

SAINTS ALIVE! MARCH 3: SAINT KATHARINE DREXEL



After attending college in the Midwest, I moved to Philadelphia for one year because I wanted to live in the east before moving to the west. Philadelphia is the home of many universities including Drexel University, founded by the uncle of St. Katharine Drexel.

Katharine Drexel was a scion of a prominent Philadelphia family. The Drexel family was incredibly wealthy but they had listened to the call to distribute food, clothing and rent assistance. They did this from their family home, not occasionally but twice a week, meeting the neighbor directly in his or her need. If folks couldn't or wouldn't come to the Drexels for assistance, the family quietly sought them out.

Society today tends to denigrate the wealthy. The Catholic Church is not opposed to wealth; the sin is not in having wealth but how one amasses it. The sin is in having wealth that diverts our attention from God (you cannot worship both God and mammon). The sin is how one uses his or her wealth; ignoring the call to build the Kingdom of God here on earth. The Drexel family, modeling a fine example for their children, responded to the call.

While traveling to the West, Katharine was moved by the poverty of black and native Americans. Her first response was to donate money, a response very familiar to her.

In listing Drexel's legacy, the Vatican noted her courage and initiative in addressing social inequality among minorities and her selfless service for the victims of injustice. Her second response to the poverty of black and native Americans illustrates this: working to change racial attitudes in the United States. Not relying on money but on justice. She felt a compassionate urgency to help change racial attitudes in the United States.

Pope Benedict explains that to desire the *common good* – desiring the good of “all of us” for nothing more than for the people who belong to society – and strive towards it *is a requirement of justice and charity* ...The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them.

“Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI's words, ‘the minimum measure’ of it.” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 2009.)

He continues, “Every Christian is called to practice this charity. This is the institutional path — we might also call it the political path — of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbor directly.”

Katharine Drexel's charitable response was to seek justice by founding the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Black and Native American peoples. From the age of 33 until her death at the age of 96, Mother Katharine dedicated her fortune of 20 million dollars – in 1900 dollars! – to her work. She founded Xavier University, an all black college in New Orleans. She funded the building of schools and churches and paid the salaries of teachers in rural schools for blacks and Indians.

Katharine Drexel was canonized because of her lifelong dedication to her faith and her selfless service to the oppressed. She was a person of wealth who used her money and energy to build the Kingdom of God that Jesus began.

Let us offer a prayer to St. Katharine Drexel when we falter in our dedication to our faith and when we have ignored the oppressed.



ARCHDIOCESE
OF PORTLAND
IN OREGON

Office of Life, Justice, and Peace