



My Life with the Saints

James Martin

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James Martin's *My Life with the Saints* is a stunning spiritual memoir that offers a glimpse into the lives of some of the Catholic Church's most noteworthy saints.

At turns hilarious and heart-wrenching, the memoir traces Martin's journey from being a nominal Catholic to becoming a Jesuit priest. These changes are marked by his initial encounters with saints who have influenced him in profound ways, from Jude to Thomas Merton, from Dorothy Day to Mary. With each saint occupying a chapter, the text becomes a delightful mix of Martin's own spiritual development with introductory histories of the focal saints.

Martin insists that saints should not be viewed as distant, mystical figures possessing superior and cold piety. He focuses instead on their humanity, in their own sympathetic weaknesses and struggles. This decision to emphasize the saints' humiliations and foibles contributes to a fuller understanding of their holiness, taking them out of the realm of mere icons and enabling the broader population of Christianity to identify with them. Although the text has a thoroughly Catholic flavor throughout, it is ecumenical in its sensibilities and should appeal to Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, and Orthodox readers alike.

These introductions are concise enough to enhance, rather than distract from, Martin's own stories. In an accessible voice, Martin invites his literary pilgrims to sit a while with contemplatives, to take to the streets with social activists, to inhabit the slums of Nairobi and Calcutta, and even to share in a few jokes with a pope. And for when a particular saint strikes audience interest, suggestions for deeper reading are provided. This veritable global and historical trek ultimately returns to meditating upon the centrality of Jesus in Christian life, and to highlighting the importance of individuals who discover their own unique calls to saintly lives.

My Life with the Saints marvelously translates stained glass and chiseled stone images into living hands and feet, laughter and tears, unconditional love, and martyrdom. It is a microcosmic mosaic of a catholic—that is, universal—church that is particularly appropriate for today.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (Fall 2016)

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