

# Advent Thoughts for the Day: Saints Advent Days 21-24 by Forbes Mutch

## Advent Day 21 Saturday 18 December Julian of Norwich

It used to confuse me - Julian was a woman, so why did she assume a man's name?

It turns out that it wasn't her real name, but the name of the church where her hermit's cell was sited in Norwich. To save confusion in later years, Julian was often referred to as Juliana of Norwich, Dame Julian or Mother Julian.

She is best known as someone who regained her health through Christ; inspired others with her story and later dispensed encouragement and words of wisdom from a monastic cell attached to St Julian's church in Norwich.

Little is known of her early life but, on 13 May 1373, aged 30, she was healed of a serious illness after experiencing visions of Christ's suffering, and she wrote two accounts of this experience called *Revelations of Divine Love*.

These narratives became cornerstone publications of early English religious literature, covering some of the profound mysteries of Christian faith, such as predestination, the foreknowledge of God and the existence of evil.

In later years, Julian became an 'anchorite', someone who withdraws from secular society to lead an intensely prayer-orientated and ascetic life in solitude. I don't blame her - this was an age troubled by the Black Death, the 100 Years' War and the Peasant's Revolt. In fact, it sounds remarkably like the world that we know today, and it's no surprise that the works of the reclusive Julian have regained popularity during COVID, lockdown and isolation.



This is part of her most inspiring prayer:

*In you, Father all-mighty, we have our preservation and our bliss. Teach us to believe that by your grace all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well. Amen*

# Advent Day 22

## Sunday 19 December

### Mother Theresa

Mother Teresa, an icon of goodness in a world corrupted by the global imbalance of wealth, healthcare and opportunity, was canonised as a saint in a ceremony in St Peter's Square, Vatican City, in 2016.

Tens of thousands of people witnessed the ceremony, including 15 government delegations and 1,500 homeless people from across Italy. It was televised live and streamed online. Mother Theresa is a truly modern saint.

Most of us have grown up knowing about Mother Teresa's work in the slums of Calcutta, but her roots are less well-known. She was born in Skopje (now the capital of North Macedonia) in 1910. She knew from an early age what she wanted to do and she left home at the age of 18 to join the Sisters of Loreto at Loreto Abbey in Rathfarnham, Ireland, to learn English with the intent of becoming a missionary.

She arrived in India in 1929. The rest is history. She lived and worked among the poor of Calcutta, caring for some the most desperately impoverished people in the world.

By 1950, she had founded the *Missionaries of Charity*, a Roman Catholic religious congregation that now has over 4,500 nuns and is active in 133 countries. The order manages homes for people who are dying of HIV/AIDS, leprosy and tuberculosis. It also runs soup kitchens, dispensaries, mobile clinics, children's and family counselling programmes, as well as orphanages and schools.

She once said: "By blood, I am Albanian. By citizenship, an Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the Heart of Jesus."

Mother Teresa of Calcutta's daily prayer:

*Flood my soul with Thy spirit and love. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of Thine. Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel Thy presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus.*



Remember that when you see a homeless person on the streets of Hertford.

# **Advent Day 23**

## **Monday 20 December**

### **Therese of Lisieux**

Of all the saints that we have written about in this Advent series, I can respond to Therese of Lisieux the most. She was a small person, living a small life but trying to make a difference to the world around her.

Born in Alençon, Normandy in 1873, her parents were hard working and comfortably well off, and were devout Catholics. As a young girl, Therese suffered from a serious fever, during which she had a vision of the Virgin Mary smiling at her. She recovered from her illness and thereafter dedicated her life to prayer and devotion.

Eventually joining three of her sisters in a Carmelite convent, Therese worried about how ordinary people could achieve holiness while 'living hidden, little lives' like hers. She realised that she had to focus on the little things in life.

*She said: 'The only way I can prove my love [for God] is by scattering flowers and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love.'*

In 1897, she died from tuberculosis at the tragically young age of 24.

Her sister, Pauline, subsequently published extracts from Therese's journal and this is where her life had its impact, as it quickly became a standard text for Carmelite sisters and other holy orders the world over. It was a powerful legacy.

Therese's 'little way' of trusting in Jesus appealed to thousands of people on a journey of faith who were (and are) trying to find holiness in their ordinary lives. She was canonised by the Catholic Church in 1925.

*To the right and to the left, I throw to my little birds the good grain that God places in my hands. And then I let things take their course. Amen.*



# **Advent Day 24**

## **Tuesday 21 December**

### **John the Baptist**

Most of us will have some knowledge of John the Baptist, as his familiar story appears in all four of the New Testament gospels and his name serves as a reference point elsewhere in the Bible.

He cuts a wild, charismatic figure, living in the Judean wilderness, wearing camel hair and a leather belt and living on a diet of locusts and wild honey. He attracts large crowds as he preaches a message of repentance on the banks of the Lower River Jordan.

'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near', he says (Matt 3:2). He is called 'The Baptist' because it's his practice of submerging in the river those who respond to his message and sincerely repent of their sins. He gives them a new life.

He speaks with authority because he knows exactly who he is and what God wants him to do - herald the coming of the Messiah. Echoing the prophet Elijah, he says: 'I am the voice of one calling in the desert. Make straight the way for the Lord.'

He lives with a boldness of purpose throughout his uncompromising mission, and is willing to die a martyr for his stand against sin.

Imprisoned by Herod, he has a dark moment when he asks his followers if Jesus really is the One who was to come, or whether there will be another. They reassure him that Jesus is for real, and John dies knowing that he was right.

If we can take anything from the story and character of John, it's that, once we realise that God has given us a specific purpose for our lives, we can move forward with confidence, fully trusting in the One who has called us. Like John the Baptist, we can live without fear. Amen.

