside the path, draw objects to symbolize the different phases of your life so far and into the future. Include symbols of your relationship with God (the Bible, the sacraments, prayer, youth group, etc.).

When you see this symbol, 
remember to invoke your guardian angel!

HOPE: trusting in God's loving plan

PRAYER:

Dear Louis and Zelig Martin, you served God faithfully in the ordinary events of daily life in a family. You taught your children to love God, and by your example, gave them a powerful witness of holiness. Please pray for my own parents, that they too might grow closer and closer to Jesus each day. Ask Jesus to grant to my own family the gifts and help we most need right now (*pause to offer these silently in your heart*). Help me to love and support them in all of the difficulties of life, so that our home might be filled with faith, hope, and charity. Blesseds Louis & Zelig Martin, pray for us!

SAINT ACTIVITY:

Do some extra research into the details of the lives of Louis and Zelig and their family, such as the illness and death of Zelig, the entrance into religious life of all five daughters, the difficulties with Celine, or the gradual decline and death of Louis.

Based on what you learn, prepare a radio show in which some act as interviewers and some act as different members of the Martin family. Brainstorm interview questions that would discover the trust in God of each of the family members, particularly Louis and Zelig.

Discuss together the importance of the virtue of hope in family life.

PRAYER:

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope! To you do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to you do we send up our sighs, mourning, and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus. O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary.

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,

R. *That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.*

REVIEW:

1. What is hope?

2. Who were Louis and Zelig Martin?

GROWTH IN HOPE:

1. Who cooperated with you on your hope project?

2. What did you try and how did it go? Did it help you to grow in hope?

3. What more could you do in this area?

October

PRAYER:

Act of Hope

VIRTUE OF THE MONTH:

Studiosness: seeking knowledge to grow closer to Truth

As all students know, the study necessary to gain real knowledge also requires real effort. Because the entire universe and all that is in it come from the hand of God, the human effort to seek knowledge should always lead us closer to *the* Truth, which is God Himself. There is, however, a vice we like to pretend is “just like” studiosness, but is actually its opposite: curiosity. While curiosity is not always a bad thing, when we spend hours mindlessly surfing the internet, flipping through TV channels, and pouring over tabloid articles, we’re giving in to the vice of curiosity, acquiring superficial knowledge about people, places, things, or ideas that either is not necessary or is actually evil.

Jesus said, “If you remain in My word... you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). We should direct all our efforts to gain knowledge with the ultimate source of Truth as the goal, for “this is eternal life: that they might *know* You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

SAINT OF THE MONTH:

Saint Edith Stein

(1891-1942, Germany)

Feast: August 9

While at a friend’s house one evening, the young Jewish philosopher Edith Stein found the biography of Saint Teresa of Avila, a sixteenth century Carmelite nun, mystic, and Doctor of the Church. Edith stayed up all night to finish the book, and when she closed the cover, she declared, “This is Truth.”

Born into a Jewish family in Germany, Edith demonstrated extraordinary intellectual gifts from a young age. However, by the age of 13 she had come to doubt the existence of God and eventually abandoned all practice of Judaism. Edith’s strong desire to know the truths of human existence lead her to study philosophy, and she completed a doctorate in this subject by age 25. Throughout her academic career, Edith was intrigued by the strong Catholic faith of some of her equally learned friends. Undertaking to know the truths of Catholicism, Edith affirmed the necessary relationship between faith and reason and was baptized into the Catholic Church in 1922. Responding to the call of consecrated life, Edith entered the Carmelite Order in 1934 and took the name Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.



Saint Edith Stein

STUDIOUSNESS: seeking knowledge to grow closer to Truth

By 1938, the Nazi persecution of all Jews forced Sister Teresa Benedicta to take refuge in a Dutch convent, where she was eventually captured and taken to the Auschwitz concentration camp. Embracing true wisdom, the "science" of the Cross, Sister Teresa Benedicta was executed in the gas chambers on August 9, 1942, and was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1998.

DISCUSSION:

1. How did Saint Edith Stein manifest the virtue of studiousness in her life?
2. In his master work, the *Summa Theologica*, Saint Thomas Aquinas asserts that the virtue of studiousness is related to the cardinal virtue of temperance, the virtue by which we restrain or moderate our desire for pleasure. We often think of temperance in terms of bodily pleasure, so how can something that involves our minds (studiousness) also be part of temperance? Explain.

HOME PROJECT: Due October _____

PRAYER:

- V. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created.
 R. *And you shall renew the face of the earth.*
 V. Let us pray.
 R. *O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant us through the same Spirit a love and relish for what is right and just and a constant enjoyment of His consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read and reflect on 1 Kings 3:5-14 and Psalm 27:7-8.

VIRTUE ACTIVITY:

Seeking the Truth Through Logic: Write a Syllogism

A syllogism is a set of three statements that use logic to prove a truth. A syllogism is valid if the premises logically lead to the conclusion. A syllogism is true if its logic is valid AND its information is accurate. If the major premise is not a fact, then the syllogism might be logical, but the conclusion will not be true.

Major premise (main truth): Everything that God made is good.

Minor premise (example of the same truth): God made the human person.

Conclusion: Therefore, the human person is good.

Try to write your own syllogism and discuss with the class. Is it valid? Is it true? Why or why not?



STUDIOUSNESS: seeking knowledge to grow closer to Truth

PRAYER:

Dear Saint Edith Stein, your love of truth and your desire to know the meaning of life led you to know and love the ultimate Truth of God Himself. Please help me in my daily pursuit of knowledge that it may always lead me to fullness of Truth. Amen. Saint Edith Stein, pray for us.

SAINT ACTIVITY:

Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: the Life of Saint Edith Stein

In the two years she spent in the Carmelite convent in Holland before being captured by the Nazis, Saint Edith Stein worked on a book entitled *The Science of the Cross*. In it she explained the spiritual ideas of Saint John of the Cross (a famous Carmelite) from his book *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, especially the “night” through which each soul must pass if it wishes to be united to God.

In small groups, design a poster with the title “Ascending the Mountain of the Lord” over a drawing of a mountain. Brainstorm what images you could draw to represent the different events of Saint Edith Stein’s life on the different levels of the mountain.

1. **Base:** Saint Edith’s life in a Jewish family; her gradual disbelief in God; her education and career in philosophy; her baptism into the Catholic faith
2. **Middle:** Saint Edith’s life as a Catholic convert; her writings, teachings/lectures; her entrance into a Carmelite convent as Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross
3. **Top:** Saint Edith’s persecution as a Jewish Catholic; her capture in Holland by the Nazis and her martyrdom in Auschwitz; her canonization by Pope John Paul II

STUDIOUSNESS: seeking knowledge to grow closer to Truth

PRAYER:

Pray the Fifth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, the Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple. Reflect upon how Our Lady sought after Christ, and how, once she found Him, she kept His words in her heart (Luke 2:51). Ask her to help you to seek God in all things, and to ponder in your heart the works He has wrought in your life.

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

REVIEW:

1. What is studiousness?

2. Who was Saint Edith Stein?

GROWTH IN STUDIOUSNESS:

1. Who cooperated with you on your studiousness project?

2. What did you try and how did it go? Did it help you to grow in studiousness?

3. What more could you do in this area?

November

PRAYER:

Act of Hope

VIRTUE OF THE MONTH:

Humility: accepting your limitations and God-given talents

Humility is the true evaluation of ourselves with all our limitations. If we're truly humble, we'll admit our shortcomings, but we'll also recognize our God-given qualities and abilities. As we grow in self-knowledge and humility, we should desire to serve God and others in ways best suited for our talents. Humility urges us to do good for others without attracting attention or expecting applause; a realistic opinion of ourselves prompts us to give credit for gifts and successes to God. The secret to *winning* heaven? *Losing* our self-love in the virtue of humility. "Whoever, therefore, shall humble himself as [a] little child will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:4).

SAINT OF THE MONTH:

Saint Therese of Lisieux
(1873-1897, France)

Feast: October 1

Saint Pius X once called Saint Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face the greatest saint of modern times, even *before* she had been canonized. In 1997, Blessed John Paul II declared Saint Therese a Doctor of the Church for her teaching on spiritual theology, an honor given to only 34 other saints. Of herself, Saint Therese only said, "What beauty? I don't see my beauty at all; I see only the graces I've received from God....I'm only a little seedling" (*Therese: Her Last Conversations*). How did a young girl from a middle-class family in turn-of-the 19th century France attain the heights of holiness before dying of a long and painful illness when she was only 24 years old? Humility.



Saint Therese of Lisieux

In her short life, Saint Therese was none of those things usually associated with "great" saints; she was not a martyr, a missionary, an evangelist, a theologian, or a foundress. She entered a Carmelite convent at the age of 15 and spent the next nine years in complete obscurity, doing all of the ordinary, daily things that convent life required. But from moment to moment, Saint Therese offered her weaknesses and limitations to God, accepted His will in all things, and persevered with child-like trust. One of her sayings was, "Our Lord needs from us neither great deeds nor profound thoughts. Neither intelligence nor talents. He cherishes simplicity."

HUMILITY: accepting your limitations and God-given talents

Both of Therese’s parents, Louis and Zelig Martin, were beatified in 2008. All of Saint Therese’s sisters also entered religious life. But there is no gene for sanctity, and in her youth, Therese was a very normal child, and even a spoiled one. The path to holiness walked by the “Little Flower” is open to anyone. Saint Therese knew that perfection means being what God wants us to be, and that is different for each one of us. Saint Therese, teach us your Little Way!

DISCUSSION:

1. How did Saint Therese of Lisieux manifest the virtue of humility in her life?
2. There are many places in the Bible where pride is described as being a complete obstacle to God and its opposite, humility, is praised as the “doorway” to His presence. What is it about pride that *closes* us, and about humility that *opens* us? (Note: the word “humility” originates from the Latin word *humus*, meaning “soil”...)

HOME PROJECT: Due November _____

PRAYER:

- V. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created.
 R. *And you shall renew the face of the earth.*
 V. Let us pray.
 R. *O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant us through the same Spirit a love and relish for what is right and just and a constant enjoyment of His consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read and reflect on Job 38:1-7, 42:1-6 and 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.

VIRTUE ACTIVITY:

We know we are forgetting humility when we use ourselves as the measure of all goodness. Most of us, at some point, have pouted, “She’s prettier than me! He’s stronger than me!”

Instead of using “me” as the basis of comparison, try using true “greats”. In small groups, choose who you think is the greatest person in each category (famous or not). When you catch yourself pouting, “He’s taller than me!”, ask yourself: “Who am I? Compared to _____, is he really that tall?”

- Most Holy _____
- Greatest Athlete _____
- Best Writer _____
- Greatest Scientist _____
- Most Artistic _____
- Greatest Singer _____
- Greatest Actor _____



HUMILITY: accepting your limitations and God-given talents

PRAYER:

Dear Saint Therese, you accepted whatever God gave you in a spirit of joy and gratitude, including your own limitations. Pray that I might have this same spirit so that I accept what I cannot do, do well what I can, and give all the glory to God. Amen. Saint Therese of Lisieux, pray for us.

SAINT ACTIVITY:

Perfect Weakness = Perfect Power

In her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, Saint Therese recounted that,

“Each morning I take up my resolution to practice humility, and by evening, I realize I have still committed many failings of pride. Seeing this, I am tempted to discouragement. However, as I well know, discouragement is also an act of pride! And so, O my God, what I want to do is to base all my hope on you alone. You can do all things, so be pleased to bring to birth in my soul the virtue I am looking for.”

Christ said of Himself, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (Matthew 11:28-29). If God Himself can say this, why are we still so afraid to be humble and small? Why might it be *important* to be small?

Choose from one of these activities:

1. Saint Therese often wrote poetry. Write a poem about being small and child-like, relying on God our Father.
2. Saint Therese liked to act in plays in the convent. Name three reasons why it is important for an actor to be humble. Act out examples of what would go wrong in a play if those reasons were ignored.
3. Cloistered nuns often bear a title after their religious name. Saint Therese’s title was “of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face”. Look up these two images. How do you think Saint Therese lived up to her name? Write an epitaph for her.
4. Saint Therese is known for her promise to send roses from heaven. Make a poster about humility and decorate it with roses.
5. Saint Therese was a bold child—she was denied entrance into the convent because of her young age, and took her request all the way to the pope! How can this boldness coexist with her characteristic humility? Script a debate in which one person says that this act was prideful and the other person argues that it was in keeping with humility.

HUMILITY: accepting your limitations and God-given talents

PRAYER:

Pray the First Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, the Annunciation. Reflect upon the humility of Our Lady, in her response to the angel: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. . ." (Luke 1:38). Ask her to help you to grow in humility so that the Lord can work through you as He did through her.

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

REVIEW:

1. What is humility?

2. Who was Saint Therese of Lisieux?

GROWTH IN HUMILITY:

1. Who cooperated with you on your humility project?

2. What did you try and how did it go? Did it help you to grow in humility?

3. What more could you do in this area?

HUMILITY: accepting your limitations and God-given talents

December

VIRTUE OF THE MONTH:

Patience: waiting or enduring without complaint

We all know what it's like to wait for our turn in a game, for the results of a test, for an expected phone call...for Christmas! But how often do we wait *patiently*, without complaining? Paragraph 1832 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* lists patience as one of the twelve fruits, or perfections, that the Holy Spirit forms in us. If this fruit of patience is truly alive in us, we can control our emotions when something disagreeable happens and respond with calm instead of anger, dismay, or irritation. In times of great suffering, such as a serious illness or a loss of home or job, the virtue of patience can be a tremendous witness to the God Who always responds to our prayers: "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined to me and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1).

SAINT OF THE MONTH:

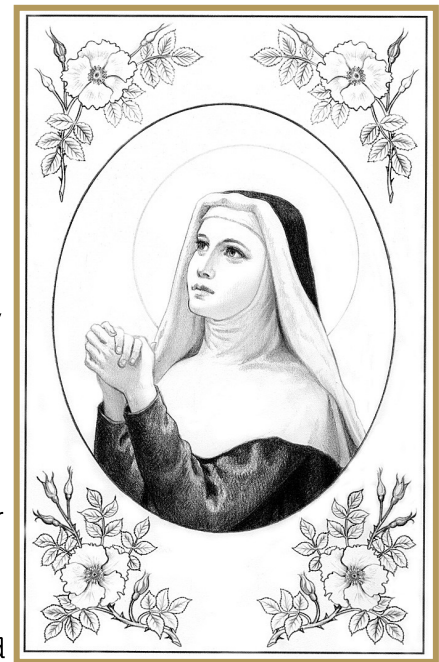
Saint Rita of Cascia
(1386-1457, Italy)
Feast: May 22

Born the only child to a mother and father known as the *Peacemakers of Jesus* in their small Italian town, Margherita (Rita) Lotti was drawn to religious life at an early age by the example of the Augustinian nuns who lived nearby. However, out of obedience to her parents' desire for her security, Saint Rita married Paolo Mancini and became the mother of twin sons. Her husband was an angry and abusive man, and became involved in the political intrigues of the time. He was ambushed by enemies and murdered! Rita and Paolo's sons swore revenge, but the anguished, continuous prayers of their mother won their conversion, and they forgave their father's murderers.

Not long after, the sons themselves died, and Saint Rita asked to enter the Augustinian monastery, only to be denied because some of the nuns were related to the murderers of her husband, and it was feared Rita's presence would cause upset. In response to this refusal of her request, Saint Rita turned her efforts to healing the division among the families involved in her husband's death, and, once peace was secured, was able to finally able to enter the monastery and consecrate her life to God.

After many years as a faithful religious, Saint Rita spent the last four years of her life confined to bed by illness, where she nevertheless continued to give of herself by teaching the younger nuns in the community.

PATIENCE: waiting or enduring without complaint



Saint Rita of Cascia by Ruth Sanderson

DISCUSSION:

1. What aspects of Saint Rita's life demanded the virtue of patience?
2. Describe two recent examples of when you acted patiently and when you did not act patiently. How did your patience—and lack of patience—affect the situation? Did the patience or impatience help you or others involved?

HOME PROJECT: Due December _____

PRAYER:

- V. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created.
- R. *And you shall renew the face of the earth.*
- V. Let us pray.
- R. *O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant us through the same Spirit a love and relish for what is right and just and a constant enjoyment of His consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read and reflect on James 5:7-8.

VIRTUE ACTIVITY:

1. Look up the verses to "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" or the original "O Antiphons" upon which the song is based. For over a thousand years, the Church has prayed these lines for the eight days preceding Christmas to express humanity's longing for the coming of the Savior.
2. Choose your favorite antiphon. Briefly research its background in Scripture.
3. Create an illuminated manuscript of your favorite antiphon, illustrating it with symbols based on its Scriptural references.

~ OR ~

Divide into groups, select one of the passages listed below, and answer each of the questions in relation to the events of that passage.

Genesis 37:1-8, 26-28; 41:37-46; 45:4-8

Exodus 15:22-27, 16:1-15, 17:1-7

1 Samuel 1:1-28

1 Samuel 13:1-14

Job 1:1-22; 2:1-10

Matthew 26:36-68

Acts 27:1-5; 28:11-31

1. Who is/are the main character(s) in this passage?
2. What situation(s) in the passage is/are opportunit(ies) for patience? Explain.
3. How did the characters show patience/impatience? What were the results of this—good and/or bad?

PATIENCE: waiting or enduring without complaint

PRAYER:

Dear Saint Rita, you practiced the virtue of patience to a heroic degree in praying for the conversion of your sons and in waiting so long to give your life to Christ. Help me to be patient with the people and events of my own life, always remembering the Lord's own patience with me. Amen. Saint Rita, pray for us!

SAINT ACTIVITY:

Saint Rita, her husband, her sons, and even her religious community suffered greatly because of family divisions, grudges, and hatred. Family difficulties are often the most difficult to endure without complaint.

Discuss in a small group:

1. Do you complain about people in your immediate or extended family? (Give examples, but don't name names.)
2. Are there ways you could be a better peacemaker in your family?
3. How often do you pray for your family?

Choose one of the following activities. Remember to ask the intercession of Saint Rita as you work!

1. Design a family tree. Incorporate a prayer for your family.
2. Look up Catholic prayers for the Healing of the Family Tree.
3. Write a prayer for families, especially for children who are raised in homes with domestic violence. Ask the Lord to heal them, to give them a spirit of forgiveness, and to help them to raise their own families in a peaceful way that is a witness to others.
4. The Lord gave Saint Rita a wound in her temple to unite her to His suffering from the Crown of Thorns. Her union with Christ is what helped her to receive the heavenly crown of glory. Draw a crown of thorns intertwined with a crown of glory. In your drawing, include these or similar words: "Lord Jesus, unite us in Your Passion, that we may enjoy the fruits of Your Redemption. Saint Rita of Cascia, pray for us!"



PRAYER:

Pray the Third Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, the Nativity. Reflect on the patience of Our Lady as she awaited the Birth of the Lord. Ask her to help you to grow in the virtue of patience.

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

REVIEW:

1. What is patience?

2. Who was Saint Rita of Cascia?

GROWTH IN PATIENCE:

1. Who cooperated with you on your patience project?

2. What did you try and how did it go? Did it help you to grow in patience?

3. What more could you do in this area?

PATIENCE: waiting or enduring without complaint

January

PRAYER:

Act of Hope

VIRTUE OF THE MONTH:

Fidelity: being faithful to promises and commitments

"Fidelity expresses constancy in keeping one's given word. God is faithful." These words from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (paragraph 2365) remind us that because God is faithful to His promises, we can and must be faithful to ours. Like God, we make promises and commitments *to others*, not to things but to *persons*. In baptism, God promises us that as His adopted children, we will be able to live our lives on earth in such a way that we can be united to Him forever in heaven. We, in turn, promise to accept the graces He gives us to live as His witnesses in the world. We all know what it's like to make and keep a promise, and to have promises made and kept to us. (And likewise, the pain caused by broken promises.) In response to the tremendous faithfulness of God, we should make our own this declaration of the psalmist: "The Lord is my portion; I have promised to keep [His] words." (Psalm 119:57)

SAINT OF THE MONTH:

Saint Gianna Molla

(October 4, 1922 – April 28, 1962, Italy)

Feast: April 28

In 2004, Pope John Paul II canonized Gianna Beretta Molla, a wife, mother, and pediatrician. Gianna's story is rather extraordinary, especially since her husband and children were still living at the time of her canonization.

Gianna Beretta Molla was born in Magenta (Milan), Italy, on October 4, 1922, the tenth of 13 children. After earning degrees in medicine and surgery from the University of Pavia in 1949, she opened a medical clinic in Mesero in 1950. She was a pediatrician, but gave special attention to mothers, babies, the elderly, and the poor. She considered her work a mission from God and exercised great care in fulfilling her responsibilities.



Saint Gianna Molla

Gianna became engaged to businessman Pietro Molla, and they were married on September 24, 1955. In November 1956, to her great joy, Gianna became the mother of Pierluigi, followed by the birth of Mariolina the next year and Laura in 1959. She met the demands of mother, wife, doctor, and her passion for life with simplicity and great balance.

FIDELITY: being faithful to promises and commitments

In September 1961, towards the end of the second month of pregnancy with her fourth child, Gianna had to make a heroic decision. Physicians diagnosed a serious condition that required surgery. The surgeon suggested that Gianna undergo an abortion in order to save her own life. Gianna replied, "If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate. Choose the child - I insist on it. Save the baby."

On the morning of April 21, 1962, her daughter Gianna Emanuela was born. Despite all efforts and treatments to save both of them, on the morning of April 28 Saint Gianna died. She was 39 years old. Her husband Pietro has described Gianna's life as "an act and a perennial action of faith and charity; it was a non-stop search for the will of God for every decision and for every work, with prayer and meditation, Holy Mass and the Eucharist."

On April 24, 1994, Pope John Paul II beatified Gianna Beretta Molla. At the beatification ceremony, the Holy Father said that Gianna's act of self-sacrifice was possible only after a lifetime of preparation. Saint Gianna Molla continues to remind the Church and the world of the virtue of fidelity, because of her faithful commitment to her family and to God. We are being called to heroism by our choice of life. Let us ask Saint Gianna to intercede for us that we might be faithful.



DISCUSSION:

1. What do you think of Saint Gianna's determination to save the baby, even at the risk of her own life?
2. Does our society today value commitment? Give examples to support your answer.
3. How does the virtue of hope help us to practice fidelity?

HOME PROJECT: Due January _____

PRAYER:

- V. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created.
 R. *And you shall renew the face of the earth.*
- V. Let us pray.
 R. *O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant us through the same Spirit a love and relish for what is right and just and a constant enjoyment of His consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read and reflect on Psalm 116:10-19.

VIRTUE ACTIVITY:

Saint Gianna knew her commitment to being a mother demanded greater fidelity than her commitment to her medical profession. On your own, write a list of roles that you fill on a daily basis. What is the most important role? What is the least? Rank them.

In small groups, brainstorm a list of people who have been faithful to their commitments, of marriage, priesthood, or religious life. Try to invite them to speak to your class about fidelity

FIDELITY: being faithful to promises and commitments

or interview them privately. Ask them what they have learned over the years that has helped them to remain faithful to their commitments.

PRAYER:

Dear Saint Gianna, you were faithful to your family even to the point of death. Intercede for us, asking God for the grace and courage to make lifelong commitments and the strength to keep them. Help us to trust in the grace He provides for us to fulfill vows made to Him. Amen. Saint Gianna Molla, pray for us.

SAINT ACTIVITY:

In our country today, the idea of commitment and fidelity to what we promise is under attack. We can even see this in the life of Saint Gianna, whose doctors advised her to save her own life even if it meant death to the child in her womb. Saint Gianna refused. Knowing that it could mean her death, she was faithful to her commitment to life.

1. How is the virtue of fidelity under attack in our culture?

2. How is the sanctity of life under attack in our culture?

3. How can we promote the virtue of fidelity in our family, school, and country?

4. How can we promote the sanctity of life in our family, school, and country?

FIDELITY: being faithful to promises and commitments

PRAYER:

Pray the First Glorious Mystery of the Rosary, the Resurrection. Reflect on how the Lord rewarded Our Lady's faithfulness at the foot of the Cross with the glorious vision of His Resurrection. Ask her to help you to be faithful, with hopeful trust in His plan.

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

REVIEW:

1. What is fidelity?

2. Who is Saint Gianna?

GROWTH IN FIDELITY:

1. Who cooperated with you on your fidelity project?

2. What did you try and how did it go? Did it help you to grow in fidelity?

3. What more could you do in this area?

February

PRAYER:

Act of Hope

VIRTUE OF THE MONTH:

Cheerfulness: looking on the bright side

In his book, *Orthodoxy*, the Catholic author G.K. Chesterton wrote that “pride cannot rise to levity or levitation.” Levity is a lightness of mind (and levitation, lightness of body). Gravity means both *downward pull* and *seriousness*. Chesterton concluded that “it is easy to be heavy: hard to be light.” And that “Satan fell by the force of gravity.” So Satan basically fell because he took himself way too seriously. It is hard to imagine the fallen angels ever being cheerful. We too cannot be cheerful if we are fighting against God. We might experience pleasure at times, but not true, lighthearted joy. But when we are united to God’s will and trust Him with our lives, we can be cheerful, even in difficult circumstances.

Practicing cheerfulness does not mean pretending everything is perfect all the time. Sometimes things are tough and not as we would like. But if we are filled with the joy of the Lord, a joy that nothing can take from us, we can see the good in the midst of difficulties. Jesus said, “I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

SAINT OF THE MONTH:

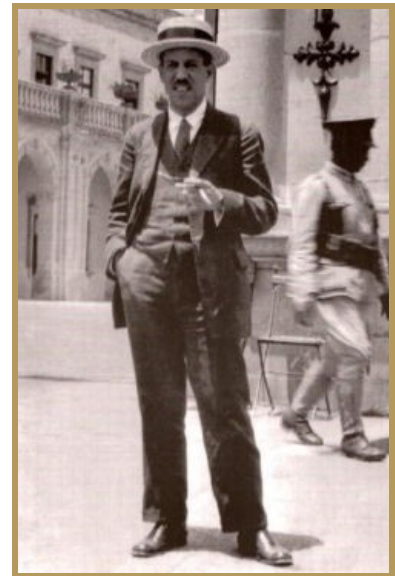
Blessed Miguel Augustin Pro

(1891 – 1927, Mexico)

Feast: November 23

Miguel Pro was the oldest son of a large Mexican family. He was a lively youth, gifted at mimicking voices of his family, friends, and neighbors, and at putting on dramas. He loved to tease his brothers and sisters and to play practical jokes on his family. Yet he was kind and sensitive to others’ feelings too. He never used his humor to hurt others, but only to make them laugh.

At the age of 20, he felt God calling him to become a Jesuit priest. When he had been at the seminary for only a few months, the government began to persecute the Church in Mexico, closing schools and taking Church properties. Miguel and the other seminarians were worried about their families and were very homesick. The novice master asked Miguel to cheer everyone up by organizing hikes, dramas, picnics, feast day parties, and other activities. Eventually the government closed the seminary and the Jesuit novices had to flee in disguise and complete their training abroad.



Blessed Miguel Pro in disguise

CHEERFULNESS: looking on the bright side

After being ordained in Belgium, Father Miguel Pro returned to Mexico in the midst of a changing government. The constitution made practicing the Catholic faith illegal, but Father Pro was fearless and went all over Mexico City helping the poor, saying Mass, and hearing Confessions. With bravery as well as humor, he put all of his talents of mimicry and costume to use, evading the police who were searching for him, and often daring to make fools of them in ways they did not even realize. The photo on page 28 shows him dressed as a rich tourist standing in front of the President's palace with a police officer walking right behind him! Once, when the police found out where he was celebrating Mass, Blessed Miguel evacuated the congregation, but stayed behind himself. He casually pretended to be a wealthy student, and acted shocked when the police told him there was a priest around. He offered to help them look and lead them all around the building in search of the priest! Another time he even wore a police uniform to bring Communion to a Catholic who was in prison and awaiting execution.

Over time, Catholics in Mexico were tired of seeing their priests shot and their churches closed, and they began to fight for their religious freedom. In October 1927, two Catholic men tried to assassinate a high government official. They were captured, and because the car they were driving had formerly belonged to Miguel Pro's brother, Miguel and two of his brothers were arrested. The men who had planned the attack confessed and swore the Pro brothers had not been involved. The government would not believe them, though, and in addition, found out that Miguel Pro was a priest. Without a trial, all five men were condemned to death. Blessed Miguel was led before the firing squad. The government had invited reporters, thinking the Church would be embarrassed by a coward's death. Instead, Blessed Miguel walked by the soldiers, who were going to shoot him, and said, "I forgive you and I will pray for your families." He asked to kneel and pray, and calmly did so. He refused a blindfold, stretched out his arms as if on a cross, with a rosary in one hand and a little cross in the other. As they shot him, he yelled out, "¡Viva Cristo Rey!" *Long live Christ the King!*

One of his brothers was also executed. His other brother was spared at the last moment. When Blessed Miguel's father saw the bodies of his two sons, he told the family not to weep, but to be proud because they were martyrs. Despite the fact that it was illegal to attend Mass, 30,000 people lined the streets for Miguel's funeral Mass, shouting "¡Viva Cristo Rey!"

DISCUSSION:

1. Explain G.K. Chesterton's pun about gravity.
2. Is cheerfulness just a personality type some people have, or is it a virtue anyone can choose to practice?
3. How did the virtue of hope enable Blessed Miguel Pro to be cheerful in the midst of danger?

HOME PROJECT: Due February _____

CHEERFULNESS: looking on the bright side

PRAYER:

- V. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created.
- R. *And you shall renew the face of the earth.*
- V. Let us pray.
- R. *O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant us through the same Spirit a love and relish for what is right and just and a constant enjoyment of His consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read and discuss Philippians 4:4-7.

**VIRTUE ACTIVITY:**

Work with a partner or two to make a Proverb Poster based on one of the following proverbs. Consider what type of illustrations would be appropriate. Can you make your proverb read like a commercial advertisement to "sell" cheerfulness?

- Proverbs 15:30a "A cheerful glance brings joy to the heart...."
- Sirach 13:25a "The sign of a good heart is a cheerful countenance...."
- Psalm 94:19 "When the cares of my heart are many, thy consolations cheer my soul."
- Proverbs 15:13 "A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken."
- Proverbs 15:15 "All the days of the afflicted are evil, but a cheerful heart has a continual feast."
- Proverbs 17:22 "A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones."
- Sirach 26:4 "Whether rich or poor, his heart is glad, and at all times his face is cheerful."
- Sirach 35:9 "With every gift show a cheerful face, and dedicate your tithe with gladness."
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

PRAYER:

Dear Blessed Miguel Pro, you used your gifts of humor and cheerfulness to draw others to Christ. You proclaimed your belief in Him, even when it cost you your life. Help us also to use the gifts God has given us for the good of others and to stand firm in the Lord, even in the face of hatred and persecution. Amen. Blessed Miguel Pro, pray for us.

SAINT ACTIVITY:

Blessed Miguel Pro was an outstanding actor, even in the midst of life-threatening situations. One of his most common costumes was that of a wealthy student in stylish dress. If you were being hunted, what would be your fallback disguise? In a small group, discuss what sort of small props or clothing you could carry when on the run and use to change your appearance. Along with these, give a demonstration of how you would change your style of speech and movement in order to seem like an innocent bystander.

CHEERFULNESS: looking on the bright side

PRAYER:

Pray the Second Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, the Visitation. Reflect on how Our Lady sang for joy (Luke 1:46) and ask her to obtain that joy for you, so that you can share the joy of salvation with others too.

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

REVIEW:

1. What is cheerfulness?

2. Who is Blessed Miguel Pro?

GROWTH IN CHEERFULNESS:

1. Who cooperated with you on your cheerfulness project?

2. What did you try for your project? How did it go? Did it help you to grow in cheerfulness?

3. What more could you do in this area?

CHEERFULNESS: looking on the bright side

March

PRAYER:

Act of Hope

VIRTUE OF THE MONTH:

Temperance: enjoying good things in a proper, balanced way

A sword maker must temper the steel of the blade through a process of heating and cooling at precise temperatures to make the sword hard and strong, but flexible. If the sword is not tempered correctly, the blade will be brittle and could snap off in a battle. We too need to be tempered—to practice moderation and balance in the things we touch, taste, see, hear, and smell so that we are ready for spiritual battle and always able to choose the true good, rather than being enslaved by or addicted to lesser goods.

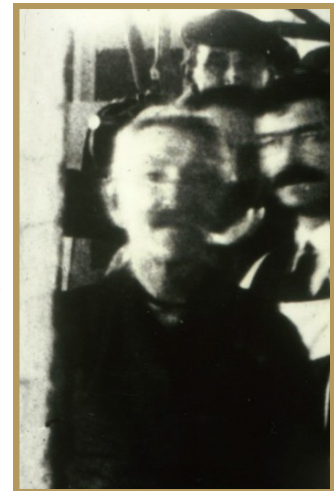
Temperance is a virtue of moderation and balance. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that “temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable” (paragraph 1809). Temperance does not mean avoiding all pleasure, but having and using pleasant things in a way that is healthy, balanced, and consistent with what is good. Temperance guides to have neither too much, nor too little of what we need and desire. The temperate person will be strong and flexible, like a perfectly tempered two-edged sword.

SAINT OF THE MONTH:

Venerable Matt Talbot
(1856-1925, Ireland)

Matt Talbot was a small but strong man, who overcame alcoholism by prayer, penance, and the virtue of temperance. His daily life was based on a quote from an Irish saint, Saint Columbanus: “Pray daily, fast daily, work daily, and study daily.”

Matt was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1856. His mother and father had twelve children and worked very hard. Matt's father took jobs wherever her could, and the family often had to move. In those days, school was not mandatory in Ireland. Matt did not like to go to school, but chose instead to find work.



Venerable Matt Talbot

One of his first jobs was at a wine bottling store. It was not unusual for a company to pay its employees every week at the local pub. It was also customary that the pub owner then require every worker to spend some of their newly received money on alcohol at the pub! Matt soon began drinking after work, and it quickly became a serious problem. He and his friends would often drink more than the money they earned working, and Matt even turned

TEMPERANCE: enjoying things in a proper, balanced way

to begging or stealing from passersby if it would help him get money to buy alcohol. His mother quickly found out about his drinking and prayed constantly for him to stop, but his habit continued for many years. One day while waiting outside a pub, some friends he knew refused to even acknowledge him. They had lost all respect for him, and he finally lost respect for himself.

He went home to his mother, who had never given up on him, and told her he was ready to "take the Pledge". This meant that he was ready to stop drinking. His pledge was for three months. Although it was very difficult, he did it! He took another pledge for six more months and he made it through that too. Finally he made the pledge for life.

From that point on, his devotion to his Catholic faith grew. He worked hard to repay any money he owed to pub owners or others from whom he had taken money. He spent the rest of his life working hard but always for God's glory. He took care of his mother when she was old. He prayed much each day and did penance for the life he had lived as an alcoholic. He slept in a small bedroom on a hard plank bed with a wood-block pillow. He was generous to others and gave money to charitable causes, even though he did not have extra money. He read many books about the lives of the saints, knowing that the saints were his friends. He was often seen praying or going in or out of church. He attended Mass daily, sometimes several times a day, and went to Confession weekly.

It was while he was on his way to church on Trinity Sunday, 1925, when he died of heart failure. Matt Talbot was declared "venerable" in 1973. He is the patron saint of alcoholics and addicts. Today there are "Matt Talbot houses" around the world that rescue and treat people with addictions.

"Three things I cannot escape: the eye of God, the voice of conscience, the stroke of death. In company, guard your tongue. In your family, guard your temper. When alone, guard your thoughts." - Venerable Matt Talbot

DISCUSSION:

1. Why do you think Matt Talbot turned so easily to alcohol?
2. How could Matt have practiced temperance in his early life?
3. How did he become more temperate as an adult?
4. Why is Matt Talbot a model of the virtue of temperance?
5. How is the virtue of temperance related to hope?

HOME PROJECT: Due March _____

TEMPERANCE: enjoying things in a proper, balanced way

PRAYER:

V. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created.

R. *And you shall renew the face of the earth.*

V. Let us pray.

R. *O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant us through the same Spirit a love and relish for what is right and just and a constant enjoyment of His consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read and reflect on Luke 9:23.

VIRTUE ACTIVITY:

Think about how you spend 24 hours of a regular school day. Add an amount of time next to each activity. Make sure all the times add up to 24 hours.

MY USE OF TIME IN A TYPICAL DAY			
Sleep		Internet (not homework)	
Meals		Videogames	
Snacks		Reading	
School		Family time	
Homework		Playing outside	
Practices		Chores, Service	
Television		Prayer	

1. Do you use your time as it should be used?
2. Do you do activities in moderation?
3. Do you spend enough time on prayer, homework, family time, and helping others?

PRAYER:

Venerable Matt Talbot, help me to use and enjoy in a balanced way the good things God has given, with gratitude for His generosity and respect for His creation. Please pray for me and for my friends, that we will be strong in the virtue of temperance, and turn to God for help in times of temptation. Amen. Venerable Matt Talbot, pray for us.

SAINT ACTIVITY:

The life of Venerable Matt Talbot shows how prayer and penance gave him the strength to be temperate, even though it was a big struggle. Discuss with your parents and teachers: what should you do if you know someone has an eating disorder or an addiction?

Since most of this month is during Lent, choose to sacrifice something good as a way to focus more on God and others. Making small sacrifices can strengthen your will to face

TEMPERANCE: enjoying things in a proper, balanced way

bigger challenges. It can help you grow in reliance on God's grace. Share your plan with a friend and then periodically share how your Lent is going. If you fail, ask God for strength and then start again.

PRAYER:

Pray the Second Sorrowful Mystery of the Rosary, the Scourging at the Pillar. Ask Our Lady to pray for you, that you might have the strength to offer many small sacrifices for the love of her Son.

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

REVIEW:

1. What is temperance?



2. Who is Venerable Matt Talbot?

GROWTH IN TEMPERANCE:

1. Who cooperated with you on your temperance project?

2. What did you try for your project? How did it go? Did it help you to grow in temperance?

3. What more could you do in this area?

TEMPERANCE: enjoying things in a proper, balanced way

April

PRAYER:

Act of Hope

VIRTUE OF THE MONTH:

Obedience: saying "yes" to the loving will of God and those He has set over us

Obedience is not exactly a popular virtue in our culture. Someone who is worldly seeks power, not submission. The Christian idea of authority turns the worldly idea of power on its head: the one with the most authority is not the one who controls the most people, but the one who *serves* the most people. To serve others means to choose their needs above one's own, to follow God and to help others follow Him. For example, the world might see the role of a pope as one of power and control, yet one of the titles of the Holy Father is "the servant of the servants of God".

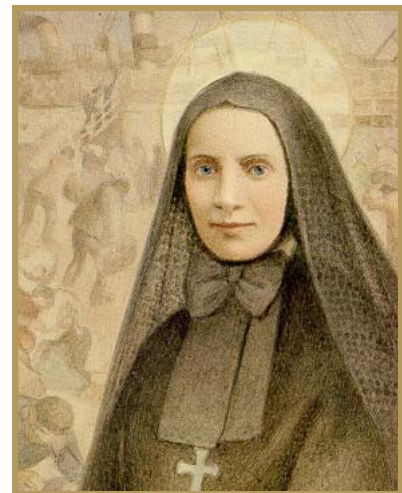
Authentic obedience guarantees us the freedom of living in the truth that our lives are guided and protected by the hand of our loving Father, who has a plan to bring everyone to salvation. We see His will in just laws, and in the lawful commands of those He has given authority. Obedience does not mean being forced to do things we don't want to do, and it certainly does not mean doing things that are sinful, just because a person in authority tells us to do it. Rather, it means that we choose to want what God wants, in order to attain the freedom and joy of following Him.

SAINT OF THE MONTH:

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini
(1850, Italy—1917, Chicago, Illinois)
Feast: November 13

Maria Francesca Cabrini was born into a large family of Italian farmers. Maria Francesca was born two months premature and remained small and frail during her life, but she nevertheless had a strong spirit and plenty of determination. Even from her earliest years, Maria Francesca had a great desire to serve Christ and was drawn to carry out this service as a missionary to China...but God had other plans.

Refused entrance into a religious order at age 18 because of her poor health, Maria Francesca instead taught for six years at a girls' orphanage and did so well that when it closed, the local bishop asked her to found a religious community, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to serve the poor in schools and hospitals. The new Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini (named for the great Jesuit saint to the Far East) worked with zeal and determination, still intent on establishing her sisters in China.



Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini,
courtesy of Missionary Sisters of the
Sacred Heart of Jesus

OBEDIENCE: saying "yes" to the loving will of God and those He has set over us

However, when she met with Pope Leo XIII, he told her "Not to the East, but to the West", and sent Mother Cabrini and her sisters to New York City to work with the many Italian immigrants who were suffering the effects of being poor strangers in a strange land.

All the love and devotion Mother Cabrini intended to pour out on the people of China she now spent in service to the downtrodden immigrants in the United States, overseeing the founding of institutions to serve their spiritual and material needs. This required hospitals, not something that Mother Cabrini desired to include as part of the work of her sisters. However, the virtue of obedience to higher authorities once again played an important role. For after Mother Cabrini initially refused the request of the archbishop of New York to establish a hospital, she had a dream in which she saw the Blessed Virgin Mary attending to the needs of the sick. When she asked her what she was doing, the Blessed Mother responded, "I am doing the work you refuse to do." Mother Cabrini accepted the grace given through this vision and promptly opened a hospital in New York City. Mother Cabrini and her sisters went on to establish other hospitals and institutions in Illinois, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Colorado, California, Washington state, and eventually South America and her native Italy.

Mother Cabrini became a citizen of the United States in 1909. Only 8 years later, while in Chicago and helping with the Christmas preparations, Mother Cabrini suffered her last illness and entered eternal life on December 22, 1917. In 1946, she became the first American citizen to be canonized.

DISCUSSION:

1. How is the Christian idea of obedience different from the world's idea of obedience?
2. How did Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini practice obedience? What do you think of those actions?
3. How does the virtue of hope help us to practice obedience?

HOME PROJECT: Due April _____

PRAYER:

- V. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created.
- R. *And you shall renew the face of the earth.*
- V. Let us pray.
- R. *O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant us through the same Spirit a love and relish for what is right and just and a constant enjoyment of His consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read and reflect on Psalm 19:8-12, Matthew 26:36-44, and Luke 22:24-27.

OBEDIENCE: saying "yes" to the loving will of God and those He has set over us

VIRTUE ACTIVITY:

1. At this time in your life, you're beginning to seek independence, so obedience seems constraining. Is obedience really constraining—or *freeing*, if you *choose* it? Why?
2. Consider the vow of obedience taken by priests and religious. Why do people take it? What purpose do you think it serves? Is there someone you could interview about this?
3. List examples of rules and boundaries (school, sports, work, etc.), How does disobeying them impact us naturally, legally, spiritually? How does obedience free us?

PRAYER:

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, when you had your heart set on one thing and God asked another of you, you obeyed His plan instead of your own. Help me, like you, to obey the Lord quickly and with joy, so that His will may be done in and through me. Amen. Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, pray for us.

SAINT ACTIVITY:

The pope asked Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini to travel to America in order to care for the immigrants who were suffering financially, physically, and spiritually because they did not speak the language and there was no one who could understand and minister to their needs. Mother Cabrini herself was an immigrant, and did not become a citizen until she was almost 60 years old.

Are there suffering immigrants today? Why are they suffering? Is their legal, financial, physical, and spiritual situation just or unjust? Do American citizens, laws, and law enforcement officers regard immigrants the way Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini would or not?

In small groups, choose one of the questions below. Research the situation of immigrants today and report back to your class.

1. What does the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have to say about immigration? About the treatment of illegal immigrants?
2. Throughout our nation's history, there have been waves of immigration from different countries. Where did most immigrants come from and why? What about today?
3. All of our ancestors, except the Native Americans, were immigrants. What was the immigration process like in the era your families came to the United States? How does that compare to today? Is it hard for an immigrant to become a citizen?
4. Are immigration laws too stringent or too lax? Why are immigration laws necessary?
5. Are there any needs of legal immigrants that might go unmet? Which ones? Why?



OBEDIENCE: saying "yes" to the loving will of God and those He has set over us

PRAYER:

Pray the First Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, the Annunciation. Reflect on how Our Lady said "yes" to God's will, even when it seemed impossible. Ask her to intercede for you and to give you a heart that is obedient to the will of God.

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

REVIEW:

1. What is obedience?

2. Who is Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini?

GROWTH IN OBEDIENCE:

1. Who cooperated with you on your obedience project?

2. What did you try for your project? How did it go? Did it help you to grow in obedience?

3. What more could you do in this area?

OBEDIENCE: saying "yes" to the loving will of God and those He has set over us

May

PRAYER:

Act of Hope

VIRTUE OF THE MONTH:

Diligence: doing your best and working hard until you're finished

Imagine being an air traffic controller at a large international airport during the Christmas season...and simply walking away from your monitor an hour early because it's been a long day and you're tired. Or maybe you're a neurosurgeon about to remove a dangerous tumor from someone's spinal cord, and you quit almost at the end because you've got other things you'd rather do right now. Problems with this behavior? Definitely.

To practice the virtue of diligence means not only to *finish* something that we have begun but also to pay attention to what we're doing so that it's done *well*. The examples used here may be a little extreme, but the virtue of diligence remains the same, whether the task involves finishing surgery or finishing a test. Fidelity to small, everyday tasks prepares us to handle larger responsibilities well. By doing all of our work well, no matter how insignificant it may seem, we are fulfilling God's will for our lives and helping to build up His kingdom. Each time we recite the Morning Offering we give all our work as a gift to God. Let's give Him our best!

SAINT OF THE MONTH:

Saint Catherine of Siena
(1347–1380, Italy)
Feast: April 29

The 24th child of cloth-dyer Jacopo Benincasa and his wife Lapa, Catherine Benincasa was born in the Italian city-state of Siena during a tumultuous time both in the secular life of the ruling Italian cities and of the Catholic Church.

Catherine vowed her life to God as a young child, and as a young woman she felt called to join the "Mantellate" who were laywomen, mostly widows, associated with the Dominican Order. These women wore the habit but resided in their own homes and cared for the sick and the poor. Her family strongly objected, since they wanted her to marry. Catherine ended the disagreement by cutting off her hair. Her family, furious, punished her by treating her as a servant, forcing her to do the cooking, cleaning, and serving, taunting her all the while. Yet Catherine served them with great love, as if she were serving the Holy Family.



St. Catherine of Siena, courtesy of the St. Catherine of Siena Institute

DILIGENCE: doing your best and working hard until you're finished

After years of this harsh treatment, Saint Catherine's father was moved to repentance when he saw Catherine praying one day, and a dove hovering over her head. He relented in punishing her, and allowed her to once again have her own room where she could spend all the time she desired in prayer. This she did with deep devotion, seeing Christ each day and praying with Him, until He asked her to apply all He had taught her by going out to serve her neighbor.

Saint Catherine served the needs of the poor and sick within Siena, and began to act as a peacemaker and reconciler of peoples. During this time the once-illiterate Catherine became a prolific writer of letters—to bishops, priests, religious, civil rulers, ordinary laymen, and even the pope—persistently exhorting them to be faithful to Christ and His Church.

During this period, there was a very difficult situation in which a series of popes had chosen to live in Avignon, France, rather than in Rome. Saint Catherine pleaded with Pope Gregory XI to return to Rome, writing him repeatedly with love and reverence, but also candor, reminding him of his duty and his divine calling. Saint Catherine even travelled to Avignon, walking on foot for most of the long journey, to see the Holy Father in person. Despite the respect so many had for the saint, she had difficulty being admitted to see the Holy Father, but she persisted. With the help of Catherine's influence and prayers, Pope Gregory XI overcame his fears, recalled his duty, and returned to Rome.

Saint Catherine of Siena died in 1380 at the age of 33. She was canonized in 1461, and in 1970 she was declared a Doctor of the Church. She is one of only four women saints to be given this honor.

DISCUSSION:

1. How does Saint Catherine of Siena's life exemplify the virtue of diligence?
2. How does the virtue of hope help us to practice diligence?

HOME PROJECT: Due May _____

PRAYER:

- V. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created.
- R. *And you shall renew the face of the earth.*
- V. Let us pray.
- R. *O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant us through the same Spirit a love and relish for what is right and just and a constant enjoyment of His consolations. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Read and reflect on Luke 11:5-8, 18:1-8 and Proverbs 21:5.

DILIGENCE: doing your best and working hard until you're finished

VIRTUE ACTIVITY:

Play "Quality Control" with your friends. Choose a classmate to be your QC Police, taking a glance at your work throughout the day and rating your *effort and completion* on a scale of one to five. Who can win the most points? What will the prize be?

PRAYER:

Saint Catherine of Siena, your heart was so on fire with the love of Christ and His will that you walked for many miles, and wrote many letters to the pope in spite of lack of encouragement. Pray for us, that we may persevere until death, and win the crown of glory as you did. Help us to do our best for God in every moment, and to see through to the end every duty that He entrusts to us. Amen. Saint Catherine of Siena, pray for us.

**SAINT ACTIVITY:**

Choose one of the following activities to imitate Saint Catherine of Siena:

1. Saint Catherine loved to pray privately in her room. Imitate her by asking permission to make a private chapel visit, or by closing your door tonight and praying to the Father in secret. Speak to Him as your Father, listen to Him and ask Him questions.
2. Saint Catherine was able to see Christ standing at her side throughout the day. Prayerfully use your imagination today to picture Christ at your side as you walk through the halls, sit in class, etc. As a reminder, place a holy card of Jesus on your book bag or desk, or draw a cross on something you carry with you throughout the day.
3. Saint Catherine asked the Lord for a heart like His, and in a vision He reached toward her, took her heart, and gave her His own Heart in its place. Draw a picture of this event, or write a poem or song about Catherine's desire to have a heart aflame with God's own love.
4. Saint Catherine received the stigmata, the wounds of Christ in her hands and feet, but the marks were invisible to others until her death. Write a reflection on the wounds of Jesus as a revelation and instrument of His great love for us. Throughout the day, take a moment to recall the wounds of Christ, perhaps by looking at a crucifix. Thank Jesus for His passion and death for our salvation, and ask Him to give you a heart full of love for Him and for others.
5. Saint Catherine received a marriage ring from Christ that no one else could see. Choose or make a simple ring to represent your dedication to Christ and wear it on a chain or cord so that no one else can see it.
6. Saint Catherine of Siena was a spiritual mother to persons both great and unknown. Her letters of spiritual advice were treasured by her friends. Write a letter to a close friend, encouraging him or her to boldly follow Christ in spite of persecution and in spite of personal weaknesses. Remind them of God's great love, and call them to love Him greatly in return.

DILIGENCE: doing your best and working hard until you're finished

PRAYER:

Pray the *Memorare* for an increase in the virtue of diligence, and for opportunities to grow closer to Jesus over the summer:

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help, or sought your intercession was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto you, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother. To you I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in your mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

REVIEW:

1. What is diligence?

2. Who is Saint Catherine of Siena?

GROWTH IN DILIGENCE:

1. Who cooperated with you on your diligence project?

2. What did you try for your project? How did it go? Did it help you to grow in diligence?

3. What more could you do in this area?

DILIGENCE: doing your best and working hard until you're finished

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Acknowledgements

The *Virtues in Practice* program was originally written by a team of parents and faculty members at St. Gertrude School in Cincinnati, Ohio in 2005, and implemented beginning with the 2006 academic year. The program began as a nine-year cycle with students in kindergarten through eighth grade learning about a different virtue, and a saint who exemplified that virtue, each month. It was intended only for the use of St. Gertrude School, but within a short time it became clear that many schools desired the use of such a program.

To make the program accessible to a wider audience, Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia from St. Gertrude School, St. Mary's School in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, Our Lady of Mount Carmel School in Newport News, Virginia, and St. Thomas Aquinas Regional School in Woodbridge, Virginia worked together with faculty and staff volunteers in those schools to create the current program which follows a spiraling curriculum that repeats the same virtues over a three-year cycle while introducing new saints each year. To all who have contributed time and talent to the creation of this program, we are deeply grateful.

This program is the fruit of grace and collaboration, and is offered free of charge to those who wish to use it in their home or school. It is our prayer that all who read it will be inspired to pattern their lives more faithfully on that of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May our lives radiate His virtues, so that others may come to know and believe in the life and love He offers freely! To that end, we offer this work to His glory through the patronage of Mary, our Mother, and Star of the New Evangelization.

~ The Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia Congregation

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For questions related to the *Virtues in Practice* program,
please contact the Office for the New Evangelization at neoffice@op-tn.org.



Eight centuries ago St. Dominic de Guzman, inspired by the Holy Spirit in response to the needs of his time, founded an Order with the mission of preaching for the salvation of souls. Dominic's love for God and neighbor continues to inspire the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia Congregation today, as they joyfully embrace the Church's call to the New Evangelization. Through their teaching apostolate, the Sisters serve over 16,000 students in 41 schools in the United States, Canada, Australia, Italy, and Scotland.

Act of Hope

O my God,
relying on Your almighty power
and infinite mercy and promises,
I hope to obtain pardon of my sins,
the help of Your grace,
and life everlasting,
through the merits of Jesus Christ,
my Lord and Redeemer.
Amen.