

THE STRUGGLE OF SAINTS

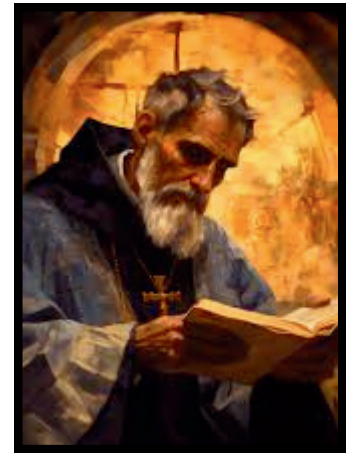
The Saints (canonized and uncanonized) have the great ability to understand their limitations and brokenness as human beings and therefor the need to surrender to God.

Below is a list of Saints who have experienced and worked through many of the struggles we may face today. Call on them to intercede on your behalf.

Anxiety & Depression

St. Augustine

After his mother died, and during the 40 years that followed, Augustine's powerful personality would manifest itself frequently in a propensity to implacable anger and severe depression. He lifted himself up from those abysses by means of prayer, sacrifice, and work. Keeping himself busy with healthy activities was a great remedy, both in his many responsibilities as a bishop and in his many hours of reflection, study, and prayer that transformed him into a great defender of Church doctrine. Saint Augustine made a choice to allow his depression and inordinate anger to lead down the path to a deeper understanding of himself and his reliance upon God. Though he continued to struggle long after his conversion, he did not give into the temptations to believing he was not worthy of Gods love and to being a great member of the Body of Christ.



St. Augustine of Hippo

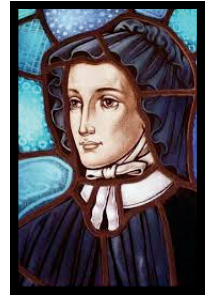


St. Ignatius of Loyola

He suffered from anxious scrupulosity and perfectionism. He would fall into a state of great unrest, irritability, discomfort, insecurity regarding himself and his own decisions - frightening doubts, great depression and difficulty persevering in good intentions. Deep depressions befell him when he fell short of perfection. So severe he even considered suicide! He allowed this suffering to turn into insight and light regarding his reliance upon God, not himself, for strength. He made a choice to learn from his struggles which fueled a wonderful dialogue with God. He ended up writing one of the greatest books on Catholic meditation.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

She suffered from a constant feeling of loneliness and melancholy, so profound that she thought several times of suicide. She faced many problems during her life, especially regarding her family; her beloved husband died young. In financial ruin when she converted to the Catholic faith, many of her family and friends rejected her. Reading, music, and the sea helped her feel happier. After her conversion, the Eucharist and charity became her source of daily strength. She used her depression as an avenue to a deeper connection with God, herself, and others.



St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Julian of Norwich

She was a lay Christian Mystic, who received many visions from God throughout her life. She struggled in her life with visions that gave her great anxiety and was tempted to believing that her anxious feelings were a sign that she was not Holy or close to God. She was able to recognize this faulty thinking and the pitfalls of using emotions/feelings as an indicator of her journey on in the spiritual life. In our modern day lives we also can fall prey to feelings that “we are bad,” that something is wrong with us, or that we are not close to God because we have anxiety. Let us take strength from Julian of Norwich’s example that feelings are not facts - that our love of Christ goes far deeper!



St. John Maria Vianney

Despite all the good he did, he couldn’t manage to see his own relevance before God, and lived constantly with an intense inferiority complex, considering himself to be useless—a symptom of depression which would accompany him throughout his entire life. During times of difficulty, he would turn to the Lord and, despite his suffering, would renew his determination to persevere in his work with trust, faith, and love for God and neighbor. Many of us today struggle today with a faulty belief that we do not measure up to others and that our faith is irrelevant. St John Vianny is a great example of how we need to respond to such faulty beliefs - By accepting that these beliefs are faulty and having as much faith, hope, and love as we can.

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

Edith suffered intense depression, starting before her conversion, principally on the many occasions when she was scorned and humiliated because she was of Jewish origin and a woman. An intellectual, a philosopher, a disciple and assistant of renowned philosopher Edmund Husserl (founder of the philosophical school of phenomenology), she finally found in God the Truth she sought so earnestly, thanks to reading the works of St. Teresa of Jesus. She then embraced God's grace with such totality that it gave her the strength to deal not only with her intense interior sufferings, but also with the deadly darkness of Nazism. She is an example of someone who persevered through the scorn of others and doubt to find the truth. She could have easily given into the prejudice against her or used it as an excuse to stay stuck, but she made a conscious choice not to. This is a great example of looking beyond the short term feelings to make choices rooted in the truth!

ADDICTION AND CO-DEPENDENCY

St. Jane Francis de Chantal

After St. Jane's husband died, her and her three children were forced to live with her dysfunctional father-in-law. There was much chaos and as a result she struggled with depressed and anxious moods. She chose to respond to these feelings and her father-in-law's cruelty with a strength of charity and compassion. Do not mistake this with "being a door mat." For she stood straight up to her father-in-law with an interior focus on God as her source of strength. This is not to say that she was not frustrated, discouraged, and even doubted God during this period of time, but that she answered these sentiments with love and surrender to God.





Venerable Matt Talbot

The Venerable Matt Talbot

He was a severe alcoholic for nearly 15 years. Then one day he was inspired to take a pledge to not drink for three months. He struggled mightily during this time. Everyday on his way home from work he avoid the places he used to drink, instead going to a church on his way home from work. He turned this three months into 41 years! Matt supported his sobriety with traditional Catholic disciplines such as prayer, frequent communion, weekly confession, spiritual reading, fasting, and service. He also seems to have taken guidance from a wise spiritual director. Eventually Matt found community support by joining the Franciscan Third Order. Let us take example from Matt that know matter how far the scale we seem to have fallen, we can still choose the next right thing!

St. Mark Ji Tianxiang

He struggled with an Opiate addiction until the day he died. He never even recovered from his addiction - so why is he a Saint you may ask? Though he struggled with his addiction, he kept trying and praying to recover. He remained faithful to the Church and Gods Mercy even in the face of being banned from taking the Eucharist and chastisement from the community around him. Many addicts have a tremendous amount of toxic shame which tells them they don't deserve Gods mercy and should just leave the Church. St. Mark could have easily taken this route, but chose not to despite his struggles. Even when he was given a chance to avoid execution if he renounced his faith, he refused and died singing the Litany of Mary. Unfortunately many of us do face judgment and alienation from other church members do to our struggles and imperfections. This Saint is a great example of how important it is to look past the sinful chastisements of fellow church members and realize they, like us, are simply fallen human persons and that their behavior comes from their own fear and lack of faith, hope, and love. He is an example to struggling addicts everywhere!

WORKPLACE CONFLICT

St. Noel Chabanel

As a missionary and wanting to have empathy for those he was a missionary to, St. Noel found himself in a situation where he was consistently irritated and judgmental of those he was helping. This caused him to feel suffocated. He did not want to feel this way toward those he worked with and helped, but he did. This is a workplace issue many of us face in today's world. The question is not whether we have this struggle, but how we respond to it. An example to all of us, St. Noel responded to it by making a vow never to abandon his mission. He persevered in prayer for God to show him how to love those he struggles to love and vowed to remain faithful to his mission. This is not to say if we struggle in the workplace we should always stay in our present situation, but that things like irritation with co-workers can be worked through or at least attempted. That by accepting that which bothers us in others, we can come to a greater acceptance and of love of God and our authentic selves - and in turn, others.



St. Noel Chabanel

St. Walter of Pontoise

Walter was appointed Abbot of a Monastery - a position he did not desire. On top of this the monastery was corrupt and discipline was severely lacking. The stress of the situation overwhelmed St. Walter. At first, he struggled with how he responded to the workplace stress, as he actually tried to flee the situation many times. But after a period of time he learned that it was an opportunity to devote himself to more prayer so as to obtain the strength to persevere in this situation and fighting the corruption. Often in our modern workplaces we may get frustrated with a lack of morals with the Company we work for or employees we work with. Let us take strength from the example of St. Walter to let us uncover the hidden opportunities to increase our faith, hope, and love of God and that of others in our own workplace situations. We can turn the struggle into a devoted strength to stand firm in the truth!

FAMILY STRUGGLES



St. Eugene de Mazenod

St. Eugene de Mazenod

Grew up with parents who fought constantly amid interference from his grandmother and a neurotic maternal aunt, who never let his father forget that they brought the money to the family. His parents' eventual divorce – very unusual for the late 18th century – and exile from the French Revolution. This left him mostly on his own growing up amid the idle rich. He had a mystical experience at the foot of a cross on Good Friday 1807, became a priest, ministered to the sick, prisoners, the poor and the overlooked young, and went on to found the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. St. Eugene had a serious lack of guidance growing up. He made a choice to fill this void with surrender to and devotion to the Lord. Let this be an example to us who had tumultuous childhoods that we can make a choice to fill the void with healthy things.

St. Clare of and Agnes of Assisi

St. Clare's parents thought in more secular ways and thus insisted that she marry, despite her having felt a calling from God to serve as a Religious. Like many in that day her parents' intent in having her marry was partially for financial reasons. When Clare wanted to devote herself to God, she was forced to flee her father's house and take refuge in the Benedictine Convent. St Francis of Assisi helped to conceal her. Clare clung tightly to the altar as her uncle tried to force her to come home. Clare's sister Agnes fled to the convent shortly thereafter due to the dysfunctional dynamics in her relationship with her father due to his anger and rage. Both sisters chose to put serving the Lord and living with healthy relational dynamics above family ties. The reality is that many of our families have dysfunctional dynamics. This does not mean we have to stop loving them, but we certainly must set appropriate boundaries to protect our own growth in healthy relationship with Christ and others. Let us take strength from the two sisters and St Francis of Assisi who assisted them in fleeing the family dysfunction.



St. Clare of Assisi

ABUSE AND TRAUMA

St. Dymphna



St. Dymphna

When she was 11 years old her Father became widowed and began making sexual advances toward her. She was steadfast in her refusal saying that “It is not what God wants.” After many times being refused, her Father (attempted abuser) in a fit of rage stabbed her many times. On her death bed she forgave him and felt sorry for him that he was so very troubled. Her actions of refusal flowed from a strong inner conviction of what was right and that she didn’t deserve to be treated that way. This is an important example as many abuse victims believe they deserve no better than the abuse they receive. The act of forgiveness flowed from her strength in relationship with God, not from condoning of his actions or a weakness. She is a great example of finding our inner strength and guidance from God in the midst and after abuse. This is important as many abuse victims tend to blame themselves in some way.

St Agatha

Agatha was a consecrated virgin who often had to fight off unwelcome advances from men who sought to marry her. One such man she refused turned her over to the judge for being a Christian- he was the judge. He sentenced her to a month in a brothel with the intent of forcing her to lose her virtue, but she didn’t. Then he had her tortured and left without food or medical care, but the Lord healed her. During this time, she saw a vision of St. Peter who healed her wounds in four days. Unfortunately, after this, the judge then had her breasts cut off and rolled her naked over hot coals. Despite this, she made a conscious choice to consecrate herself to the Lord and along the way made many choices to remain faithful to the dignity of this decision. Even though St. Agatha was put into tough exterior situations, within her heart she remained faithful to her own dignity and Christ. Let us learn from the example of not giving into the manipulative advances of authority figures and finding strength in Christ in order to do so.



St. Agatha

BIPOLAR DISORDER/OCD/ANXIETY



St. Theresa of Lisieux)

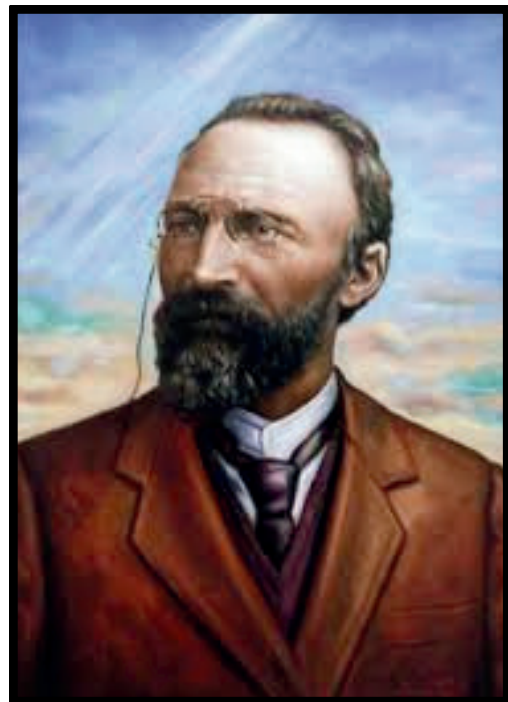
St. Theresa of Lisieux (The little flower)

She suffered from tremendous anxiety, a wide range of emotions, social anxiety, separation anxiety and scrupulosity plagued her during her youth. We often do not think of this famous and very popular Saint in this light, but it is true. This little Saint used the issues she struggled with as a means to connecting in a deeper and more profound way to our Lord and Savior. It also shows the importance to be very careful with mental illness labels and not judging people that have them, as being “less than” or “those people.” These judgments are highly toxic and serve no good end.

CAUGHT UP IN THE OCCULT

Blessed Bartolo Longo

Raised in a devout Catholic family, Bartolo Longo prayed the Rosary every night with his family. Yet, like many young Catholics today, he strayed from his faith during his college years. He became interested in the occult, going so far as to become a satanic priest. Bartolo’s family and friends continued to pray for him and finally convinced him to return to his faith. To make amends for his sinful lifestyle, he became a Dominican tertiary and helped college students learn about the evils of the occult and how to avoid it. He built orphanages, schools and other charitable institutions. He was also commissioned to build the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary in Pompeii, which still stands today.



Blessed Bartolo Longo

ANGER MANAGEMENT

St. Jerome

Jerome was somewhat of an out of control youth. He left his parents to study at the age of 12, where he was not a Christian and engaged in many sexual relationships with women. Jerome converted to Christianity and then became a priest after a friend influenced him positively. Jerome had an abrasive personality and was one to be easily upset, as he had trouble controlling his anger. As a result he had many Christian and non-Christian enemies who attempted to oust him of his position. Jerome is known to have felt a fair amount of remorse for when he did lose his temper leading him to repent of his outbursts and to make amends to those he offended. Jerome is an example that we can still be saints even though we have a temper and even a hard time getting along with others. This teaches us that Sainthood is not necessarily about “being nice” and getting every ones approval.



St. Francis de Sales

St Francis de Sales struggled with anger when certain jokes were made about him. He, like many of us, had the fault of tending to take things personally. He battled his anger for over 19 years until he had it under control. He took the problem and learned as much as he could about himself and human nature. As a result he wrote Introduction to the Devout Life, which is one of the most popular books for guiding people through the spiritual journey! His goal in writing this book was to say that people from all walks of life, including being a soldier, tradesman, prince, or married can all work toward a devout life and become saints. He eventually became so meek, calm, and humble that he is know as the “gentleman saint.” This shows us that we can take our faults and use them as a guide to help others who struggle with similar things.



STRUGGLED WITH DOUBT

St. Theresa of Calcutta

St. Theresa didn't feel the presence of God the last 15 years of her life and thus struggled with doubt. This is a quote from Mother Theresa herself: "Where is my faith? – even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness & darkness. – My God – how painful is this unknown pain. It pains without ceasing – I have no faith. – I dare not utter the words & thoughts that crowd in my heart - & make me suffer untold agony. So many unanswered questions live within me – I am afraid to uncover them – because of the blasphemy – If there be God, - please forgive me." Like many of us, she struggled with believing in God, the presence of God, and whether she had favor with God. What makes Theresa special is that she answered her doubt with humble surrender to God, which in turn allowed her to engage with Christ with greater intimacy than if she hadn't even had the initial doubt!



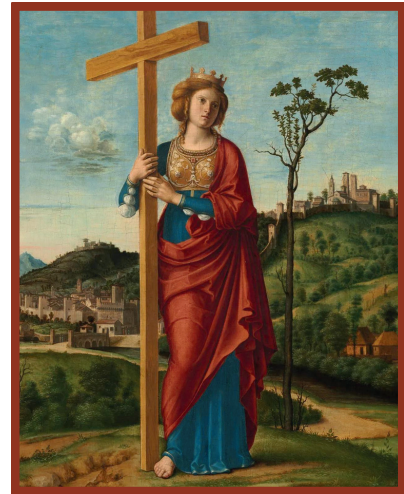
St. Paul of the Cross

St. Paul of the Cross struggled through a spiritual darkness for over 45 years. This is a direct quote from St. Paul: "I experienced interior desolation, depression and doubts. It seemed to me that I would never be able to persevere in my vocation. The devil suggested to me that I was deceived, but I could serve God in some other way, but this was no kind of life for me, etc, and other such things, but I pass over in silence. To crown my misfortune, all devotion had vanished. I felt dry, and was tried in every way. Even the sound of church bells disturbed me. Everyone seemed happy except me. I can never hope to explain these fierce assaults, and I was more strongly attacked by them. When I was about to be vested in the habit and to leave my poor home. " Even in the midst of such heavy doubts St. Paul was able to persevere and stay the course. He was able to work through his doubt, which allowed him to know himself, others, and God in more profound ways.

DIVORCE AND SINGLE PARENTING

Helena of Constantinople

She was the Mother of Emperor Constantine and married to Constantius Chlorus - he had called her his “soulmate.” Then Constantius got caught up in his rise up the political ladder and divorced her after 15 years of marriage for a more politically advantageous marriage. Her Son remained very close to her and his strong faith rubbed off on her. St. Helena was renowned for helping not only individuals, but entire communities through her works of charity. She often sought out to help the poor and destitute. She would visit churches and leave them with rich donations. St. Helena was a very devout servant of God, so much so that one would easily believe her to have been a follower of Jesus Christ from birth. Through her influence and work, Christianity continued to spread throughout the known world. She must have been devastated by the divorce, but through internal reflection and surrender to God's grace she made a new and fruitful life for herself.



St. Margaret of Cortona

For single moms, she became the mistress of a nobleman when she was a teenager. Margaret remained with the nobleman for ten years and even bore him a son, despite his refusal to marry her as she desired. When she returned home to her father's house with her son, her stepmother refused to let her stay. So she took refuge with the Church of Saint Francis in Cortona, eventually joining the Third Order of St. Francis - although her past led to resistance by some members of the order. When she was a part of the Third Order she could have let the shame she felt about her situation lead to leaving the Church, but she remained faithful realizing whoever was judging her harshly or shunning her, it was their own sinful problem. We see so many today wrongly judged by members of a Parish because of their past, which leads the person to throw away their whole Catholic faith, as if the Church itself condones this kind of harsh judgement. Like St. Margaret let us realize that once we make mistakes or go down an unhealthy path all we can do is be accountable, in a loving way, to ourselves, God, and Christ through the Sacrament of Penance and seek to amend our path through surrender to Christ. This is vital to breaking cycles of unhealthy behavior!