

## OUR BRIGHTEST STARS: SAINTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE DIOCESE OF RICHMOND

*Editor's note: Throughout the Catholic Diocese of Richmond's bicentennial year, The Catholic Virginian will publish the history of the diocese in the Shine Like Stars in the World section that will appear in the last issue of each month. The content of this section is provided by the Bicentennial Task Force.*

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Each year on Nov. 1, the Church venerates the saints in one celebration: All Saints Day. A saint is someone who is in heaven, which means being united to the Trinity, together with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all of the blessed (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1024).

Some saints are canonized, meaning that the Church has officially declared them to be in heaven, and that, because they were martyred or were exceptionally virtuous, they may be publicly venerated and invoked. Canonization provides role models and intercessors for the Church on earth.

Most holy men and women do not receive official recognition; their sanctity is unknown or forgotten. In the history of the Catholic Church in Virginia, countless men and women have given witness to their faith and made sacrifices to carry out the Church's mission. They are mostly anonymous and are honored on All Saints Day.

Memories have endured of some holy people associated, in varying degrees, with the Diocese of Richmond. They have either been canonized or are in the process of being canonized. They are stars of the highest magnitude in a constellation of sanctity.

### Spanish Jesuit Martyrs of Virginia (1570–1571)

Thirty-seven years before the first permanent English settlement in North America at Jamestown (1607), eight Spanish Jesuits and a boy landed near present-day Williamsburg on Sept. 10, 1570. They were the first people to proclaim the Christian faith in the territory that became Virginia.

They were Fathers Juan Baptista de Segura and Luis Francisco de Quirós, and Brothers Gabriel Gómez, Pedro Mingot Linares, Sancho de Zaballos, Cristóbal Redondo, Gabriel de Solís and Juan Baptista Méndez. Betrayed by their indigenous guide, Don Luis de Velasco, they were killed between Feb. 4 and 10, 1571. Only the boy, Alonso de Olmos, survived, who was rescued a year later. The cause for these martyrs' canonization began in 2002.

### St. Vincent de Paul (1581–1660)

Richard Vincent Whelan, the second bishop of Richmond (1841-1850), probably chose his namesake, Vincent de Paul, to be the patron of the diocese. The Catholic Church in Virginia at that time was rural, missionary and poor — just like the focus of the saint's ministry in 17th-century France.

Vincent de Paul is remembered for reforming the clergy — he founded the Vincentian order of priests and co-founded the Daughters of Charity — and for



**Mother Maria Bernardetta de la Immaculada and the future Pope Francis, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, met in Argentina and were friends until her death in 2016.** (Courtesy photo)

evangelizing the poor. Canonized in 1737, he is honored as the Apostle of Charity and Father of the Poor.

### St. John Nepomucene Neumann (1811–1860)

A German-speaking immigrant from what is today the Czech Republic, John Neumann was a dedicated priest to German immigrants in New York state. He later joined the Redemptorist order.

He was sent to Richmond to conduct an eight-day mission for German Catholics in September 1842. Neumann's preaching at St. Peter Cathedral contributed to the eventual founding of a parish in the city for the German Catholic community: St. Mary (1848–1937). He was appointed bishop of Philadelphia (1852). This first American bishop to be canonized (1977) is remembered for his pastoral zeal.

### Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos (1819–1867)

Like St. John Neumann, his Redemptorist colleague and, for a time, his confessor, Francis Xavier Seelos came to the United States as a missionary from present-day Germany. Father Seelos was a pastor in Annapolis, Maryland, when he and other Redemptorists began ministering to Union soldiers at Fort Monroe during the Civil War.

At that time, priests of the Diocese of Richmond were no longer able to reach the fort because of the hostilities. Seelos arrived at the installation in December 1862 and remained for a brief period. Later, he preached missions along the East Coast and in the Midwest, and then served as pastor in Michigan.

His final assignment was as a pastor in New Orleans. He died there of yellow fever in the course of ministering to victims of the disease. Venerated for his generosity and kindness as a priest, Francis Xavier Seelos was beatified in 2000.

### St. Katharine Drexel (1858–1955)

Mother Katharine Drexel and her half-sister, Louise Morrell, used their fortune to support charitable causes. They founded schools for African Americans in the Diocese of Richmond. St. Emma's Industrial and Agricultural College for boys (1895) and St. Francis de Sales School for girls (1899) were both located in Rock Castle (Powhatan County).

Katharine funded the work of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, the religious order she established to minister to African Americans and Native Americans. Mother Drexel was the second native-born American to be canonized (2000).

### Servant of God Frank Parater (1897–1920)

Although there are no records of a jubilee celebration for the centenary of the founding of the Diocese of Richmond, the untimely death that year of one of its seminarians became a lasting testimony of holiness.

A Richmond native, Francis Joseph Parater III was a devout and well-rounded young man who attained the rank of Eagle Scout. Parater was later sent as a diocesan seminarian to the North American College in Rome, where, at age 22, he died of rheumatic fever.

A spiritual testament in which he offered his life "for the spread and success of the Catholic Church in Virginia" was discovered after his death. His cause for canonization was introduced in 2001.

### Servant of God Dorothy Day (1897–1980)

In an address to Congress during his 2015 visit to the United States, Pope Francis highlighted the contributions of Dorothy Day: "Her social activism, her passion for justice and for the cause of the oppressed, were inspired by the Gospel, her faith and the example of the saints."

Day co-founded the Catholic Worker movement in an effort to bring about systemic change in society. Her involvement in the civil rights movement brought her to Danville, Virginia, in July 1963, where she demonstrated in support of integration. Her cause for canonization began in 2002.

### Servant of God Mother Maria Bernadetta of the Immaculate (1918–2001)

"I'm waiting on the cardinal to call me; sometimes he can't, but most of the time he calls me at 2:00."

Mother Maria Bernadetta of the Immaculate was speaking of the weekly phone call she received from her friend, then-Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio (Pope Francis). The two became friends in Argentina, where she was serving, and their friendship continued when she returned to her native Italy.

A Poor Sister of St. Joseph, Mother Maria Bernadetta also worked in Richmond as a cook at St. John Vianney Seminary (1966-1978). There she was remembered for her kindness and down-to-earth wisdom. Her cause for canonization was introduced in 2019.

The bicentennial motto of the Diocese of Richmond is, "Shine like stars in the world, as you hold fast to the word of life" (Phil 2:15-16). The 2020 jubilee honors all holy men and women who have contributed to the spread of the Catholic faith in Virginia. The reputation of sanctity emanating from the brightest "stars" associated with the Richmond Diocese guides those who seek holiness in our own day.