

DAYS WITH
MARRIED
SAINTS



A CATHOLIC COUPLES'
DEVOTIONAL

KENT AND CAITLIN LASNOSKI

THIRTY DAYS WITH MARRIED SAINTS

A CATHOLIC COUPLES' DEVOTIONAL

BY KENT AND CAITLIN LASNOSKI

FOREWORD BY JACKIE FRANCOIS ANGEL
AND BOBBY ANGEL



Library of Congress Control Number: 2019954621

CIP data is available.

ISBN 10: 0-8198-7556-2

ISBN 13: 978-0-8198-7556-3

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible, Revised Edition* © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C., and are used by permission of the copyright owner.

All excerpts from the English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for use in the United States of America, copyright © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc. — Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Used with permission.

Excerpts from papal and magisterium texts copyright © Libreria Editrice Vaticana. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Franz Jägerstätter, *Letters and Writings from Prison*, ed. Erna Putz, trans. Robert A Krieg (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2009). Reprinted with permission.

Cover design by Ryan McQuade

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

“P” and PAULINE are registered trademarks of the Daughters of St. Paul.

Copyright © 2021, Kent and Caitlin Lasnoski

Published by Pauline Books & Media, 50 Saint Pauls Avenue, Boston, MA 02130-3491

Printed in the U.S.A.

www.pauline.org

Pauline Books & Media is the publishing house of the Daughters of St. Paul, an international congregation of women religious serving the Church with the communications media.

This book is dedicated to the holy married saints whose lives shine light on our own marital path; to our parents and grandparents whose witness of faithful love inspires us; to all married couples fervently seeking after the Lord as they journey together toward heaven; and to our children, for whom we pray and hope to make visible the love of Christ for his bride the Church.

Contents

Foreword	xi
Introduction	1
About the Authors	7
All the Married Saints	
Day 1: Married Saints: A Brief History	11
The Holy Family	
Day 2: Joseph, a Just Man Who Listened to God	23
Day 3: Mary, Mother of Grace	31
Day 4: Extraordinary Family, Ordinary Problems	37
Blessed Luigi and Maria Corsini Beltrame Quattrocchi	
Day 5: The Beginning of a Journey	45
Day 6: Taking up the Cross	51
Day 7: Together with Christ	57
Saint Isidore and Blessed Maria de la Cabeza	
Day 8: Faithful Workers of God	65
Day 9: Spousal Trust	71

Saint Gianna Beretta Molla

- Day 10: Surprising Sanctity 79
Day 11: Living the Works of Mercy 85
Day 12: Abandonment to God's Will 91

Blessed Franz Jägerstätter

- Day 13: A Man of Conversion 101
Day 14: Principle in the Face of Peril 107
Day 15: Faithful Love in Letters 113

Saints Henry II and Cunegund: Royal Married Saints

- Day 16: Christ Enthroned 123

Blessed Gisela and Saint Stephen of Hungary

- Day 17: Evangelism by Example 133

Saint Elizabeth of Portugal

- Day 18: A Royal Peacemaker 141

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam

- Day 19: Faith in Action 149
Day 20: Voice of a Prophet 155
Day 21: Marriage for the Other 163

Saint Monica

- Day 22: A Steadfast Support 171
Day 23: Praying for Loved Ones 177
Day 24: The Beauty of Truth 183

Saints Basil the Elder and Emmelia

Day 25: Forming a Holy Family 191

Day 26: The Power of Friendship in Christ 197

Saints Louis and Zélie Martin

Day 27: An Unchosen Adventure 205

Day 28: Holy Examples 213

Day 29: Long-Suffering Trust 219

Conclusion

Day 30: Make Love Your Aim 227

Notes 233

Foreword

God cares about your love story.

Marriage is a great adventure and a noble responsibility for those of us called by God to live this vocation. Natural marriage is the union between a man and a woman who give their lives to each other until death do them part. For the Christian, however, marriage also has a supernatural dimension. Christian married love is a sacrament, a visible sign of God's love for his beloved, the Church, the people of God. Within your marriage, therefore, God is calling you to mirror his love on earth and to encourage one another to holiness to the point where you are both transformed and actually become *saints*.

Unfortunately, we don't often hear about the married saints. Many of us think that only priests, nuns, and monks are saints, or we are rightly intimidated by the

saintly life of the Holy Family: Mary, Joseph, and the God-man—Jesus himself. How could we *possibly* live up to that? Take heart. Drawing upon the humanly lived experiences of many of the married saints, including Mary and Joseph, this book will help you to see how your marriage can lead you to heaven.

The Second Vatican Council emphasized that everyone in the Church shares a universal call to holiness, which means that *all of us* are called to sanctity. What that looks like will vary radically depending on our personality, temperament, culture, and state in life. Some are called to teach, others to preach, and still others to serve. Through your marriage, you and your spouse can help bring healing to the world by the manner in which you love one another, encourage each other to holiness, and radiate that love to the world.

In the pages ahead, Cait and Kent Lasnoski pour out their love for the Lord and remind us of the beautiful dignity of the married vocation. In this book, you'll find great inspiration in the lives of the saintly men and women who have gone before us. These married saints, some of whom lived centuries ago and others much more recently, gave themselves to the Lord and bore much fruit for his kingdom. Their examples can convince you of the real possibility of glorifying God through the ups and downs of your married life. What's more,

this book can help you to establish a regular prayer routine with your spouse and to start putting the lessons of the saints into action.

Through every victory and season of struggle in your marriage, know that these women and men are interceding for you.

This book will bless you. Pass it on to others.

Live your marital love boldly!

JACKIE AND BOBBY ANGEL

Introduction

Take a moment to imagine you and your spouse in the not-too-distant future. You both have a bird's-eye view of a crowd of people, all of whom are edging forward to catch a glimpse of something. The sun shines brightly and the air is hot and heavy, but you are surrounded by a coolness. Below, tens of thousands of people cram together, but you don't feel constrained. You have been standing for hours without fatigue. In front of you towers a many-pillared basilica with a marble dome. Embracing the people as if they were the arms of God, two covered walkways curve around the square.

From a window in a building high above the crowd, a man dressed in white emerges. As he raises his arms, a hush falls over the crowded square. The man makes the Sign of the Cross and then begins to speak: "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Lk 18:8). He pauses for a moment and then continues:

Dear brothers and sisters! Dear families! Today we have gathered for the beatification of a married couple . . . With this solemn ecclesial act, we intend to highlight an example of a positive reply to Christ's question. [This couple lived in] a century in which faith in Christ was harshly tried, and [yet] gave a positive reply. Even in those difficult years, this [couple], *kept the lamp of the faith burning—a lumen Christi*—and passed it on [to their children]. . . . This couple *lived married love and service to life* in the light of the Gospel and with great human intensity. Drawing on the word of God and the witness of the saints, the blessed couple *lived an ordinary life in an extraordinary way*. Among the joys and anxieties of a normal family, they knew how to live an *extraordinarily rich spiritual life*.¹

As you may have already guessed, you are imagining the beatification ceremony for you and your spouse. The words above were taken from a homily Pope John Paul II gave at the beatification Mass for the first couple ever beatified together, Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi. One day, God willing, such a homily might be given for you! You may think this possibility highly unrealistic and perhaps it's true that you and your spouse may never be officially canonized. But that does not mean that you cannot become saints.

In the early Church, the word "saints" referred to all Christians whether living or asleep in Christ. As Chris-

tians, we are chosen, set apart by God the Father in the Spirit as members of Christ's own Body. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us through Baptism makes us sharers in God's own life. Baptism sets us apart as God himself is holy and set apart. The Christian is in this world but not of this world—and in this sense, every Christian is a saint! Over time, the Church began using the term "saint" to refer to people who were officially recognized for holiness and known to be enjoying perfect union with God in heaven—the heroes, pioneers, or exemplars of the faith. Often in these early years people were declared saints by popular acclaim. They were martyrs, miracle workers, cathedral builders, founders of religious orders, defenders of important doctrines, or mystics who experienced visions, revelations, or deep union with God. As time went on, the Church prudently centralized the process of canonizing saints and extended the possibility to a greater diversity of expressions of holiness.

Canonization is more accessible to the ordinary person today. Men and women are now generally canonized when they have lived a holy life of heroic virtue and miracles are confirmed through their intercession after their death. A modern canonized saint does not necessarily have to perform miracles while alive, write the next *Summa Theologiae*, or found a monastic order. Instead, canonized saints heroically live ordinary lives as they

strive to follow God's will. Of course, unless you and your spouse end up having a large impact on your local and universal church, official canonization is probably unlikely. Nevertheless, your marriage can be radically holy. A holy marriage simply involves cooperation with God's grace in life's everyday moments. Put this way, you and your spouse really can pursue great holiness in your marriage. And who knows, one day there really could be a beatification ceremony for both of you. With God's grace, anything is possible!

We hope that the vivid portraits of heroically virtuous spouses in this devotional's thirty days of reflections will inspire you and your spouse in this journey of sanctity. As you will discover, these married couples did not live picture-perfect lives. They all faced the weariness and trying times that come with every marriage. Many bravely bore the crosses of infertility, deaths of children, disease, false accusations, imprisonments, or unfaithful spouses. What characterizes them most is not merely their long-suffering in the face of evil but their joy in the good, true, and beautiful. The married saints passionately loved their spouses, delighted in their children, opened their homes to strangers, gave generously to others, and lived an intense piety. They also managed to find joy amid their day's equivalents of dirty diapers, dishes, laundry, cubicles, traffic, and office meetings.

They were the salt and light of the world and the presence of the risen Christ to those who met them (see Mt 5:13–16). Now from heaven these married saints continually intercede for the faithful’s intentions, including for *your* marriage. Through their example and prayers, may the married saints lead us to Christ!

About the Authors

Before setting sail, you deserve to know the couple that steers the ship. We are Cait and Kent, and we have been married fourteen years. We are blessed to be raising and educating eight children. Kent is the author of *Vocation to Virtue: Christian Marriage as a Consecrated Life* and has written several articles on the theology of marriage and holiness. For the last twelve years, we have designed and run marriage preparation and enrichment programs. We readily admit, however, that academic learning and professional experience does not necessarily lead to a good marriage or holy children. Though we understand our marriage to be like a bank that God uses to guide the stream of our lives toward union with him, we do not presume that our banks are strong enough to guide *you* to heaven. For this reason, we thought it would be safer (and, frankly, more exciting) to leave such a high

aim to the proven example of the married saints. We hope the beautiful brushstrokes of the married saints' lives will inspire you and your spouse to entrust the palette and canvas of your marriage evermore to God. May your marriage, with the help of God's grace, become the beautiful masterpiece that he has in mind for you and your spouse.

Let's imitate the married saints.

Let's be heroic in virtue.

Let's be saints!

All the Married Saints

DAY 1

Married Saints: A Brief History

Opening Prayer

A Litany of Married Saints

Lord, have mercy. *Lord, have mercy.*

Christ, have mercy. *Christ, have mercy.*

Lord, have mercy. *Lord, have mercy.*

Holy Mary, spouse of Saint Joseph,
pray for us.

Saint Joseph, husband of Mary,
pray for us.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us.

Holy Family of Bethlehem,
pray for us.

Holy Innocents,
pray for us.

Holy Family of Egypt,
pray for us.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
pray for us.

Sorrowful Mother, in our pain,
pray for us.

Saints Elizabeth and Zecharia, models of fidelity,
pray for us.

Saints Anna and Joachim, grandparents of Jesus,
pray for us.

Blessed Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, ex-
ample of Christian marriage,

pray for us.

Saints Isidore and Maria, protectors of farming
families,

pray for us.

Saint Gianna Beretta Molla, patroness of mothers
and the unborn,

pray for us.

Saint Margaret of Scotland, patroness of large
families,

pray for us.

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, model of hope,
pray for us.

Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, patroness of those
who suffer the loss of a child,
pray for us.

Saint Monica, who rejoiced in answered prayers,
pray for us.

Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, exemplars of
holy parents,
pray for us.

All you holy married saints,
pray for us.

All you defenders of the family,
pray for us.

When Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount he said, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48). That’s a tall order! What does this mean for married couples who are struggling to live holiness amid the ups and downs of everyday life? Today we’ll examine a variety of themes in the lives of the married saints. Hopefully, they will provide us with practical guidance so that we might emulate these holy couples and find holiness in our own marriages.

Interestingly, the married saints tied the knot for many reasons, not all of which included romantic love.

Many had their marriages arranged by their parents. Some entered into marriage despite a desire to remain unmarried and devote themselves entirely to God. Saint Zdislava of Lemberk, for instance, ran away to be a hermit at age seven but returned home and married in obedience to her parents. In contrast, Blessed Aleth of Dijon married at age fifteen despite her parents' ardent preference that she devote herself to religious life. Aleth had a very happy marriage and prayed that her children might enter religious life. Amazingly, all of them became priests or religious, including the great Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Other married saints believed they had a vocation to religious life but discerned that God's will was otherwise. Blessed Elizabeth Canori Mora, for instance, wanted to become a nun but discerned that her vocation was to married life.

Many of the married saints enjoyed harmonious, loving marriages. This is true even for some of the saints who married as an act of obedience. For example, Blessed Mary of Oignies' parents forced her to marry at age fourteen to counteract her growing piety and her desire to become a nun. Despite her parents' intentions, Mary continued to live for God, and she soon convinced her husband to turn their house into a hospice for lepers. Saint Elizabeth of Hungary was sent to the royal courts of her betrothed at four years old. She married her

husband, Ludwig IV, at age fourteen. Despite the arranged marriage, the couple was known for their great affection for one another. Her husband wrote, “Let people say what they will, but I say it clearly: Elizabeth is very dear to me, and I have nothing more precious on earth.”²² Another touching, if somewhat morbid, legendary story speaks to one saintly couple’s affection for one another. It is said that when Saint Hilarius’ wife, Saint Quieta, was buried alongside him, his arm reached up from his grave and pulled her to his heart.

Not all the married saints enjoyed harmonious relationships with their spouses. About one in ten had difficult, rocky marriages—some ending happily, others in tragedy and sadness. Saint Rita of Cascia prayed unceasingly for her unfaithful husband and eventually he repented and converted. Saint Joan of France suffered an exceptionally cruel fate at the hands of her husband, King Louis XII. When her husband was captured and imprisoned, Joan interceded to win his release. Louis later repaid her kindness by working the system to have their marriage annulled. Joan resisted but sadly accepted Rome’s final decision, going on to rule a portion of the kingdom by herself and to found a religious order. Saint Homobonus, upon discovering that he and his wife were infertile, began adopting abandoned children from the streets. His querulous wife gave him no end of trouble

until his patience won her over, and they worked as joyful partners to care for the orphans.

For many of the married saints, holiness was a team sport. Most saintly couples were both Christian when they married, though some had greater zeal than their spouses. Not every married saint had the support of his or her spouse. In fact, even with the support and prayers of a saintly wife or husband, some married saints had spouses who never converted. In other cases, through God's grace and fervent prayer, some spouses did eventually convert. For example, Blessed Jacopone da Todi's wife died during a public tournament when the stands collapsed. After her death, Jacopone realized that his wife had devoted herself to austere penances for the sake of his conversion. This realization helped him to change his sinful ways and dedicate his life to Christ.

The married saints were open to life, with an average of three children per couple. Like many married couples today, some saints struggled with infertility. The married saints also provide us with a much-overlooked witness, less common today, to the discerning use of sexual intimacy. Close to half of the married saints embraced periods of extended sexual abstinence during their marriages. Some abstained during certain liturgical seasons for penance and to focus on prayer, others for the sake of greater availability to do works of mercy. Even if we do not

directly imitate all the worthy practices of the married saints, they teach us that intentional use of one's sexuality is a part of a life of virtue. Inspired by the example of the married saints, couples today can join the sacrifice of times of abstinence to the Cross in prayer, (such as those related to natural family planning, sickness, absence, etc.).

As is probably obvious by now, if the married saints give us an example of anything, it's how to break the mold. For this reason, the married saints can be intimidating models for our marriages. These saints are not irenic, inspiring motivational speakers who simply say, "Keep doing what you're doing, just slightly better." Instead, saints overturn conventional marriage narratives. The way of radical holiness does not typically lead to a comfortable retirement, college funds, 2.5 kids, and generally accepted approaches to sexuality. Many of these saints raised children in times when half their offspring would likely die before adulthood. They also dedicated much of their lives to works of mercy. Inspired by the full force of the Gospel, the married saints' lives defy typical success narratives and social expectations.

Precisely because the married saints lived quite varied lives, all married couples can look to them for inspiration. The ways these couples responded to infertility can encourage us all to more radically embrace spiritual

fertility. By observing how these saints handled discordant spousal relationships—often with perseverance, forgiveness, prayer, patience, and especially courage—we too can make efforts in our own marriage to avoid the plague of divorce. We can also find inspiration to live more radical hospitality by observing how the married saints opened their homes to the less fortunate. Finally, though most of us do not have an arranged marriage, the married saints in these circumstances can still inspire us to embrace God’s plan for family’s life, even when it conflicts with our own personal plans. The details vary, but all of the married saints dedicated themselves completely to God and lived lives full of adventure, risk, sorrow, and joy. Such are the lives of the married saints. Such, we pray, may be our own.

All the married saints, pray for us!

Spiritual Practice

1. What stood out to you as the main differences between the lives of the married saints and those of other familiar, unmarried saints? Which details of the married saints’ lives surprised you?
2. As you read the reflection for today, did you hear God calling you to think differently about what holiness might mean for your marriage?

3. Commit to one way of thinking differently about God's call to holiness in your married life. Think of one or two practical ways that this might change your everyday decisions and perceptions.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we pray for the grace to hear God's call in our marriage and to follow your will more closely, wherever it may lead. Amen.