

## TWENTY FIRST SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2023

Today's gospel contains a question that is critical to our relationship with God. It defines our understanding of who God is for us and that question is one that Jesus asks Peter:

*"Who do you say that I am?"*

And, of course, this is critical question, isn't it? Because how each of us answers this questions determines our own biography, how each of us live as disciples of Jesus.

This weekend I would to explore this question first by looking at who Jesus was to the patron saint of this church. All biographies are from franciscanmedia.org.

(Include correct saint biography here.)

I hope you find the answer to the question: "Who do you say that I am?" for the saint of this church helpful. Ultimately, each of us must answer this question for ourselves. How will each of us answer this question? How will we live our lives? The answer will determine how we live our lives and be our visible sign to the world of who Jesus is. For me Jesus is is the one who loves me every moment of every day just as I am. Knowing I am a beloved son makes all things possible that God invites me to be and do in life.

(I have included a biography for all the saints who are patrons of the nine churches where mass is regularly celebrated in Corpus Christi parish.)

## **ST MONICA (Feast Day August 27)**

The circumstances of St. Monica's life could have made her a nagging wife, a bitter daughter-in-law, and a despairing parent, yet she did not give way to any of these temptations. Although she was a Christian, her parents gave her in marriage to a pagan, Patricius, who lived in her hometown of Tagaste in North Africa. Patricius had some redeeming features, but he had a violent temper and was licentious. Monica also had to bear with a cantankerous mother-in-law who lived in her home. Patricius criticized his wife because of her charity and piety, but always respected her. Monica's prayers and example finally won her husband and mother-in-law to Christianity. Her husband died in 371, one year after his baptism.

Monica had at least three children who survived infancy. The oldest, Augustine, is the most famous. At the time of his father's death, Augustine was 17 and a rhetoric student in Carthage. Monica was distressed to learn that her son had accepted the Manichean heresy—"all flesh is evil"—and was living an immoral life. For a while, she refused to let him eat or sleep in her house. Then one night she had a vision that assured her Augustine would return to the faith. From that time on, she stayed close to her son, praying and fasting for him. In fact she often stayed much closer than Augustine wanted.

When he was 29, Augustine decided to go to Rome to teach rhetoric. Monica was determined to go along. One night he told his mother that he was going to the dock to say goodbye to a friend. Instead he set sail for Rome. Monica was heartbroken when she learned of Augustine's trick, but she still followed him. She arrived in Rome only to find that he had left for Milan. Although travel was difficult, Monica pursued him to Milan.

In Milan, Augustine came under the influence of the bishop, St. Ambrose, who also became Monica's spiritual director. She accepted his advice in everything and had the humility to give up some practices that had become second nature to her. Monica became a leader of the devout women in Milan as she had been in Tagaste.

She continued her prayers for Augustine during his years of instruction. At Easter 387, St. Ambrose baptized Augustine and several of his friends. Soon after, his party left for Africa. Although no one else was aware of it, Monica knew her life was near the end. She told Augustine, "Son, nothing in this world now affords me delight. I do not know what there is now left for me to do or why I am still here, all my hopes in this world being now fulfilled." She became ill shortly after and suffered severely for nine days before her death.

Monica is a model of patience and trust in God. That is her answer to today's gospel question. Her long years of prayer, coupled with a strong, well-disciplined character, finally led to the conversion of her hot-tempered husband, her cantankerous mother-in-law and her brilliant but wayward son, Augustine.

Saint Monica is the Patron Saint of: Alcoholics, Conversion, Mothers, Wives

## **SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA (Feast Day June 13)**

The gospel call to leave everything and follow Christ was the rule of Saint Anthony of Padua's life. Over and over again, God called him to something new in his plan. Every time Anthony responded with renewed zeal and self-sacrificing to serve his Lord Jesus more completely.

His journey as the servant of God began as a very young man when he decided to join the Augustinians in Lisbon, giving up a future of wealth and power to be a servant of God. Later when the bodies of the first Franciscan martyrs went through the Portuguese city where he was stationed, he was again filled with an intense longing to be one of those closest to Jesus himself: those who die for the Good News.

So Anthony entered the Franciscan Order and set out to preach to the Moors. But an illness prevented him from achieving that goal. He went to Italy and was stationed in a small hermitage where he spent most of his time praying, reading the Scriptures and doing menial tasks. The call of God came again at an ordination where no one was prepared to speak. The humble and obedient Anthony hesitantly accepted the task. The years of searching for Jesus in prayer, of reading sacred Scripture and of serving him in poverty, chastity, and obedience had prepared Anthony to allow the Spirit to use his talents. Anthony's sermon was astounding to those who expected an unprepared speech and knew not the Spirit's power to give people words.

Recognized as a great man of prayer and a great Scripture and theology scholar, Anthony became the first friar to teach theology to the other friars. Soon he was called from that post to preach to the Albigensians in France, using his profound knowledge of Scripture and theology to convert and reassure those who had been misled by their denial of Christ's divinity and of the sacraments.

After he led the friars in northern Italy for three years, he made his headquarters in the city of Padua. He resumed his preaching and began writing sermon notes to help other preachers. In the spring of 1231 Anthony withdrew to a friary at Camposampiero where he had a sort of treehouse built as a hermitage. There he prayed and prepared for death.

On June 13, he became very ill and asked to be taken back to Padua, where he died after receiving the last sacraments. Anthony was canonized less than a year later and named a Doctor of the Church in 1946.

Anthony should be the patron of those who find their lives completely uprooted and set in a new and unexpected direction. His response to today's gospel question was to trust completely in God and turn his life completely over to Christ. God did with Anthony as God pleased—and what God pleased was a life of spiritual power and brilliance that still attracts admiration today. He whom popular devotion has nominated as finder of lost objects found himself by losing himself totally to the providence of God.

Saint Anthony of Padua is the Patron Saint of: Lost items, Poor, Travellers

## **SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGOURI (Feast Day August 1)**

Moral theology, the Second Vatican Council taught, should be more thoroughly nourished by Scripture, and show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world. Alphonsus, declared patron of moral theologians by Pius XII in 1950, would rejoice in that statement.

At the University of Naples, Alphonsus received a doctorate in both canon and civil law by acclamation, at the age of 16, but he soon gave up the practice of law for apostolic activity. He was ordained a priest, and concentrated his pastoral efforts on popular parish missions, hearing confessions, and forming Christian groups.

He founded the Redemptorist congregation in 1732. It was an association of priests and brothers living a common life, dedicated to the imitation of Christ, and working mainly in popular missions for peasants in rural areas. Almost as an omen of what was to come later, he found himself deserted after a while by all his original companions except one lay brother. But the congregation managed to survive and was formally approved 17 years later, though its troubles were not over.

Alphonsus' great pastoral reforms were in the pulpit and confessional—replacing the pompous oratory of the time with simplicity. His great fame as a writer has somewhat eclipsed the fact that for 26 years he traveled up and down the Kingdom of Naples preaching popular missions.

He was made bishop at age 66 after trying to reject the honour, and at once instituted a thorough reform of his diocese.

At 71, Alphonsus was afflicted with rheumatic pains which left incurable bending of his neck. Until it was straightened a little, the pressure of his chin caused a raw wound on his chest. He suffered a final 18 months of “dark night” scruples, fears, temptations against every article of faith and every virtue, interspersed with intervals of light and relief, when ecstasies were frequent.

Alphonsus is best known for his moral theology, but he also wrote well in the field of spiritual and dogmatic theology. His *Glories of Mary* is one of the great works on that subject, and his book *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* went through 40 editions in his lifetime, greatly influencing the practice of this devotion in the Church.

Saint Alphonsus was known above all as a practical man who dealt in the concrete rather than the abstract. His life is indeed a practical model for the everyday Christian who has difficulty recognizing the dignity of Christian life amid the swirl of problems, pain, misunderstanding and failure. Alphonsus suffered all these things. He is a saint because he was able to maintain an intimate sense of the presence of the suffering Christ through it all. That was his answer to today's gospel question.

Saint Alphonsus Liguori is the Patron Saint of: Theologians, Vocations