

FEAST DAY OF

The Holy Family

Every year, just after we celebrate Christmas, we honor the Holy Family of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. What makes this family holy? You might think because Jesus is the Son of God. But Fr. Leo John Dehon, founder of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, offers a different answer.

Fr. Dehon talks about the “hidden life” of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus at Nazareth, where the three of them lived together for about 30 years. Until that time, before Jesus began teaching in public, most people did not know him. What did this family do all that time that made them holy? They did things that every family does—working at a job, cleaning the house, cooking, eating, praying, and caring for each other—and they did everything with lots of love. Fr. Dehon believed that in these ordinary activities, even if they seem unimportant, is where we find holiness.

It’s possible that what we do with lots of love will be hidden from most people. We don’t grow close to God, or become holy, simply because others see what we do and tell us how good we are. Our families can be holy, just like the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, by trying our best to do everything with lots of love.



Cut paper image by Steve Erspamer, SM

**Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,
bless our families—parents, grandparents, and children—
and help us to be holy like you are holy.**

**Remind us to do everything,
even what seems boring or hard,
with lots of love.**

**We do not have perfect families,
but we want to make loving ones.**

**May our families be places
where you would feel at home.**

**Thanks for watching over us
and keeping our families in your care.**

Amen.

FEBRUARY 10th, FEAST DAY OF

St. Scholastica [6th Century AD]

Scholastica, and her twin brother, Benedict, came from a wealthy family in what is today the country of Italy. For as long as she could remember, Scholastica wanted to dedicate her life to God. Her brother, also, wished to dedicate his life to God, and after some positive and negative experiences trying to do so, he wrote a handbook for men and women now known as “The Rule of St. Benedict.” Each group of men or women would live together in a monastery, which Benedict described as “a home for those seeking God” and “a school for the Lord’s service.” They would fill their days with prayer, study, and work.

Scholastica gathered around herself a group of women who followed her brother’s Rule. Once a year she would get together with Benedict to visit and talk about God. By trying her best to learn what God wanted to say to her through prayer, study, and work, Scholastica lived up to her name, which means, “the studious woman.”

St. Scholastica inspires us to pray daily, study well, and work hard. She reminds us that dedicating ourselves to God and serving God’s people involves doing our best.



Cut paper image by Steve Erspamer, SM

**Jesus,
when you lived on earth
you taught us many things
by your word and example.
Like St. Scholastica,
we want to keep learning and practicing
what you taught.
Help us to do our best as we
pray daily, study well, and work hard.
Please bless our families,
our teachers, and our school.
Amen.**

MARCH 14th, the birthday of

Fr. Leo John Dehon, SCJ [1843-1925]

Fr. Leo John Dehon opened a Catholic school in the city where he ministered as a priest. He wanted to help children, “whom God loves so much and wishes to see treated with utmost respect” grow into “persons of heart, of sacrifice, and of commitment.” He wanted to prepare future leaders who, by practicing the Christian principles of justice and charity, would help fix the difficult problems that people face each day.

One of his former students remembered, “What we loved was to see Fr. Dehon mixing among us and finding out about our lives in a familiar way. We loved to talk with him. He put himself on our level and was interested in all of us.” Another former student said, “I have a particular affection for him because, although strict, he was good and just.”



Many parents and students knew him as an “unforgettable teacher,” who worked hard to help youth grow into adults. Even after they graduated, he kept in contact with them and encouraged them to keep trying to create a just and loving world that Jesus described as the reign of God.

The followers of Fr. Dehon, the Priests of the Sacred Heart [SCJ], also believe in helping children learn and grow to be their best. That’s why they sponsor this school and four others in the United States.

**Dear God,
who loves us so much,
help us to keep growing, learning, and loving.
Please help us to be our very best,
right now and in the future,
so that we can help you
make our world safe and beautiful.
Amen.**

April 29th, FEAST DAY OF

St. Catherine of Siena [1347-1380]

From an early age, Catherine wanted to be God's good friend. She chose not to marry, but lived in her family's home where she spent most of her time in quiet and prayer. She once explained that the more we know and understand God, the more we see that God is "mad with love" for us, and the more we want to love God in return.

So Catherine was a little confused when one day while praying she heard God tell her to serve the needs of her neighbors. If she did this, she thought, she would not have the time she wanted to be with God. Gradually, she came to understand that love of God and love of neighbor was the same love.

She began visiting the sick and comforting those who were dying. Then she began to visit prisoners. Many people joined her in this work. Many more listened to her preach about the dignity of each person, who was created and loved by God and redeemed by a loving Jesus.

In those days it was very unusual for a woman to preach, but she inspired people to love and serve each other. Today, the Catholic Church considers her an important teacher of the faith. From Catherine we can learn how much God loves us, and how much God wants us to love by helping people in need.



Cut paper image by Steve Erspamer, SM

**Dear God,
you created us and love us.
You sent Jesus to teach us
how important each one of us is to you.
We want to be your good friends
and show you how much we love you
by helping people in need.
Amen.**

MAY 1st, FEAST DAY OF

St. Joseph, the Worker

As a foster-father, Joseph provided for and protected the child Jesus. Joseph also taught Jesus the skills by which he earned a living. Most often, people think of St. Joseph as a carpenter, but as a skilled craftsman he would have been able to work with many materials, including stone.

It is possible that both Joseph and Jesus worked on a construction site, not far from Nazareth, that King Herod intended to become the new center of government for the area. As manual laborers, they used their hands to create something useful and beautiful—just like God, the Creator of our world.

St. Joseph is the patron of all people who work with their hands. He shows us by example that this work is honorable, creative, and a participation in the work of God.



*Statue in Our Lady of the Sioux Chapel,
St. Joseph's Indian School*

**Dear St. Joseph,
please remind us often
to thank God for the gift of our hands
that give us the ability
to write, to draw, to play sports,
to help with tasks around the house,
to plant vegetables and flowers,
and to help someone in need.
Please teach us
how to use our hands
to help Jesus create a beautiful world.
Amen.**

FEAST DAY OF

The Sacred Heart of Jesus

The many books of the Bible try to tell in different ways just how much God loves people. We read that God created plants and animals to make people happy. We learn that God saved people when they were in trouble and sent prophets to warn men and women when they were making mistakes. God's love never ends and God is always ready to forgive when people say they're sorry.

However, all of this was not enough for God, who decided to send Jesus, his only Son, to live among us. Now, in Jesus, we could see and hear and touch God in a way that was not possible before. Through his teachings and his miracles, Jesus showed that all people are deserving of respect and love. Some people, who wanted to be more important than others, were not happy with Jesus. To silence him, they put him to death.



This statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is in Sacred Heart Church in Walls, Mississippi

Soon after this sad experience, Jesus rose from death because God's love cannot die. One way to remember God's love is to think of Jesus' Heart filled with so much love for us that he was willing to give his life to prove it.

**Dear Jesus,
your Heart is filled with love for us.
You ask us to follow your example,
and learn how to love you,
love all people,
and love all creation.
We know that this is hard to do sometimes
but you show us that love
can overcome any difficulty.
In union with you,
we want to create a loving world.
Amen!**

AUGUST 28th, FEAST DAY OF **St. Augustine** [354—430 AD]

Just a few hundred years after the time of Jesus, Augustine was born in a Roman colony in northern Africa [present day Algeria]. In his autobiography, he admits that as a young boy, he studied only because his parents and teachers forced him to study and he seldom did his homework because he liked to play.

Later, he was thankful that he had good training and by the time he was 17 years old, he loved to learn and continued learning throughout his life. He became a teacher and a popular public speaker. Baptized at age 33, he loved God and people, and believed that we worship and serve God best by loving one another. Eventually, he became a bishop and an important teacher of the Christian faith.



Wood carving originally in Christ the King Chapel,
Divine Heart Seminary, Donaldson, Indiana

**Dear Jesus,
today we remember St. Augustine,
who didn't always like school
but was happy that what he learned
gave him the skills he needed for life.
As we begin a new school year,
help us to study well
even when we'd rather be playing,
so that we can grow
and be our best
all through our lives.
Thank you, Jesus.
Amen!**

SEPTEMBER 29th, FEAST DAY OF

St. Michael the Archangel

Both Jewish and Christian traditions depict Michael, the Archangel, as a soldier who protects God's people from all that is opposed to God's love and care [Daniel 12:1; 10:13, 21]. Fr. Dehon says, "St. Michael is the wonderful standard bearer of the Sacred Heart." The Book of Revelation tells the story of a battle in heaven between Michael, leading the good angels, and Satan, leading the rebellious angels [Revelation 12:7-10]. Michael wins the battle in heaven, but the battle on earth between good and evil continues.

When we do something that we know is wrong, we act as if we know more than God does or think we are better than God is. Michael, whose name in Hebrew means, "Who is like God?", reminds us that we are not God but that we can win the battle against evil if we are on God's side, listening to and obeying God. With Michael, the Archangel, to protect and help us, we can do our best to choose what is right, even when it is difficult, and to love Jesus and all his sisters and brothers.



Carved wood statue in Our Lady of the Sioux Chapel at St. Joseph's Indian School, Chamberlain, SD

**Jesus,
thank you for your love and care
and for St. Michael, the Archangel,
who protects us
and helps us choose what is right,
even when it is difficult.
When we all work together
and follow your commandments,
we help you create a world
where all people love each other
and there is peace.
Amen.**

OCTOBER 4th, FEAST DAY OF

St. Francis of Assisi [1182-1226]

St. Francis of Assisi read, studied, and prayed over the words of the Bible because this would help him become more like Jesus. Francis read about Jesus' simple birth in a cave, the sufferings of his passion and death, and how Jesus continues to live among us in the simple bread of the Eucharist. When he read that Jesus sent out his followers to preach the gospel, but told them not to take anything with them, not even money or extra clothes [Matthew 10:5-10], Francis knew that this is what Jesus wanted him to do with his life.

Because he lived a very simple life, he was able to notice all the gifts of creation. He saw people and animals, and even the sun, moon, wind, water, fire, and Earth as his sisters and brothers. He wrote a song about this, explaining, "For God's praise, I wish to compose a new hymn about the Lord's creatures, of which we make daily use, without which we cannot live, and with which the human race greatly offends its Creator." Today, we are trying to take better care of Earth and its resources. Although this can be hard to do, St. Francis will help us with his example.

Basswood sculpture of St. Francis by Herman Falke, SCJ



**We thank you, God,
for the simple and beautiful gifts
that remind us of your goodness.
Brother Sun brightens our days;
Sister Moon decorates our nights.
Brother Wind brings us every kind of weather.
Sister Water keeps us refreshed and happy.
Brother Fire warms us and provides energy.
Sister Mother Earth gives us food and flowers.
We praise you, God, for all your creatures
and we ask you to help us make sure
that everyone can enjoy them.
Amen.**

Adapted from St. Francis of Assisi's Cantic of the Creatures

All Creatures of Our God and King, tr. William H. Draper, and Cantic of the Sun, by Marty Haugen, are two musical settings of St. Francis of Assisi's Cantic of the Creatures.

NOVEMBER 11th, FEAST DAY OF

St. Martin of Tours [336-397 A.D.]

As a teenager, Martin was interested in becoming a Christian and entered a stage of preparation called the catechumenate. Not happy with this choice, his father had him drafted into the army against his will. Martin was 15 when he began serving with the Imperial Guard of the Roman Army. Stationed in northern France during a particularly cold winter, he saw a man begging and shivering. Since everyone else was ignoring the man, Martin decided to help. With little to offer, Martin divided his cloak with his sword and gave half to the beggar. That night, in a dream, Martin saw Jesus wearing that half piece of cloak and heard Jesus say, "Martin, still a catechumen, has covered me with this garment."



Cut paper image by Steve Erspamer, SM

Soon after, Martin chose to be baptized. He explained to his commanding officer, "Up to now, I have served you as a soldier. Now let me serve Christ. It is not lawful for me to fight." Accused of being a coward, he was put in prison for a short time. When discharged, he began to live as a monk and founded a monastic community. Many people recognized his holiness and insisted that he become their spiritual leader. As Bishop of Tours for 25 years, he visited every parish at least once a year and fought against the common practice of putting to death prisoners of war and those who disagreed with the Christian faith.

A simple man of peace, Martin served God by caring for people and defending their right to life. The example of St. Martin can encourage us to share what we have with those in need and to avoid fighting with those who don't like us.

**Jesus,
your friend, St. Martin,
reminds us that whatever kindness we do for others
we also do for you.
May his example help us
to share what we have with those in need
and to treat everyone,
even those who don't like us,
with respect.
Amen.**

DECEMBER 12th, FEAST DAY OF

Our Lady of Guadalupe

In 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed the Atlantic Ocean trying to find a new trading route to Asia. Instead, he landed in what we now call the Americas. More Europeans followed him, and most history books describe this as a time of discovery. Yet, these lands were a discovery only to Europeans. Peoples who lived on these lands for many centuries felt invaded.

In what is today Mexico, Spanish soldiers took advantage of the native people by destroying their way of life and stealing their natural resources. The Christian missionaries, who did not want to do any harm, sometimes made mistakes because they did not understand the native people. Although the missionaries did their best, most of the natives did not want to listen to them because Christianity came with the Spanish conquerors.

One day, a Christian Indian, named Juan Diego, was walking to church when he heard a voice calling his name. He saw a beautiful woman who identified herself as “the Virgin Mary, Mother of the true God.” She sent Juan to tell the bishop to build a church on the spot she was standing. Because Juan was an Indian, the bishop refused to believe him. Finally, as a sign that he was telling the truth, the Virgin Mary put her image on his clothing. When the bishop saw the image on December 12, 1531, he finally believed Juan.



Mosaic of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Houston

Today the image on Juan’s clothing is known as, “Our Lady of Guadalupe.” The image is important because it shows Mary as a native person, who spoke to Juan in his native language. To a people oppressed by a foreign power, Our Lady of Guadalupe represents an image of God, who wants to protect and love them. She reminds them that the Christian faith is open to all people. For this reason, Mexicans have a strong devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

**Jesus,
you give us the gift of your mother,
Our Lady of Guadalupe,
to show us that you live among us.
You are one of us, your speak our language,
and you know what makes us happy and what makes us sad.
May Our Lady of Guadalupe inspire us
to be concerned for all people and to help those who are most in need.
Amen.**