

We are in Need of a Young Believing Church

IYCS Theological Reflection April 2018

Glancing through the list of saints of recent past we find that some of them were martyred and died young. All through the centuries there were a number **of young saints**, because of their fidelity to God, service to the mankind and safeguarding their celibacy in honour of Christ. They were martyred young because they did not compromise with the worldly pleasures. Their zeal for God and their adherence to faith and truth in achieving the mission of Christ was exemplary.

Jesus died young for the cause of truth and salvation of humankind. His followers also died for the same cause. Among the saints, the young saints revamped the Church at various ages. We feel, we are in need of such young saints today who could influence us to follow Christ meaningfully. Especially, for those who are lost to the worldly affairs and yearning to find meaning in life.

As we celebrate **Holy Easter, the Resurrection of Christ**, the life experiences of these young saints may help rejuvenate us and the Church by enkindling our spirit to work for the mission of Christ. **We are in need of a young believing Church today.**

Here are a few examples of young saints:

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St. Therese of Lisieux (Age 24): She is one of the most popular saints in the history of the Catholic Church. She is famous for her "Little Way," where one does everything out of great love. Her approach is simple and practical. In 1997, St. John Paul II gave her the title of "Doctor of the Church." She is the youngest Doctor of the Church ever.



Bl. Chiara Badano (Age 24): The young and popular Chiara suddenly had a rare form of bone cancer, osteogenic sarcoma. She refused morphine and offered her sufferings for Jesus Christ. She maintained her joyful demeanour, keeping the other patients happy until her death.



St. Joan of Arc (Age 19): Joan, a peasant girl, received visions of St. Michael the Archangel, St. Margaret, and St. Catherine of Alexandria to rise up and help the French defeat the English in the Hundred Years' War.



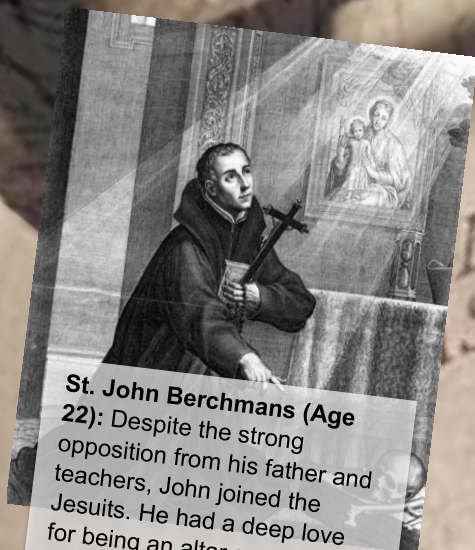
St. Lucy (Age 21): Lucy is one of the most widely revered virgin martyrs in the Early Church. She died during reign of the Emperor Diocletian, unwilling to renounce her Christian faith.



St. Agnes of Rome (Age 12): Since the fourth century, Agnes has been held at the highest honour of all the virgin martyrs.



St. Dymphna (Age 14): Dymphna was the daughter of a petty king in Ireland. After the death of her mother, Dymphna's father became mentally ill and desired to marry her. She fled to Belgium, but her father found and beheaded her. She is the patron saint of mental disorders.



St. John Berchmans (Age 22): Despite the strong opposition from his father and teachers, John joined the Jesuits. He had a deep love for being an altar server at Mass and died early with Roman fever.



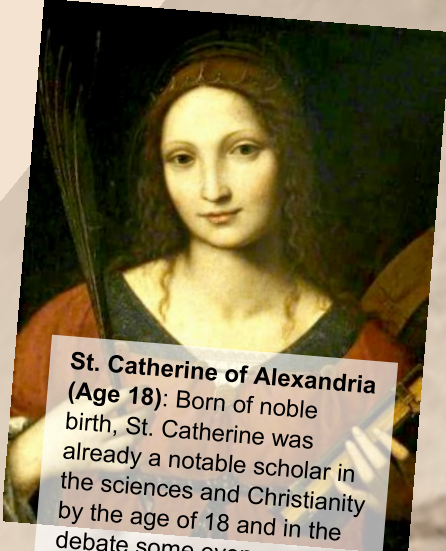
Bl. Isidore Bakanja (Age 19-24): Working for a colonist on a rubber plantation, the owner brutally beat Isidore for his Christian faith. He suffered agonizing pain from his wounds for 6 months. Isidore forgave the man: "Certainly I shall pray for him. When I am in heaven, I shall pray for him very much."



Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati (Age 24): Pier Giorgio did not let his young age stop him from continuously helping the poor. He contracted polio and died on July 4, 1925.



St. Clelia Barbieri (Age 23): Clelia is the youngest founder of a religious community in the history of the Catholic Church. She founded the Congregation of the Sisters Minims of Our Lady of Sorrows at the age of 21. Today they continue to serve the poor in Italy, India, and Tanzania



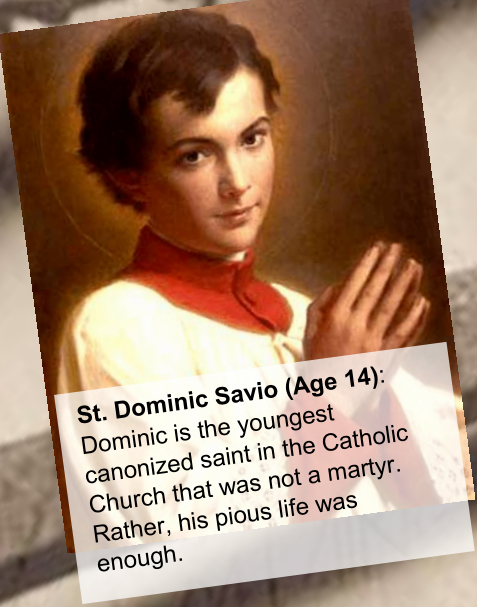
St. Catherine of Alexandria (Age 18): Born of noble birth, St. Catherine was already a notable scholar in the sciences and Christianity by the age of 18 and in the debate some even converted to Christianity and were instantly martyred. The enraged emperor had Catherine beheaded.



St. Kateri Tekakwitha (Age 24): Kateri was an Algonquin-Mohawk Native American who converted to Catholicism at the age of 19. Her tribe shunned her, but she was relentless in her love for Jesus for the rest of her life.



St. Pedro Calungsod (Age 17): Pedro was a missionary in Guam, ministering to the Chamorro people. He was pierced by a spear, cut down by a cutlass, and flung into the sea.



St. Dominic Savio (Age 14): Dominic is the youngest canonized saint in the Catholic Church that was not a martyr. Rather, his pious life was enough.



St. Stanislaus Kostka (Age 17): He was a model and mirror of religious perfection. Wrapped up in prayer, he died from an unknown illness



St. Maria Goretti (Age 11): While Maria was alone, a teenage boy named Alessandro tried to seduce her. When she refused, he stabbed her 14 times. At the hospital, she forgave him before dying. Alessandro soon repented.



St. Elizabeth of Hungary (Age 24): Elizabeth was a princess with a great love for the Lord. Despite her status and wealth, she chose instead to serve the poor.



Bl. Laura Vicuña (Age 12): Weakened by physical abuse by her mother's boss, Laura died of pulmonary tuberculosis. On her deathbed, she offered her life for her mother's salvation: "Mama, I offer my life for you »

St. Pope John Paul II in 1982 canonized Saint Maximilian Kolbe and beatified 266 martyrs of 20th century. 218 of them were martyrs of religious persecution in Spain; 25 were martyrs of persecution in Mexico carried out by the local government; 10 were witnesses of the faith during the Nazi-Socialist regime in Germany and Europe. The remaining eleven, belonging to various countries on every continent, died under different circumstances due to suffering inflicted either in prison or in concentration camps. Among them there are also three very young women martyrs like Saint Blessed Antonia Mesina.

Maximilian Kolbe died for his fellow prisoner at the concentration camp ; three Discalced Carmelites of Guadalajara were shot in the city streets for their faith ; Edith Stein, German Discalced Carmelite, died in the gas chamber ; Karolina Kozka, a Polish Lay woman was killed by a Russian soldier at the age of 17 while defending her virginity ; Michel Callo, young French worker died in Guessen II concentration camp ; Pierina Morosini, lay woman aged 26 was attacked by a man who stoned her to death for refusing to comply with his evil desires ; Antonia Mesina, a lay woman at the age of 16 was killed by a prowler who tried to rape her ; 2 Sisters and 5 Catechists (1 man and 4 women) from Thailand were killed in different places during persecution of Christians ; Isidore Bakanja, lay Catechist killed by European Over-seer who hated Catholics ; Peter To Rot, married, with children, lay catechist was killed by Japanese soldiers and many more.

Besides these we have a large number of unknown young people who died defending their faith in various parts of the world. In the recent past we have a number of anonymous young Christians who died in war and religious persecution, mainly in Middle East - Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Yemen etc. ; in Asia - Vietnam, India, China, Pakistan etc. ; in Africa - Sudan, Congo etc. ; in Latin America - Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil etc. They may not be numbered in the list of saints but their defence of faith and sacrifices will inspire us to live for a life of truth and salvation of mankind. Similarly there are many who lived a life of humility, simplicity and self-sacrifice which will go unnoticed, but in the eyes of God it will measure more than what is visible.

Let this Easter time help us, our young people learn these young martyrs and saints and get inspiration to offer their life to Christ by which we can bring about a change in this highly materialized and unbelieving world. Let Jesus help us commit ourselves to the cause of truth and salvation of the humankind.

Wish you all a Joyful and Grace filled Easter.