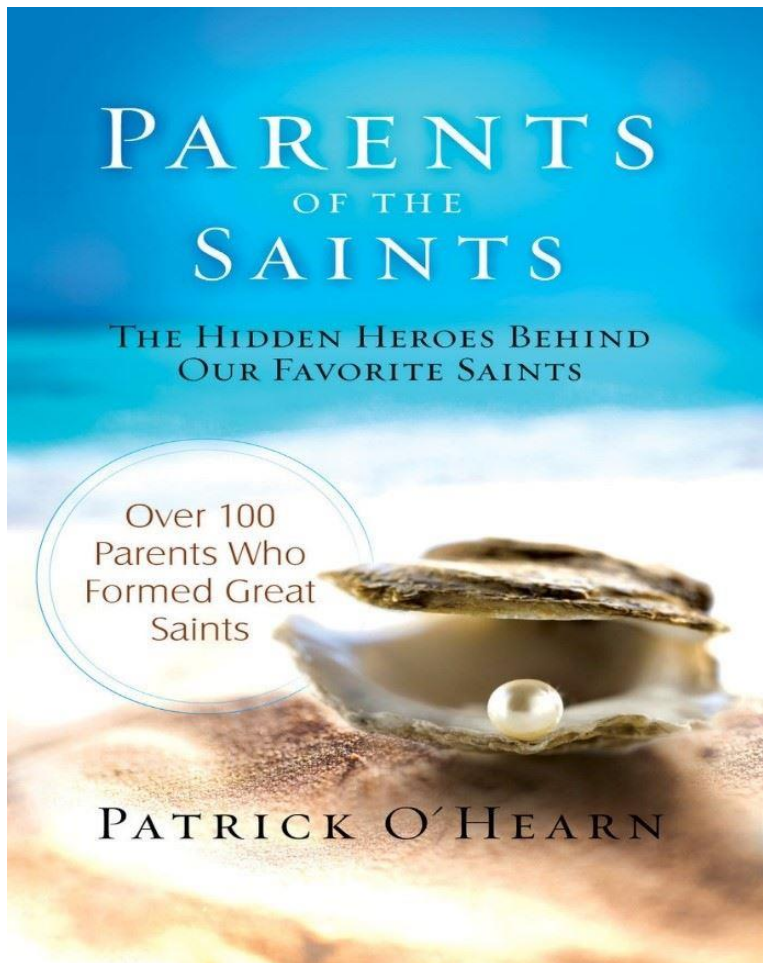


March 29, 2023

PARENTS OF THE SAINTS: THE HIDDEN HEROES BEHIND OUR FAVORITE SAINTS

By Patrick O'Hearn

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unworthy. Many a new parent can relate to these feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness.

These feelings can be especially pronounced in Catholic parents for we believe that God calls us to raise not just good human beings, but divine beings, that is, saints. CCC 460. And, in raising a saint, who should a parent look to but saintly parents (or at least parents who raised a saint) for guidance. Because “[f]ew and far between are the books written on the parents of the saints,” (likely due to an insufficient historical record until the last few hundred years), author Patrick O’Hearn has undertaken this task in *Parents of the Saints: The Hidden Heroes Behind Our Favorite Saints* p. 2 (TAN Books 2020).

O’Hearn compiles stories from over 100 parents of the saints, some of whom are themselves canonized saints. The author recounts these stories through the prism of “seven hallmarks that permeated their lives and even the lives of their children.” *Id.* at 5. These hallmarks are “a devotion to the sacramental life, surrender, sacrificial love, suffering, simplicity, solitude, and the sacredness of life.” *Id.* Each chapter “centers on how these hallmarks were profoundly present in the interactions between these parents and their saintly children.” *Id.* *Parents of the Saints* features, among others, Karol and Emilia Wojtyla (parents of Pope St. John Paul II), Luigi and Assunta Goretti (parents of St. Maria Goretti), Alberto and Maria Beretta (parents of St. Gianna), and John and Agnes More (the parents of our patron, St. Thomas More).

The most prominent parents in the book are those of St. Therese of Lisieux, Saints Louis and Zelig Martin, whom Pope Francis canonized in 2015, as they exhibited each of the seven hallmarks. Considering St. Zelig in this context, the reader learns that Zelig attended daily Mass with her husband at 5:30 a.m., received Holy Communion as often as permitted by the custom of the time, and was an ardent First Friday devotee. She needed these graces for she knew suffering well. She lost four of her nine children (three during infancy), including one who died because of the negligence of a wet nurse who starved the child (Zelig was then unable to breastfeed). At the age of 44, Zelig was diagnosed with breast cancer and would die the following year. Yet, whatever happened, she “put it into the hands of God because He knows much better than we do what we need.” *Id.* at 85, 190. And what she needed was God and her family. She once declared, “I don’t want to become attached to anyone but God and my family.” *Id.* at 339. Her love for her family was evident in her self-denial and forgetfulness of self. One of her daughters remembered how Zelig would regularly prepare the family breakfast “with the greatest care, while contenting herself with a bowl of broth, taken standing up and alone by herself, while serving the others.” *Id.* at 228. And, of course, Zelig held life to be sacred, remaining open to life, even after suffering through the death of multiple children. She prayed that God would grant her a “Great Saint,” but only “for His Glory.” *Id.* at 340. A prayer He answered in the life of St. Therese, “one of the greatest modern-day saints,” and Zelig’s ninth (and last) child. *Id.* at 13.

It is this first “Yes” to God that He asks of every would-be parent, an echo of Mary’s “Yes” at the Annunciation. And God keeps seeking our “Yes,” our cooperation with His grace, through all the blessings and burdens of family life.

It is through the family, the domestic church, that God so often spreads the Gospel. It was St. Andrew who told his brother, St. Peter, “We have found the Messiah.” Jn. 1:41. St. Paul recounts how St. Timothy’s faith “dwelt first in [his] grandmother Lois and [in his] mother Eunice.” 2 Tim 1:5. And, finally, when Christ heals the Gerasene demoniac, He does not say, “come, follow Me,” as He tells so many others, but to “[g]o home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you.” Mk 5:19.

As O’Hearn concludes *Parents of the Saints*, may we, with the help of God’s grace, announce the Gospel to our children and, thereby, raise up saints for His glory.

Parents of the Saints is widely available both in hardcover and as an e-book.