Feasting for a family saint
Choosing and celebrating a patron saint for your family brings blessings and heavenly help

St. Bruno’s feast day is October 6, and while my husband has been passionately devoted to him for ages, this year our family will be celebrating St. Bruno as our family patron saint for the first time.

We plan to teach our children about St. Bruno’s life and work, read some of his writings and pray together. We will have a special meal, and the adults will partake in the yellow-green liqueur that was invented at and named for the famed French Carthusian monastery. We might even include some monastic chant, or watch videos pertaining to St. Bruno and the Grande Chartreuse. One thing is for certain — we will not eat in silence, as do the Carthusian monks. That seems to be virtually impossible in a large family!

We could also pattern our celebration on the Slava — a Serbian Orthodox tradition that celebrates and venerates the family patron saint. This custom began in the ninth century when the Serbians were newly converted from paganism to Christianity. Whichever saint’s feast day fell on the baptismal day of the family patriarch became the family patron saint. It’s a tradition passed down through generations to this day.

Because the Slava is celebrated as the anniversary of the family’s baptism into Christianity, it is a big celebration, with a feast at the family patriarch’s home attended by extended family and often friends. The Slava includes four essential items that are blessed by the priest at church or the home:

• special Slava bread (slavski kolac), representing Christ as the bread of life;
• wheat pudding (koljivo or zhito), pointing to Christ’s resurrection (see John 12:24) and commemorating departed family members;
• red wine, representing Christ’s blood;
• a lighted beeswax candle, reminding family members that Christ is the light of the world and his light must always be kept in their hearts and minds.

No matter how a family’s patronal feast day is celebrated, the goal remains the same: to honor the saint and better know him or her — to develop a relationship, a friendship, so that we might frequently call upon the family saint for assistance on the journey toward holiness and Christ. It’s a reminder to live out each day the reality that we are members of the communion of saints.

While in years past my family has informally recognized October 6 as one of our saints’ feast days, the more we read about St. Bruno’s work, his personality and way of life, we see he is perfectly suited to be our family’s patron saint. Our Bruno family history also contains a connection to him. In 1095, St. Bruno built another monastery — Serra San Bruno — in the Italian region of Calabria. My husband’s great-grandfather hailed from Calabria, born in the city of Paola. He served as an altar boy at the cathedral there until, at the age of 15, he stowed away on a ship bound for America.

I look forward to my family finding inspiration in St. Bruno’s works and teachings, to set our lives ever more firmly on Christ. I also look forward to the unity and strength our family will experience in jointly offering up our prayers of intercession to St. Bruno and receiving his aid. And we look forward to yet another feast to celebrate!

Stat crux dum volvitur orbis — the cross is steady while the world is turning (motto of the Carthusians).

Michelle Bruno is a member of Holy Spirit Parish in Kent. Contact her at VadeInPace1@outlook.com.

CHOOSEING A FAMILY PATRON SAINT
Here are a few ways you can choose a worthy connection to a patron saint:

• A family surname
• A family interest or passion: musicians — St. Cecilia; sailing — St. Nicholas; military or athletic family — St. Sebastian
• The patron saint of a family’s (or their ancestors’) country of origin
• A saint whose feast day coincides with the beginning of the family — the parents’ wedding day
• A parent’s confirmation saint
• A saint whose life circumstances, personality or mission you relate to or admire

• An already established patron saint of families, like St. Joseph, St. Francis of Assisi, or St. Maximilian Kolbe. St. Eugene of Mazenod is the patron of dysfunctional families, and St. Margaret of Scotland is one of many patron saints of large families.

A CATHOLIC HOME

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