March 8: St. John of God (1495-1550)

Having given up active Christian belief while a soldier, John was 40 before the depth of his sinfulness began to dawn on him. He decided to give the rest of his life to God’s service, and headed at once for Africa, where he hoped to free captive Christians and, possibly, be martyred. He was soon advised that his desire for martyrdom was not spiritually well-based, and returned to Spain and the relatively prosaic activity of a religious goods store. Yet he was still not settled. Moved initially by a sermon of Blessed John of Avila, he one day engaged in a public beating of himself, begging mercy and wildly repenting for his past life.

Committed to a mental hospital for these actions, John was visited by Blessed John, who advised him to be more actively involved in tending to the needs of others rather than in enduring personal hardships. John gained peace of heart, and shortly after left the hospital to begin work among the poor. He established a house where he wisely tended to the needs of the sick poor, at first doing his own begging. But excited by the saint’s great work and inspired by his devotion, many people began to back him up with money and provisions. Among them were the archbishop and marquis of Tarifa.

Behind John’s outward acts of total concern and love for Christ’s sick poor was a deep interior prayer life which was reflected in his spirit of humility. These qualities attracted helpers who, 20 years after John’s death, formed the Brothers Hospitallers, now a worldwide religious order.

John became ill after 10 years of service but tried to disguise his ill health. He began to put the hospital’s administrative work into order and appointed a leader for his helpers. He died under the care of a spiritual friend and admirer, Lady Anne Ossorio.

MARCH 2016

Prayer & intercession for peace in areas of conflict

God of compassion,
Hear the cries of the people;
Console those who mourn the dead;
Give strength to neighbouring countries to welcome refugees;
Convert the hearts of those who have taken up arms,
And protect those who are committed to peace.
God of hope, inspire leaders to choose peace over violence,
and to seek reconciliation with their enemies.
Inflame the universal church with compassion for the people of troubled lands, and give us hope for a future built on justice.
We ask this through Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace and Light of the World.

A Prayer about colour and race

Lord, we are all your people; your children;
and we are made in your image and likeness.
And we are black or brown,
yellow or white.
Why don’t we live in your image and likeness?
We are three colours that blend
into the rainbows of life
with the colours of the mountains and the hills,
the rivers and sea
and all beautiful growing things.
Why then do we smudge and spoil
the archway of life’s rainbow
by hating and fighting
and speaking ill of each other?
Why can’t we keep God’s rainbow perfect
in unity, friendship and love –
for only then will we find
the promise that a rainbow brings:
the promise of eternal life.
Lord, help us to live in unity and peace
and to love one another.

(Rosa George)
March 22 - St. Nicholas Owen (d. 1606)

Nicholas, familiarly known as "Little John," was small in stature but big in the esteem of his fellow Jesuits.

Born at Oxford, this humble artisan saved the lives of many priests and laypersons in England during the penal times (1559-1829), when a series of statutes punished Catholics for the practice of their faith. Over a period of about 20 years he used his skills to build secret hiding places for priests throughout the country. His work, which he did completely by himself as both architect and builder, was so good that time and time again priests in hiding were undetected by raiding parties. He was a genius at finding, and creating, places of safety: subterranean passages, small spaces between walls, impenetrable recesses. At one point he was even able to mastermind the escape of two Jesuits from the Tower of London. Whenever Nicholas set out to design such hiding places, he began by receiving the Holy Eucharist, and he would turn to God in prayer throughout the long, dangerous construction process.

After many years at his unusual task, he entered the Society of Jesus and served as a lay brother, although—for very good reasons—his connection with the Jesuits was kept secret.

After a number of narrow escapes, he himself was finally caught in 1594. Despite protracted torture, he refused to disclose the names of other Catholics. After being released following the payment of a ransom, "Little John" went back to his work. He was arrested again in 1606. This time he was subjected to horrible tortures, suffering an agonizing death. The jailers tried suggesting that he had confessed and committed suicide, but his heroism and sufferings soon were widely known.

He was canonized in 1970 as one of the 40 Martyrs of England and Wales.

This Lent, as we continue our Journey to Jerusalem with Jesus, how can we be “on the move” to a new awareness of the Gospel in our lives?

Take time out to pray! Christ did! – 40 days!

I thank you, Lord
For knowing me better than
I know myself
And for letting me know myself
Better than others know me.
Make me, I ask you then,
Better than they suppose.
And forgive me for what
they do not know

Abu Bakr c. 572-634

Prayer as silence
When you pray, you yourself must be silent. You do not pray to have your own earthbound desires fulfilled, but you pray: Thy will be done. It is not fitting to use God as an errand boy. You yourself must be silent: let the prayer speak.

Tito Colliander

Come Lord,
Do not smile and say you are already with us.
Millions do not know you, and to us who do
what is the difference?
What is the point of your presence if our lives do not alter?
Change our lives, shatter our complacency,
Make your word our life’s purpose.
Take away the quietness of a clear conscience,
Press us uncomfortably, for only thus that other
Peace is made: your peace.

Dom Helder Camara