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Three Mothers of Three Saints

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on MAY 2, 2016.

Every Mother's Day we honor mothers for their selfless devotion to their children. This Mother's Day let's look at three mothers who share one thing in common: they were all mothers of saints.

Aleth, mother of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. It was the latter part of the 11th Century.

The young girl Aleth, age 15, was intent upon becoming a nun. But when the handsome knight, Tescelin, Lord of Fontaines, asked for her hand in marriage, she accepted his proposal as the will of God for her. Aleth bore her husband seven children: six sons and one daughter. Because Tescelin was so busy with his work, Aleth was entrusted with the management of the household and the education of their children. She proved to be a very competent woman. Not only did she raise her children almost single-handedly, she found time in her busy day to care for the poor.



Aleth had a special fondness for her third son Bernard, named after her father. She felt he was destined for some service in the Church and had him educated accordingly. But she did not live to see this dream realized. When Bernard was only 14, Aleth became ill and died quite suddenly with her entire family gathered around her bed. Bernard took his mother's death hard and lapsed into a period of depression, a depression eventually eased by the solicitude of his sister. A few years later, Bernard went through a wild and reckless phase. One day, amidst his revelry, he heard his mother's voice telling him, "Be a man and complete the work God has begun in you." A few years later, Bernard made the decision to become a monk. He became the

About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

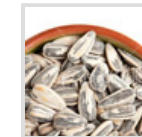
Sister of Notre Dame,
teacher, student, author,
speaker, listener, friend,
poet, farm girl.



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Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality— the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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primary reformer of the Cisterian order and was named a Doctor of the Church. It's easy to see why his mother Aleth has been called "the greatest single influence" in the life of St. Bernard.



Lapa, mother of St. Catherine of Siena. Not all saints were close to their mothers. St. Catherine (who lived in the 14th Century) was often at odds with her mother, Lapa. As one biographer put it, "Catherine forever remained a riddle to her mother."

By all standards, Lapa was an extraordinary woman. She gave birth to 25 children (that is not a typo), 13 of which reached adulthood. Her husband, Giacomo Benincasa, a wealthy wool dyer, was a quiet man. Lapa, in contrast, was a talkative and energetic woman. Catherine was the second youngest in the family. As someone said, "Lapa loved her dearly but understood her not at all." When Catherine was 13, her mother encouraged her to pay more attention to her appearance so she might attract a favorable husband. But Catherine had already decided she wanted to be a nun. One day, when Catherine was 15, she chopped off her beautiful golden-brown hair. To conceal the deed, she donned a small white cap. Lapa, suspecting something, snatched off the cap, shrieked in horror, and cried to her daughter, "How could you do this to me?"

It took a few more years for Catherine to convince her parents to let her become a Dominican tertiary. As such, she lived at home, devoting herself to prayer, fasting, and charitable works. Her reputation for sanctity and wisdom grew until people of all kinds came to her seeking counsel. She also became a prolific letter writer advising noblemen, priests, bishops, politicians and even popes! Catherine died at age 33, but her mother lived to be 89. In 1970 Catherine was named a Doctor of the Church. The story of Catherine and her mother is a consolation for any mother and daughter who find the going rough.

Margaret, mother of St. John Bosco. Margaret Occhienna married the widower Francis Louis Bosco in 1815 in Turin, Italy. She raised three boys, including Francis' son by his first marriage. When her son John was only two, his father died of pneumonia. Years later the saint said he could not remember his father. But he remembered his mother weeping at his father's death. Margaret was a hard-working woman who supported her three sons and her invalid mother all by herself. Unable to read or write, she taught her boys their prayers and told them Bible stories from memory. Once at night

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she took the boys outside to view the stars saying, "All the stars are wonderful. It is God who put them there."



Margaret made her boys responsible for helping with their small farm. Despite their poverty, they always had room at their table for a beggar or for deserters from Napoleon's army. John expressed the desire to be a priest. When he left for the seminary in his clerical dress, she told him, "To see you dressed in this manner fills my heart with joy. But remember, I would rather have a poor peasant for a son than a lax priest."

As a priest, John had a special love for neglected and orphaned children. When he opened a home for these children, his mother came to work there. In fact she gave the final 10 years of her life to helping her son care for neglected children. In time he founded the Salesian order. On the tomb of Margaret Bosco is a plaque that says, "Don Bosco's march to sanctity began on the altar of Mamma Margaret's knee."

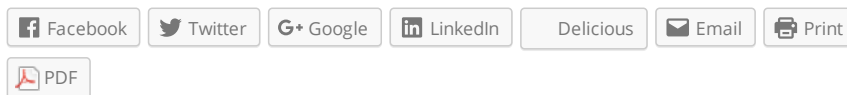
May is traditionally dedicated to Mary, our Mother. The song I chose is "Salve Regina" or "Hail Holy Queen." This hymn dates back to the 11th Century. It is sung at the end of Compline, the last hour of the Divine Office. It is also often recited at the end of the rosary. This version is in the original Latin with English subtitles.



Does anything in the stories of these three mothers strike you?

Are there other mothers you love and admire?

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Kathleen May 2, 2016 at 1:34 am



Wow! These are fascinating stories about how God works through mothers. I admire the persistence and strength of these mothers.

Kathleen

REPLY

John Hopkins May 2, 2016 at 5:35 am



Thank you, Sister Melanie! What amazing women, especially Lapa! Twenty-five children! Living to 89! And then to still have the energy to be at her wits' end with her second youngest. She reminds me of my sister-in-law's mother, Tess – a mother of twelve, almost 90, but when she was in her early 80's she was driving a truck!

REPLY

Kathy May 2, 2016 at 7:21 am



Thanks again, Sister Melannie. I enjoy learning more about the saints, especially my patron, St. Catherine. Yes, I will have to remember that as I have three daughters, and there are times with all of them when we don't exactly see eye to eye!

I hope, as a mother, that I can have a positive influence on them as these saints' mothers did.

REPLY

Jean May 2, 2016 at 9:44 am



Sr. Melannie,

Thank you for yet another inspiring start to the week. Love the Latin, brings back all those years spent in the choir loft!

REPLY

Rose May 2, 2016 at 10:03 am



Thank you Sr. Melannie! Indeed, Lapa and Catherine are a consolation to me as my mother often expressed how she did not quite understand me! Love the beautiful song.

REPLY

Tom May 2, 2016 at 4:18 pm



Mothers often get blamed for the vocational crises of their adult children. Either they pushed too much or put obstacles in the way. These stories assure me that God can work wonders in a person's life no matter what kind of mother-child relationship he/she had as a child.

REPLY

Dina May 4, 2016 at 7:45 am



Me thinks thou dost protests [analyzes] too much.

REPLY

Josita May 2, 2016 at 4:33 pm



What a unique idea to tell the stories of the mothers of great saints!
I know that's why they were great...a mother's love and influence is paramount in a person's life!
Thanks so much for this great post!
I have such warm and special memories of my Mom, too.

Josita

REPLY

Patty May 2, 2016 at 6:30 pm



Dear Sister Melanie - Oh, such wonderful, loving mothers. Thank you.

REPLY

Thomas D May 2, 2016 at 8:14 pm



Beautiful stories, beautiful photographs of flowers, and a beautiful Salve!
Many thanks, Sr Melannie.

REPLY

Rosemary May 2, 2016 at 8:35 pm



Happy Monday, Dear Sister,

I so look forward to your wisdom and lessons each week. The stories of these strong and amazing women, surely give courage and hope to women in today's whirlwind world who are trying to raise good, strong and loving children. It is a daily challenge, I know ❤️

Love the ancient and beautiful Latin...so many good memories.

Have a blessed week.

Much love and many thanks!

REPLY

Karen Hartman, SFP May 3, 2016 at 12:00 am



I loved the story of Catherine of Siena. She is my patron and I am eager to learn more about her life. This was fascinating.

Blessings to all Mother's on this special day -mothers who nurture their children with loving attention and care and spiritual mothers who pray for the children of the world who are in need of love and affection.

REPLY

Barb May 3, 2016 at 6:09 am



Loved these three "Mom" stories. As a mother myself, I know how parts of your heart walk the earth in your children's bodies - so you want their hearts whole and beating with faith, hope and joy so your own heart feels that way too. The three mothers in your stories are inspirational - thank you for sharing the ways they each formed their children. We can always learn.

REPLY

Mary Jo May 3, 2016 at 9:35 am



Thank you Sister. I remember when my children were young and I was stressed out about one or the other's behavior. I talked to the priest at their catholic school. Father told me to pray to St. Monica who is the mother of St. Augustan. While growing up St. Augustan gave his mother 'problems.' She continued to pray

for him throughout his life. None of my children are Saints (yet), but St. Monica and I did a good job together because all four of my children are wonderful adults.

REPLY

Mary Jo May 3, 2016 at 9:37 am



Sorry, I forgot to mention that my second daughter, Catherine, is named after St. Catherine of Siena.

REPLY

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