



Two Blessed (Part 1)

When asked by a reporter what she thought about being called a living saint, Mother Teresa of Calcutta responded, "Isn't that what we're all supposed to be?" Imperfect as we are, we are God's saints, members of the Communion of Saints with those being purified in Purgatory and those perfectly united with God in heaven. To encourage us imperfect saints, the Church from very early on has given special recognition to those who, during their time on earth, lived extraordinarily holy exemplary lives, honoring them as Saints with a capital S.

Not only is it a great honor to be declared a Saint...it's a great honor to have a Saint from your own town or region and, therefore, tempting to get rather creative about the life and sanctity of some local personage and claim Sainthood for him or her. To guard against abuses and assure the credibility of the sanctity of those endowed with the title of "Saint", the Catholic Church adopted a process, followed in all cases since the 12th century, of studying the life and verifying the sanctity of each candidate presented for canonization (inclusion on the official list of Saints...the word "canon" means an official list). There are four stages in the process.

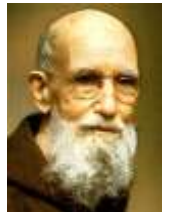
It begins with a dedicated team of devotees preparing an extensive biography of their candidate to present to the Vatican Congregation for the Causes of Saints. If, after examination, the Church accepts the request, the candidate is given the title "Servant of God". An intensive study is undertaken to verify beyond the shadow of a doubt that the person exhibited the virtues of faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance to an heroic degree. If such is found to have been the case, the candidate is then given the title "Venerable". Now comes a period of waiting for some divine indication of the individual's sanctity, traditionally through verifiable miraculous healings attributed to the individual's intercession. After the first such healing, nothing withstanding, the title "Blessed" is bestowed (beatification) and, following a second, the title "Saint" (canonization).

Venezuela and Minnesota are both honored to have individuals who graced their lands with their presence whose causes have advanced through this canonization process to the stage of beatification. They are José Gregorio Hernández and Bernard Francis "Solanus" Casey. Although born thousands of miles apart, growing up in very different circumstances with very contrasting educational experiences and talents, they had the most important thing in life in common...a profound dedication to know love and serve God with their whole being.



José Gregorio Hernández entered the world on October 26, 1864, in the town of Isnotú in the mountains of western Venezuela where his father ran a combination pharmacy and grocery store. His mom, to whom he remained devoted his entire life, died when José Gregorio was just 8 years old, leaving him, as the eldest of six surviving children, determined to fulfill his mother's wish that he receive a good education and return to Isnotú to serve the people there. José Gregorio excelled in school. The local teacher, impressed with his intelligence and understanding, recommended that his dad send him to school at one of the leading academies of its day in Caracas. José Gregorio was just 13 at the time. Four years later, at the age of 17, he had earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy and entered the Central University of Venezuela to study medicine.

On November 25, 1870, Ellen Casey gave birth to the sixth of 16 children in the family's log cabin near Prescott, Wisconsin. In 1878, Bernard, his father's namesake, contracted diphtheria during an epidemic which claimed the lives of two siblings and left his voice impaired but his spirit thankful to God. With lots of mouths but little money, the Caseys moved several times seeking better land to farm. Bernard's education suffered as a result, consequences of which would affect him later on. He felt responsible to help provide for the family and, at 15 years of age, moved to Stillwater where an uncle was pastor at St. Michael. He found work first in a lumber mill, then in a brickyard, as a guard at the state prison, and as a streetcar conductor, a variety of experiences in touch with a broad swatch of humanity.



Two young men from very different backgrounds, both followed the pathway of sainthood from early on...we'll pick up on the stories of these "Two Blessed" examples of sanctity in next week's article.

Points to ponder

How would you respond if someone asked if you are a living saint? How are you trying to be one?

The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has staffed and supported parishes in the diocese of Ciudad Guayana in Venezuela since 1970. These "Did you know?" papers are designed to give you a better understanding of life in Venezuela and to strengthen connections between the parishes of the Archdiocese and their archdiocesan mission during our 50th anniversary year. Please direct any comments or suggestions for future papers to Fr. Denny Dempsey at ddempsey@churchofst dominic.org or 651-368-7324.