

LAY SAINTS

Models of Family Life

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JOAN CARROLL CRUZ

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*This book is
dedicated with love
to
The Holy Family*

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INTRODUCTION

A NATIONAL Catholic magazine polled a thousand of its readers to learn what they believe about the saints. The magazine reported that while news reports on the nation's Catholics have highlighted disagreements with traditional Church teachings, sixty-seven percent of the survey's respondents said they prayed to the saints as much, or more, than they did years ago. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents said they tried to imitate the lives of the saints.

Mentioned as the four favorite saints were the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Thérèse of Lisieux (the Little Flower). With the exception of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, who are in a unique category, we are left with a Franciscan brother and a Discalced Carmelite cloistered nun. While we can admire the virtues of St. Francis and St. Thérèse, the lifestyles of these two saints, and other saints of religious orders, are far removed, to say the least, from those of lay people.

Although the exact number of canonized saints is unknown, we know, of course, that the greater majority have been members of religious orders. We love them, we admire them, we wish to imitate them. But how can a mother with

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small children, a wife with a difficult husband, a young bride with in-law problems—how can they really relate to the nun who lived in the quiet of a cloister, the nun who lived in a community where everyone shared the work of the house? How can they relate to the saints of religious orders whose lives were arranged in an orderly manner and who had designated times for quiet prayer and who had little or no financial problems?

One might wonder whether these saints of the cloister would have merited their titles if they had remained in the world to face the conflicts and dangers confronted by ordinary lay people.

It is profitable, of course, for lay people to love these saints, to pray to them and to imitate their virtues as much as they are able. But it seems that lay people would draw more encouragement to advance in prayer and virtue and would derive more consolation in their trials by examining the troubles and temptations of those saints who lived and died as lay members of the Church.

St. Teresa of Ávila suggests that “we need to cultivate and think upon, and seek the companionship of those saints who, though living on earth like ourselves, have accomplished such great deeds for God.” In these four volumes, then, are the lives of lay saints who have, so to speak, “lived on earth like ourselves.” Represented here are single men and women, mothers and fathers, soldiers and servants, doctors and lawyers, the humble and the noble—all who have met the difficulties and challenges of the secular life and triumphed over them.

Their virtues are to be admired, but most of all imitated. May we benefit from their example and from their prayers.

—Joan Carroll Cruz

PREFACE

A WORD ABOUT THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

A BOOK about lay saints would be incomplete without mentioning the preeminent model for lay people, the Blessed Mother. But what could be said here that has not been mentioned about her already in numerous biographies and devotional works? We have only to delve into these to find a solicitous and understanding mother, a kindly and generous friend, a consoling companion, and a ready and willing intercessor with God.

Although it is known that Mary was free from sin, full of grace, blessed among women and the fairest honor of our race, yet she was not exempt from countless trials and hardships. She, who was the model of saints throughout the ages, should be the particular ideal of lay people, since Mary was an exemplary member of our lay ranks. She was, of course, a young bride, a young mother, a housekeeper, and a widow. . . .

May this Immaculate Mother pray for us, that in our imitation of the saints, we can advance in virtue and eventually join her and her sainted children in our heavenly homeland.

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But if it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, you have your choice: choose this day that which pleaseth you, whom you would rather serve, whether the gods which your fathers served in Mesopotamia, or the gods of the Amorrites, in whose land you dwell: but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord.

—Joshua 24:15

HUSBANDS, WIVES,
AND PARENTS

ONE

SAINT ADALBALD OF OSTREVANT

D. 650

AS THE son of a distinguished family, Adalbald spent much of his time in the court of Dagobert I and Clovis II and may have been the Duke of Douai. An ideal Christian noble, he was a general favorite among the courtiers.

While on an expedition in Gascony, Adalbald became friends with a noble lord named Ernard, whose daughter, Rictrude, became Adalbald's bride. The wedding was performed with great pomp, but the union did not please certain members of the bride's family. Yet, in spite of a critical assessment of the groom by his in-laws and their dire predictions for the couple's future, the marriage proved to be a happy one. Early in their wedded life, the young couple became interested in performing works of mercy and spent time visiting the sick, relieving the poor, feeding the hungry, and converting prisoners.

Four children were born to them: a son, Mauront, and three daughters, Eusebia, Clotsind, and Adalsind. All four children imitated their parents in the ways of virtue and acts of charity.

In the year 650, sixteen years after his marriage, Adalbald

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was recalled to Gascony, never to return. When he reached the vicinity of Perigueux, he was attacked and killed by a number of his wife's vindictive relatives.

When news of her husband's death reached Rictrude, she was overcome with grief. Even so, she managed to obtain possession of her husband's body, which was buried with honor.

Following Adalbald's death and after her children were grown, Rictrude entered the double monastery for men and women at Marchiennes, which she had previously founded. This monastery was so arranged that the living accommodations and prayer areas were entirely separate. Only the chapel was shared, but even this was divided into sections. Accompanying Rictrude into the monastery were her two younger daughters, Adalsind and Clotsind, as well as her only son, Mauront, who left the world and the Frankish court to receive the tonsure in his mother's presence.

Following Rictrude's death, Clotsind succeeded her mother as abbess of the monastery. The third daughter, Eusebia, entered the monastery of Haimage, which had been founded by her great-grandmother, St. Gertrude of Haimage.

The remains of St. Adalbald rested in the Monastery of St. Amandes-Eaux in Elanone (Elnon), France, but afterward his head was taken to Douai. This we learn from an ancient manuscript of the Church of St. Ame, where there was, at one time, a magnificent chapel dedicated to Sts. Adalbald, Rictrude and their son, St. Mauront. Exhibited there for public veneration were statues of the holy trio. That of St. Adalbald was draped in a robe covered with lilies; St. Rictrude's statue was clothed in a Benedictine habit and held a miniature replica of the Abbey of Marchiennes in her hand;

SAINT ADALBALD OF OSTREVANT

and St. Mauront was represented with a sceptre in his right hand and towers in his left.

The whole family—father, mother, three daughters and one son—are honored as saints of the Church. Also included in this holy gathering are Adalbold's grandmother, St. Gertrude of Haimage, and Rictrude's sister, St. Bertha, who after being widowed became a nun and the foundress of the Monastery of Blangy in Artois.

TWO

SAINT ADELAIDE

D. 999

THE history of St. Adelaide (Adelheid) is dominated by the tenth-century power struggle and intrigue of certain parties for control of the Kingdom of Italy. Adelaide was born into this struggle, being the daughter of Rudolph II, King of Burgundy, who was at war with Hugh of Provence for the Italian crown. In 933, the rivals reached a peace agreement which stipulated that Adelaide, the daughter of one rival, should marry Lothaire, the son of the other rival. Adelaide was then only two years old. Fourteen years later her brother, Conrad of Burgundy, arranged the marriage and thereby fulfilled the contract. This marriage produced one child, a daughter, who was named Emma.

As a result of this marriage, Adelaide's husband, Lothaire, was considered the King of Italy. However, Berengarius, the Marquis of Ivrea, came upon the scene and claimed the Kingdom of Italy for himself. When Lothaire suddenly died in 950, it was suspected that he had been poisoned by Berengarius, who succeeded him. Berengarius then attempted to force the widow Adelaide to marry his son, Adalbert. When she refused, Berengarius treated her with brutality and kept her in almost solitary confinement in the Castle of Garda.

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From there she was rescued by a priest named Martin, who is said to have dug a subterranean passage by which she escaped. Adelaide remained concealed in the woods until her friend Alberto Uzzo, the Duke of Canossa, heard of the rescue and conveyed her to his castle.

While this was taking place, the Italian nobles, having grown weary of Berengarius, invited Otto the Great of Germany to invade and seize the country for himself. Otto met little resistance and promptly defeated Berengarius. To consolidate his authority in Italy, Otto married Adelaide at Pavia in the year 951. Adelaide had been a widow for one year and was twenty years younger than Otto. Of Adelaide's second marriage, five children were born: Otto II, Henry, Bruno, and two daughters, who eventually became nuns.

Otto, it seems, had been married earlier to the daughter of Athelstan of England. Otto's son by this marriage, Rudolph, was jealous of the influence of his stepmother and her children and became a source of friction and rebellion. In spite of this, the German people accepted the gentle Adelaide and held her in the highest regard.

Berengarius once again instigated trouble in Italy, and when he finally invaded the Papal States, Pope John XII appealed to Otto for help. When Otto took his forces across the Alps, Berengarius retreated. In 962 Otto was crowned emperor at Rome. Little is related about Adelaide for the following ten years, until the death of Otto the Great in 973 and the succession of her son Otto II.

During the reign of her son, trouble once again brought Adelaide to prominence. Although Otto II had many worthy traits, he permitted his wife, Theophania, and other counselors

SAINT ADELAIDE

to turn him against his mother. Some suspect that the daughter-in-law resented Adelaide because of the saint's liberality to the poor. Because of the unpleasant atmosphere at court, Adelaide left and went to her brother, Conrad, at Vienna. She appealed to St. Majolus, Abbot of Cluny, to effect a reconciliation. This was eventually brought about at Pavia, with her son asking pardon on his knees for his unkindness.

Trouble once more shadowed Adelaide when Otto II died and left as his successor his son, Otto III, who was then an infant. The child's mother, Theophania, assumed the duties of regent. With her troublesome daughter-in-law in complete control and as yet unreconciled, Adelaide again left the court. When Theophania died suddenly in 991, Adelaide was recalled to serve as regent in her place.

Adelaide's administration was dependent upon the wise guidance of Adalbert of Magdeburg, St. Majolus, and St. Odilo of Cluny, who wrote about the saintly regent. These holy men reported that Adelaide was forgiving to her enemies and proved herself generous in her dealings. She founded and restored monasteries of monks and nuns, maintained a peaceful religious atmosphere at court, and was zealous in her attempts to convert the pagans of the northern and eastern frontiers.

When she was sixty-eight years of age, St. Adelaide died while on a journey to Burgundy to reconcile Rudolph III with his subjects. It was December 16, 999.

Although St. Adelaide is not mentioned in the *Roman Martyrology*, she is greatly revered in Germany, where her name appears on their calendars.