

THE MEANING OF LIFE

"We must all care for life, cherish life, with tenderness, warmth ... caring for life from the beginning to the end." -Pope Francis

SAINTS AND PRAYERS

St. Catherine of Sweden (patron saint of protection against abortion and miscarriage) Feast day March 22

St. Catherine is the fourth child of Saint Bridget of Sweden. At the time of her death St. Catherine was head of the convent of Wadstena, founded by her mother; hence the name, Catherine Vastanensis, by which she is occasionally called.

At the age of seven she was sent to the abbess of the convent of Riseberg to be educated and soon showed, like her mother, a desire for a life of self-mortification and devotion to spiritual things.

At the command of her father, when about thirteen or fourteen years old, she married a noble of German descent, Eggart von Kurnen. She at once persuaded her husband, who was a very religious man, to join her in a vow of chastity. Both lived in a state of virginity and devoted themselves to the exercise of Christian perfection and active charity.

In spite of her deep love for her husband, Catherine accompanied her mother to Rome, where St. Bridget went in 1349. Soon after her arrival in that city Catherine received news of the death of her husband in Sweden. She now lived constantly with her mother, took an active part in St. Bridget's fruitful labors, and zealously imitated her mother's ascetic life.

Although the distinguished and beautiful young widow was surrounded by suitors, she steadily refused all offers of marriage. In 1372 St. Catherine and her brother, Birger, accompanied their mother on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land; after their return to Rome St. Catherine was with her mother in the latter's last illness and death.

Catherine died on March 24, 1381, mourned like her mother by the whole of Sweden. In 1484 Innocent VIII gave permission for her veneration as a saint and her feast was assigned to March 22 in the Roman martyrology.

Catherine wrote a devotional work entitled "Consolation of the Soul" (Sielinna Troest), largely composed of citations from the Scriptures and from early religious books; no copy is known to exist. Generally she is represented with a hind at her side, which is said to have come to her aid when unchaste youths sought to ensnare her.

(source: *New Advent Website*)

Blessed Laura Vicuna (patron saint of abuse victims, Argentina, incest victims, loss of parents, and martyrs) Feast day: January 22

Laura was the first child born on April 5, 1891 to Senora Mercedes Pino and Jose Domingo Vicuna, a soldier who belonged to a noble Chilean family. A civil war broke out and Senor Vicuna had to flee his country. A few days after the birth of the second child Julia Amanda, Senor Vicuna, worn out physically and mentally, died, leaving his wife and children alone. Seeing that she could not survive, she decided to leave the country.

She finally found work at a large "hacienda" owned by Senor Manuel Mora. He was a typical Argentine "gaucho", a dreamy Latin lover and a shady character. Senora Mercedes let her be won over by his promises of help, and accepted his protection. His financial support would allow her to enroll her two girls as pupils in the Salesian Sisters' school in Junin, but at what price!



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SAINTS AND PRAYERS

Blessed Laura Vicuna continued

Laura was very happy living under the serene guidance of the young missionary Sisters. She discovered God, His love, and allowed herself to be surrounded by it. God's love stimulates her to love in return. Thus Laura made herself all to all, helping them in any way she could. She was a leader and everyone's friend. Laura accepted God's love. Laura was fascinated by the ideal of the Sisters and secretly hoped to consecrate herself to God in the service of her brothers and sisters. "I wish Mamma would know you better and be happy", she often prayed before the tabernacle.

Laura was distressed about her mother's situation with Senor Mora; her mother was indeed far away from God and Senor Mora was the cause. The struggle for living and providing for her daughters had wearied her. In a moment of stress and discouragement, she had given in to his demands. But Laura would do her best to give her mamma God's friendship once again. Love is stronger than death, love creates and maintains life. Deeply believing this, Laura said to the Lord: "I offer you my life for that of my mother". The winter of 1903 at Junin was extremely severe, with persistent rain and dampness. Laura became weaker with each passing day; she was wasting away. Although her mother took her home to Quilquihue where the climate was more pleasant and helpful, there was no improvement in her health. Laura knew she would not recover.

God had accepted her offering-her self-immolation. Senora Mercedes remained day and night at her bedside, surrounding her with every care and attention. Laura kept looking at her tenderly. Now it was time to reveal her secret. "Mamma, I'm dying, but I'm happy to offer my life for you. I asked Our Lord for this". Senora Mercedes was appalled. She fell on her knees sobbing. She understood everything in a flash. "Laura, my daughter, please forgive me...O dear God, please forgive my life of sin... Yes, I will start again." Laura's face was serene and at peace.

St. Raymond Nonnatus (patron saint of childbirth, midwives, children and pregnant women) Feast day: August 31

St. Raymond was born in 1200 or 1204 at Portello in the Diocese of Urgel in Catalonia and died at Cardona, August 31, 1240. He was delivered by caesarean operation when his mother died in childbirth, hence his name non natus (not born). Of noble but poor family, he showed early traits of piety and great talent. His father ordered him to tend a farm, but later gave him permission to take the habit with the Mercedarians at Barcelona, at the hands of the founder, St. Peter Nolasco.

Raymond made such progress in the religious life that he was soon considered worthy to succeed his master in the office of ransom. He was sent to Algiers and liberated many captives. When money failed he gave himself as hostage. He was zealous in teaching the Christian religion and made many converts, which embittered the Mohammedan authorities. Raymond was subjected to all kinds of indignities and cruelty, was made to run the gauntlet, and was at last sentenced to impalement.

The hope of a greater sum of money as ransom caused the governor to commute the sentence into imprisonment. To prevent him from preaching Christ, his lips were pierced with a redhot iron and closed with a padlock. After his arrival in Spain, in 1239, he was made a cardinal by Gregory IX. In the next year he was called to Rome by the pope, but came only as far as Cardona about six miles from Barcelona, where he died.

His body was brought to the chapel of St. Nicholas near his old farm. In 1657 his name was placed in the Roman martyrology by Alexander VII. He is invoked by women in labor and by persons falsely accused.



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SAINTS AND PRAYERS

Respect Life Prayers

Loving God, Creator of all, we recognize that life is a gift from you.
Open our hearts to your Holy Spirit
and renew in us a deep respect for all persons:
the family, the unborn, the young, the adult,
the sick, the disabled, the abused, the imprisoned,
the aged, the dying, the homeless, the unemployed
and the oppressed in any way.

Bless all of us and instill in us a deep
love for your gifts of life.

Through the intercession of Mary, Mother and Virgin,
may all our words and actions foster
reverence for human life.

May we be true witnesses to the truth that all life is
precious and has sublime dignity.
Lead our nation and our world to this understanding
so that we may be a people dedicated to the protection
of all your sons and daughters.

We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ,
the Word who became flesh and lived among us.

Amen.

Written by Father Eamon Tobin

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In the circumstances of my conception and birth,
of my parents, of my family,
of all whosoever care for me or did me
harm in all the years that began the journey of my life.
God who calls by name works all together for my good.
I choose life.

I accept God's gift of life around me,
the sacred treasure of each human life
whether sister, brother, friend or stranger;
however whole or broken, small or great,
saint or sinner, rich or poor, ill or well, ally or enemy, or indifferent.
Each is crafted in God's image, to each is offered
Christ's redemption, in each moves the spirits blessing.
I choose life.

I accept God's gift of life in my times,
in infant's cry, in childhood's wonder
in trials of teen years and embrace of youth,
in maturity's accomplishments and failures,
in waning day's and night's negotiations.
Among the creatures with the breath of life within them,
God has placed the timeless in the human heart,
but not the reach to grasp or measure it.
I choose life.

I accept God's gift of life in my dying,
in God's hands the shaping of the manner
by God's clock the counting of the hour.
May God who lays me down uphold me.
May Christ along the way companion me.
May spirit lift, and light billow me into the Resurrection.
God is life, and this I choose.

In the name of the One God, ever living and life giving,
faithful and true, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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