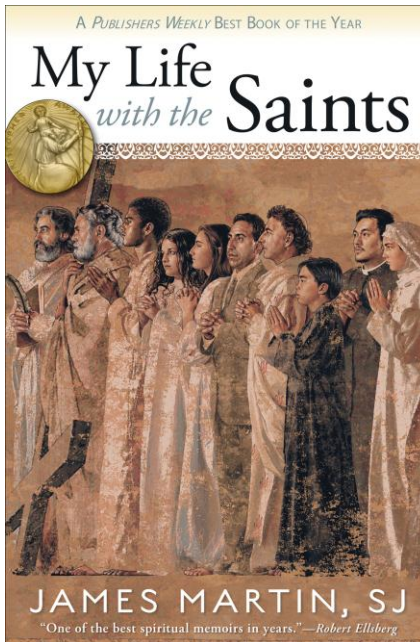


Nativity Spring 2011 Book Club
My Life with the Saints by Father James Martin, SJ
Wednesdays March 2, April 6 & May 4; 7-8:30pm in FLG Conf. Room

DISCUSSION GUIDE



Welcome! How wonderful that people are gathering to talk about the saints! Few things in the Christian tradition are as enjoyable, and I'm delighted that this book has brought you together to talk about those who are both our patrons and our companions. In the few years since this book has been published, I've been fortunate to speak to thousands of people about their experiences with the saints. And one thing stands out: The lives of these holy men and women help people feel enthusiastic about living out their faith. I hope that in your discussions of *My Life with the Saints* you will also be inspired to think about God more deeply, to ponder what each saint's life has to say to you, and to meditate on the ways that you are called to be holy. So together let's pray that the whole communion of saints, the great "cloud of witnesses" who have gone before us, will accompany us as we journey toward God today, tomorrow, and for the rest of our lives.

Peace, Jim Martin, SJ



Session 1: Chapters 1–5 (Joan of Arc–Ignatius of Loyola)

PRAYER: St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Dear Lord, in the world of souls, which is your garden, you created great souls comparable to lilies and roses, but smaller ones as well. These must be content to be daisies or violets destined to give joy to God's glances when He looks down at His feet. May I understand that perfection consists in doing your will, in being what you will me to be. Help me to know your will for me. Amen.

Discussion

1. The first saint mentioned in this book is Jude. Who was the first saint to whom you felt drawn? How did you "meet" him or her? If you've been unfamiliar with the saints until now, which person in *My Life with the Saints* have you found most appealing so far?
2. What purpose might the saints serve in our lives?
3. Joan of Arc stayed true to her decision to follow God even in the midst of persecution. Have there been times when your faith put you in conflict with others? How did you deal with this?
4. Joan's willingness to be a "fool for Christ" is her primary appeal for many. What does being a "fool for Christ" mean to you?
5. We sometimes think the saints were naturally holy and believed without question, but Thérèse endured a time of darkness in her spiritual life that shook her confidence in heaven and the afterlife. When has your faith wavered in your life?
6. "She is the one who most understands what it means to be a human being who suffers and rejoices in everyday life," Martin writes of Thérèse. Can you describe the "Little Way," her path to holiness? In what "little ways" might you offer your suffering to God?
7. "We cannot be ourselves unless we know ourselves. But self-knowledge is impossible when thoughtless and automatic activity keeps our soul in confusion," Thomas Merton wrote in *No Man Is an Island*. What are some creative ways to incorporate reflection into our sometimes "thoughtless and automatic activity"?
8. Like even the holiest of persons, Thomas Merton was not perfect, and, like many saints, he could be disagreeable at times. Do you think imperfections make a saint less likeable or more accessible?
9. Feeling gratitude for God's creative action in our lives is a key concept in Ignatian spirituality. Think back over your day. What one thing, person, or event touched you today for which you are most grateful?

10. The spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola can be summed up as “finding God in all things.” Where in your everyday life might you experience God, if you were to look?

11. Balancing activity with prayer is a constant challenge. Do you have a habit of prayer? When and where do you like to pray?

Love in Action: Prayer. What are your prayer habits? If you don't have the habit of daily prayer, start with a few minutes each morning. Consider a new source of inspiration—perhaps the Internet (see the 3-Minute Retreat at www.findinggod.org) or a book of daily reflections. Be faithful to this commitment until our next gathering

Session 2: Chapters 6–11 (Pedro Arrupe–Peter)

PRAYER: Blessed Teresa of Calcutta

The fruit of SILENCE is Prayer.

The fruit of PRAYER is Faith.

The fruit of FAITH is Love.

The fruit of LOVE is Service.

The fruit of SERVICE is Peace.

May God lead us into silence,

So that all else may follow. Amen

Discussion

1. In the 1960s and 1970s, Pedro Arrupe challenged the Jesuits to promote “the faith that does justice.” Where does work with the poor on behalf of justice fit into your faith?

2. Humility, obedience, and surrender marked Arrupe's work. When have you found yourself faced with no choice but to submit to authority and relinquish control? How did it feel? What is the interaction between surrender and faith?

3. “The Virgin's messages were simple and sensible: penance, prayer, pilgrimage,” Martin writes of the Virgin Mary's appearances to Bernadette. What is the purpose of a pilgrimage? Have you ever participated in one? Can you describe the experience?

4. In upholding the dignity of each individual, Mother Teresa taught us what is possible between humans. What most struck you about her approach?

5. Were you surprised by Mother Teresa's "dark night"? Have you ever experienced something similar? She eventually understood her desolation as a way of identifying with Jesus. How did you deal with your desolation?

6. "In the developed countries there is a poverty of intimacy, a poverty of spirit," Mother Teresa said. Do you agree? Why or why not?

7. According to Roncalli—Pope John XXIII—why was there a need for the Second Vatican Council? What was his vision of the church?

8. "Everything, even human differences, leads to the greater good of the church," John XXIII said at a gathering of bishops from around the world. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

9. Pope John XXIII was a joyful person with a good sense of humor. Do laughter and playfulness play a part in your spiritual life? How might humor lead people closer to God?

10. Chastity and celibacy are two different things, as Martin points out beginning on page 197. Describe the differences. What is the central aim of both chastity and celibacy?

11. Dorothy Day had an unswerving commitment to nonviolence. What do you feel is the root cause of the culture of violence in our world today? Do you believe you could help effect change in that culture? How?

12. What was it about the Catholic worldview that appealed to Dorothy Day?

13. Do you think it's true that Jesus chose Peter as an apostle as much for his weakness as for his strengths? Are there ways that your weaknesses have moved you closer to God?

14. Does the story of Peter give you comfort or challenge you? What aspect of his experience impresses you most?

Love in Action: Charity Pray about the poor, then plan to volunteer at a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter, or another facility.

Session 3: Chapters 12-18 (Thomas Aquinas-Conclusion)

Prayer: Mary of Nazareth

My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.

For behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.

And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree.

He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent empty away.

He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy;

As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His posterity forever.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Discussion

1. Do you respond better to intellectual reasoning or to firsthand experiences in learning about your faith? Is this true when you learn about other topics?
2. Thomas Aquinas understood that faith and reason are complementary. In what ways do you find that the two reinforce each other?
3. Martin's associate Brother Bill is described as a quirky individual with a radical experience of his call from God. One could say much the same about Francis. What one characteristic of Brother Bill and/or Francis do you admire most? Why?
4. Sister Luise's unflagging energy in her work on behalf of refugees in Kenya impressed Martin. What was the source of her energy? Where have you seen evidence of the power of prayer in your life or felt its absence?
5. Like many saints, Francis of Assisi challenged us to live more simply. What role does a simple lifestyle play in your spiritual life?
6. Have you met any saints in your life? What made those individuals holy in your eyes? How have they influenced you?
7. On pages 309 and 310, Martin calls to mind the struggles and sacrifices that so many people endure in private. What examples of "hidden lives of love and service," like that of Joseph, have you glimpsed among your acquaintances?

8. We know very little about Joseph from Scripture, but we assume that he must have been an integral part of Jesus' life and training. What role does a parent play in forming a child's image of God?
9. What parallels do you see in today's world to the devotion, faith, and surrender of the Ugandan martyrs?
10. Some saints, like Aloysius Gonzaga, followed religious practices that can seem foreign or even repellent to us. Does this make it more difficult for you to appreciate their lives? Do you know anyone personally who adheres to strict religious practices today? Do you admire people who do so? Why or why not?
11. Which image of Mary presented by Martin speaks most to you: first disciple, prophetic voice, contemplative, or resourceful young woman? Why?
12. Mary, by saying yes, brought Christ into the world. How can you bring Christ into the world?
13. One of the underlying themes of *My Life with the Saints* is Thomas Merton's adage, "For me to be a saint means to be myself." How could Merton's insight be applied to your life?
14. Martin believes the saints should be appreciated for who they are, not simply for what they do. What is the greatest lesson you learned from the saints? How can they be a bigger part of your life?
15. What did Mother Teresa mean when she said, "Find your own Calcutta"?

Love in Action: Conversion. Has your heart been changed by reading Martin's spiritual memoir? How will you, as the saints did, put God's love into action? Decide on one action you will make a continuing part of your life.