



## Faith Formation Session on the Saints: LEADER'S GUIDE

# 9 on the Archdiocese of Dubuque's Top Ten Reasons to be Catholic!

*Faith formation leaders should review all materials and select the material most effective for your presentation. You may copy and distribute any of the materials.*

### **Introduction:**

Members of our archdiocese love the saints! Have you been surprised by roses from St. Therese of Liseiux or received spiritual wisdom from St. John of the Cross? Then "saints" was probably on your Top Ten list, along with thousands of others. Many responses referred to the "communion of saints" and the "cloud of witnesses." Our belief in the saints inspires us as Catholics and connects us to the faithful who have gone before us. Sounds like many of us will take great interest in the approaching canonizations of John XXII and John Paul III!

Catholics love their saints and hold deeply the communion of saints. So, what do we believe about the saints?

### **Opening Prayer:**

Loving God, send your Spirit to open our hearts to Jesus.  
Guide us to a deeper conversion.  
Grant us a greater appreciation of the beauty and truth of our Catholic faith.  
Give us the courage and confidence to joyfully share our faith with others.  
May your Church be a beacon of light for all who seek your loving presence.  
Be with us now as we explore one of our Top Ten Reasons to be Catholic!  
Mary, faithful Mother of God, intercede for us.  
We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
One God, forever and ever. Amen.

### **Scripture:**

Matthew 5:1-12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

## Opening Song:

*Blest Are They* by David Haas:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9ek5YQmBmk>

(Beautiful eight-minute video on the beatitudes with instrumental music of *Blest Are They* in the background.

\*Many of the pictures are of children, but the words are meaningful to all.)

OR

*Holy, Holy* by Jacob and Matthew Band: [http://](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayqjiqtjgMI)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayqjiqtjgMI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayqjiqtjgMI)

OR

*Every Day* by Jacob and Matthew Band:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbBi\\_Dc5cJg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbBi_Dc5cJg)

## Section I: What is a saint?

**Video # 1:** Why Care About the Saints? Rev. James Martin S.J.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8WkZblkeNo&list=PLMAWECE3ntbqodeOcl-qKQlwFkR1t4zI5>

Why should we care about the saints? Because, as French spiritual writer Leon Bleau cautioned, “The only one real sadness in life is not to become a saint.” When we fail to become a saint, we fail to become who God created us to be—we fail in love, we fail in life. Thomas Merton wrote: “To be myself is to be a saint.”

The saints guide us on the path to holiness. Fr. Martin begins our discussion on the saints by referring to them as “friends” whose “lives can serve as examples for us.” Though he speaks of the saints who are canonized, most saints were ordinary men, women, and children who lived as faithful children of God in everyday, ordinary life (saints in the making are in our families, parishes, neighborhoods—and all those on their way to heaven!) A saint in the making is someone who lives each day, every day for God. “A saint is a friend of God, a saint is someone of heroic virtue ... May I suggest, a saint is someone who has allowed Christ to live his life in him” (Catholicism, Robert Barron). Many define a saint as someone who is holy—who has lived according to the beatitudes.

All men and women are called to holiness—to be saints. In the Vatican II document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (Light to the Nations), Ch. V, we read of the Universal Call to Holiness:

“The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples of every condition. ... They are warned by the Apostle to live “as becomes saints”; and to put on “as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, patience” and to possess the fruit of the Spirit in holiness. ...

Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity;(4\*) ... They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history” (LG, Ch. V. no. 40).

Jesus taught the beatitudes as the way to holiness. But it was more than words. As St. John Paul II remarked to the youth: "In the end, Jesus does not merely speak the Beatitudes. He lives the Beatitudes. He is the Beatitudes." Those who live the beatitudes are poor in spirit (humble—completely dependent on God—single-minded toward the kingdom). They mourn (sorrowful over suffering), are meek (gentle and kind), hunger and thirst for righteousness (seeking God's will, working for justice), are merciful (forgive others, compassionate), pure of heart (selfless, see Jesus in others), peacemakers (choose reconciliation over violence), and persecuted for the sake of righteousness (have the courage to stand for Christ and the dignity of the human person). In the beatitudes, the nature of God and the pattern for discipleship is revealed.

John Paul II continued to challenge the youth (and all of us): "It is strange that Jesus exalts those whom the world generally regards as weak. He says to them, 'Blessed are you who seem to be losers, because you are the true winners: the kingdom of heaven is yours!' ... [T]hese words present a challenge which demands a deep and abiding metanoia of the spirit, a great change of heart." However, the beatitudes, though difficult to comprehend and to live, lead to happiness. We learn how to be truly happy, blessed, as we are formed into the image of Jesus. The beatitudes "respond to the desire for happiness that God has placed in the human heart" (CCC # 1725). To be blessed, to be happy, is to live in God's presence.

Men and women who live the beatitudes naturally exhibit heroic virtue in everyday life: the young mother who chooses life when all of society encourages her to abort; the teen who defends the classmate being bullied; the elderly man who cares for his wife with Alzheimers—even to the detriment of his own health; the young person who leaves all comfort to serve in the slums. A young mother, expecting her first child, was bemoaning the state of our culture. After further reflection, she sighed, "Perhaps he or she will have a greater opportunity to become a saint."

"The beatitude [blessing] we are promised confronts us with decisive moral choices. It invites us to purify our hearts of bad instincts and to seek the love of God above all else. It teaches us that true happiness is not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power, or in any human achievement - however beneficial it may be - such as science, technology, and art, or indeed in any creature, but in God alone, the source of every good and of all love..." (CCC, # 1723).

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. How has a saint befriended you?
- b. When have you witnessed heroic virtue in a living saint (saint in the making)?
- c. Which beatitude do you see being lived out most in this living saint?
- d. How is God calling you—right now—to grow in holiness (which Beatitude is most challenging for you)?

**Section II:** Witness to our favorite canonized saints and what they have to teach us.

**Video #2:** Rev. Scott Bullock, pastor in the Archdiocese of Dubuque  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-Fba0m3mMw>

There are over 10,000 canonized saints. "By canonizing some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace, the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of holiness within her and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the saints to them as

models and intercessors" (CCC, #828). (A man or woman may be called "blessed" with the evidence of one miracle through his/her intercession. The Holy Father will canonize him or her after proof of a second miracle.)

We have saints who have been declared Doctors of the Church. They are men and women who have demonstrated outstanding holiness, doctrinal insights, extensive writings, and have been officially proclaimed by the Church. Just a few of these holy men are St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Gregory, St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. John of the Cross. There are four women Doctors of the Church: St. Hildegard of Binge, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Therese of Lisieux.

We have popular saints such as St. Nicholas, St. Francis (especially now with Pope Francis), St. Lucy, St. Joseph, St. Patrick, and St. Therese of Lisieux. We have patron saints (special guardians) for almost everything: bankers, firemen, migraines, depression, countries, birds, lost items, and even hopeless causes.

We believe all the saints, popular or obscure, show us the path to holiness through humility, single-mindedness, prayer, and action. Therefore, we give them special honor within the Body of Christ. God has often worked through the saints during difficult times in church and world history. They have shown us the way back to holiness. Frequently asked questions about the saints: <http://www.catholic.org/saints/faq.php>

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- a. Who was your favorite saint growing up? Why? Who is your favorite saint now?
- b. How has a canonized saint challenged, encouraged, or helped you along the way?
- c. Who is your patron saint?

### **Section III: What is the Communion of Saints?**

**Video #3:** Anastasia Nicklaus Schmelzer, Director of Campus Ministry at Clarke University in Dubuque, IA.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-clrQdlygJQ>

The communion of saints is the entire Body of Christ. "What is the Church if not the assembly of all the saints? The communion of saints is the Church" (CCC, # 946). The communion of saints includes the canonized saints, our beloved grandmothers who have passed away, and those serving next to us in the soup kitchen.

"We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified (CCC, # 1030), and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that this communion, the merciful love of God and his saints is always attentive to our prayer' (Paul VI, CPG 30)" (CCC, # 962).

We pray for those who have died to assist them through purgatory. Far from being a place, purgatory is a grace. Purgatory is the "purifying fire" (CCC, # 1031) that burns off anything within us that is not of love. Some may die with a grudge in their heart, a sin not confessed, or a fault not recognized on earth. They love God and are certainly headed for the fullness of heaven, but this is a time to be fully cleansed in preparation for the full glory of God (therefore, we pray for the dead).

We also ask the saints to pray for us because of their special closeness to God—whether living or deceased. We

believe our deceased are not dead, but fully alive in Christ, because “God is not God of the dead, but of the living” (Mark 12: 26-27). You will often hear Catholics express this belief: “I asked mom (deceased) to pray for my son who is going through a difficult divorce.” “I know dad is watching over our new grandbaby who has special needs.” “Grandma is always asking Jesus to help me!”

One person witnessed to the power of living saints: “I’ll get to heaven because I’m surrounded by saints right here on earth: my neighbor, my friends, my daughter. Sure, they all have their struggles—they’re human—but they turn to God in their struggles. They’ve taught me to do the same by praying regularly, receiving the sacraments, and reading scripture. I feel blessed to have been surrounded by friends who keep me on the path.”

With great joy, we believe that one day all the saints will rejoice together in heaven. Until we are together in our true home, what a great blessing to know “we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses ...” (Hebrews 12:1).

Please break into small groups after watching this video presentation to discuss the following questions.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- How have you experienced the Communion of Saints? How has your relationship changed with someone who has died and become a member of the great cloud of witnesses?
- What does the phrase, “love lasts” mean to you?
- How can the Communion of Saints help us to fight the feeling of loneliness?

### **Conclusion:**

Please be sure to make time for large group discussion.

### **Concluding Questions:**

- What did you learn about the saints?
- What did you like best about the session?
- What is one thing you will share with someone at home or in your sphere of influence?
- What difference does it make in one’s life to believe in the saints and the Communion of Saints?

Have each person submit his/her own name or the name of his/her favorite saint (living or deceased). Collect and use them to create a litany of the saints or use a traditional litany the saints:

<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=254>

OR play one of these beautiful YouTube videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Xh8oXmyvO> (*Litany of the Saints* - 4 min)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-labIH9tSg> (*Modern Litany of the Saints* by Matt Maher - 2 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTg1n95--KE> (*Home* by Phillip Phillips)

Finish the session by saying the following prayer together:

### **Closing Prayer:**

#### Prayer For Sainthood

Loving God, you have called each of us to be holy.

Thank you for the saints who show us the pathway to holiness.

Grant us a deep desire for sainthood.

Help us to be men and women of prayer, humility, love, and service.

Give us the strength and courage to live the beatitudes.

Mary, and all the saints in Heaven, intercedes for us.

We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit.

One God, forever and ever. Amen.

**Additional Resources:**

To find additional resources (including books, DVDs, online resources, and more) on the Saints, please contact the Education Resource Center (ERC) of the Archdiocese of Dubuque at 563-556-2580, ext. 214 or [dbqcmec1@dbqarch.org](mailto:dbqcmec1@dbqarch.org).