

# Advent Thoughts for the Day: Saints

## Advent Days 14-16 by Melanie Seward

### Advent Day 17

Tuesday 14 December

### St Augustine of Hippo (not of Canterbury)



This Augustine was born in the 4th Century to a Christian mother and a pagan father in what is now Algeria. His ethnicity was Berber but his family were 'romanised' and Latin was his first language.

He had a Christian upbringing but fought against it: he stole for the sake of it, he dabbled in the beliefs of Manichaeism, he was party mad and a womaniser. He got his young mistress pregnant and then left her, planning to marry for money! He is said to have prayed, 'God give me chastity but not just yet!' His mother did not give up and after much questioning, conflict and hesitation,

Augustine experienced God speaking to him through the words of St Paul (Romans 13:13-14).

Augustine turned his life around; he became charitable, devout, a priest and a bishop, his writings still influence us today. He is the patron saint of brewers and beer!

We can be tempted to see 'Saints' as being wonderful human beings born into a super moral life and 'perfect' from the womb. Augustine of Hippo reminds us that God calls the imperfect and not only can we all change but, with his help, we can all live as he intended us to live. God sees the potential in each one of us.

***"There is no saint without a past, no sinner without a future."- St. Augustine of Hippo***

Perhaps he, more than any of the saints, reminds us that God is seeking us and will help us to seek him.

**'O Lord my God, my sole hope, help me to believe and never to cease seeking you. Grant that I may always and ardently seek out your countenance. Give me the strength to seek you, for you help me to find you and you have more and more given me the hope of finding you. Amen.'**

IMAGE: The earliest portrait of Saint Augustine in a 6<sup>th</sup>-Century fresco, Lateran, Rome from [Augustine of Hippo - Wikipedia](#)

**Manichaeism** - a struggle between a spiritual world of light and an evil, material world of darkness.

# Advent Day 18

## Wednesday 15 December

### St Hildegard (born 1098)



Local custom sealed Hildegard's fate; the tenth child of a noble family in Germany, she was given to the church. A hilltop monastery, where she had her own stone walled cell, became her home for forty years. She became prioress of the abbey and began to compose music for her nuns to sing when they said the Divine Office.

Aged 42, Hildegard spoke of the visions she had received from God since childhood and was allowed to record them. Writings on medicine and natural science, theology and philosophy followed.

As a mystic and poet, she founded her own monastery and oversaw men and women under her authority.

Hildegard was a truly remarkable woman, able to manage and exercise power as well to channel her creativity whilst remaining close to God.

Hildegard is just one shining example of how God has always called women to do his work. Regardless of her time, family and culture she was called to be a beacon of hope and renewed understanding. God opened the channels through which she could exercise her abilities in the service of God and others.

Today, our church needs all kinds of people with all kinds of gifts to step forward and be beacons of hope and to renew our understanding. God was able to do this with Hildegard in 1098. If we were to listen to God in 2021 and allow his spirit to empower us, what could be achieved to God's glory? If we were to offer him our gifts of creativity, science, medicine as well as the spoken and written word, how might our world change?

#### **A Prayer of Awareness** ***Hildegard of Bingen***

God is the foundation for everything  
This God undertakes, God gives.  
Such that nothing that is necessary for life is lacking.  
Now humankind needs a body that at all times honours and praises God.  
This body is supported in every way through the earth.  
Thus the earth glorifies the power of God.

IMAGE: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hildegard\\_von\\_Bingen.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hildegard_von_Bingen.jpg)  
Unknown authorUnknown author, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

# Advent Day 19

## Thursday 16 December

### St Damien (1840-1899)



Named Joseph at birth, he grew up as the youngest on a farm in Belgium and followed his two siblings into the religious life. He picked up Latin from his brother and prayed to be sent on a mission. When one of his brothers was unable to fulfil a mission to Hawaii, the Abbey sent Joseph to replace him.

Hawaii set up a Leper Colony - an island where people were forced to live with no facilities and no contact with non-lepers! Leprosy was feared and resulted in a lifetime of isolation. Fr Damien felt the call to care for them.

He volunteered to live on the leper island. He was met with lawlessness, alcoholism and people badly needing treatment for their sores and wounds. He shared the love of God. He worked to bring people together to build houses, roads, a hospital, a school and a church. It was planned to send replacement missionaries but, Fr Damien asked to stay - he loved the people. Father Damien contracted Leprosy himself but continued his work and died living amongst his people.

Fr Damien was not seen as the brightest; he was 'hands on'. He went beyond the seven sacraments and lived alongside those for whom he cared. Fear and concern were mitigated by compassion; in making the coffins, dressing the ulcers and sharing meals, he transcended the relationship of helper and helped.

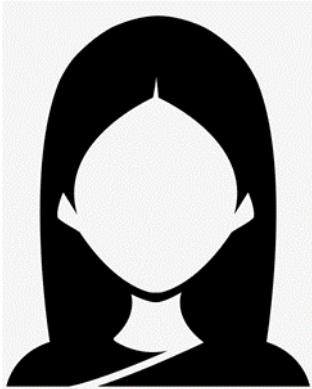
In our time, where many are treated as 'lepers'- unwanted because of disease, physical disability, mental illness, refugee status, addiction or just being a square peg in a round hole - Fr Damien has much to teach us and we should hold him dear.

***The photo is from the Hawaii State Archives in Honolulu, Hawaii. It was taken in 1888, the year before Father Damien's death, by William Brigham, who had come to Molokai as a companion of a leprosy specialist, Dr. Prince A. Morrow.***

# Advent Day 20

## Friday 17 December

### St Anna Wang (died 1900)



In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Europeans and Americans were gaining increasing influence in China and were able to gain trading agreements resulting in whole areas being run independently of the Chinese. Resentment and anger grew, fuelling a grass-roots rebellion called the 'Boxer Rebellion'. It sought to expel foreigners and began attacking missionaries, burning churches, killing any Chinese who were Christians and any officials who sought to protect them.

Tens of thousands of people were murdered.

Anna, born into a poor farming family, was raised a Christian but her mother died in her early childhood. Aged eleven, she rebelled against her family who tried to force her into an arranged marriage. When she was fourteen, the Boxer Rebellion came to her village; they burned the church and rounded up all the Christians. The deal on offer: renounce your faith and live. Many parents did so to save their children, but Anna refused. Clinging to prayer, she encouraged others to find the strength to do the same.

The Catholic Church has recognised many Christian children as martyrs. **St. Paulus Lang Fu** was only seven when he was martyred during the same Boxer Rebellion. These saints are important; they remind us that faith can be held strongly by both young and old and that children in our faith communities can teach us a great deal. Adults do not have all the answers... about anything, let alone God. Remember the verse...

***Jesus: 'Let the little children come to Me. Never hinder them! Don't you realise—the kingdom of God belongs to those who are like children?'***

***(Luke 18:16 from The Voice)***