

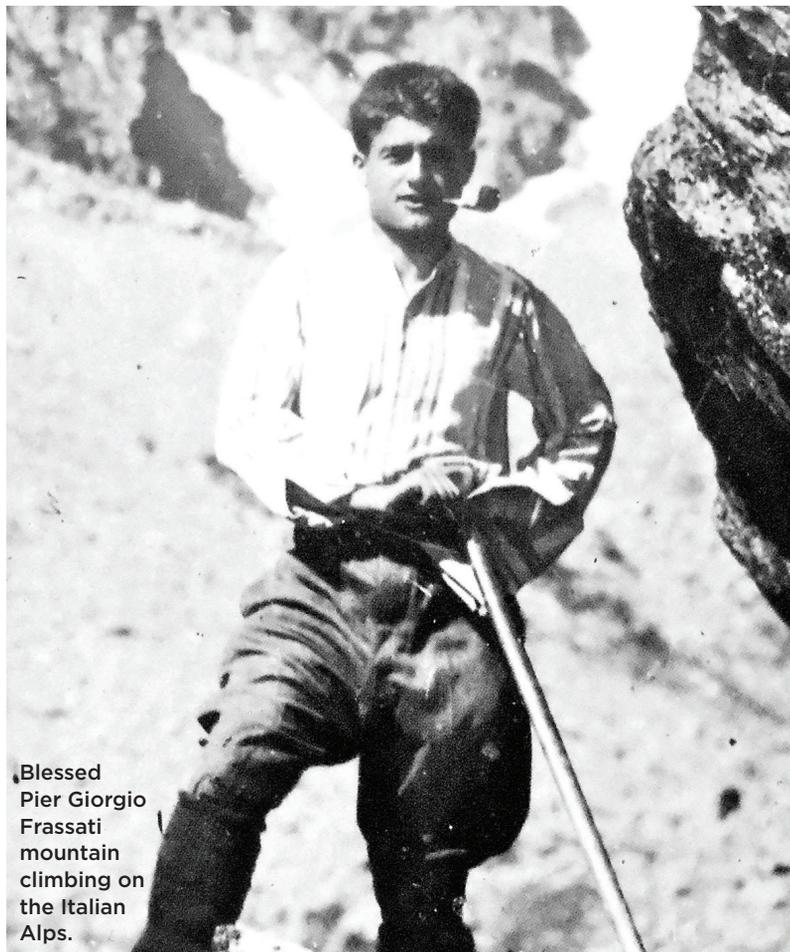


Saints that inspire and motivate young people



**BISHOP
JOHN O. BARRES**
*is the fifth bishop
of the Catholic
Diocese of Rockville
Centre. Follow
him on Twitter, @
BishopBarres*

ALMOST EVERY CONVERSATION ABOUT THE CONTEMPORARY MISSION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HIGHLIGHTS THE CHALLENGING QUESTION OF HOW WE CAN REACH THIS GENERATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE. A WHOLE SYNOD IN ROME HAS BEEN DEVOTED TO THIS CRITICAL QUESTION AND CONCERN.



Blessed
Pier Giorgio
Frassati
mountain
climbing on
the Italian
Alps.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The lives of the saints have and will always have a compelling power for young people. All the saints are capable of attracting, inspiring and motivating the young.

As a junior at Phillips Academy (Andover), I did a term paper on St. John Neumann in February 1977. As I researched and studied his life, I was inspired by St. John Neumann's humility, his commitment to the Word of God, his mystical connection to the Catholic Mass and the Body and Blood of Christ, and his determined and creative Catholic missionary spirit.

As I was studying, writing and praying the life of this heroic priest and bishop, I went to Mass one day and when the priest lifted the chalice at the consecration, I asked the Lord silently and with great peace, "Do you want me to be a priest?" I did not make a decision at that moment, but it was the moment that the door opened, and my prayerful question was a 16-year-old's act of faith and expression of commitment to the unfolding of God's will.

That term paper on St. John Neumann as a junior in high school helped lead me to my vocation as a priest and eventually a bishop.

I like to encourage young people to study seriously the lives of saints and I tell them that if they are attracted by the holiness and virtue of a saint that means the Holy Spirit is asking them to develop and express some of the same qualities of that saint but through their own personality and moment in history.

Here are three saints that ignite and motivate the Catholic faith of young people: Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, and St. Katharine Drexel.

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati (1900-1924) had a winning personality and charisma. His father was the owner of the Italian newspaper La Stampa, an Italian senator and ultimately Italy's ambassador to Germany. His mother was a renowned painter and artist. They were aristocrats of high prestige and influence in Turin and in Italy.

Pier Giorgio was an athlete and an Italian Alpinist. There are photos of him hanging off mountains with pickaxes and ropes. He loved adventure and he loved practical jokes. An engineering student, he befriended and served

a wide-range of poor people in the streets of Turin. He was a student activist who protested Italian Fascism and the rise of Benito Mussolini. His interior life was rich, and he loved to go into parishes to engage in the Eucharistic Adoration that motivated his missionary life.

When he died of a fatal disease at the age of 24, his parents expected their influential friends and fellow aristocrats to be at the funeral, but they were moved when they found the streets filled with the poor people of Turin who the Good Samaritan Pier Giorgio had served so lovingly.

As a rich and wealthy young man, Pier Giorgio turned the Gospel parable of the rich young man on its head. The rich young man in the Gospel departs from Jesus sadly since he cannot part with his possessions. Pier Giorgio, with his wealthy, powerful and influential parents, went directly to Jesus and said yes immediately and always to the radical self-gift of his life to God — a compelling and motivating story for any young person seeking happiness, the truth and an adventurous missionary life of holiness.

As a young man, Blessed Frederic Ozanam (1813-1853) had a taste and a talent for lively debate and engaged in it at the universities in Paris. He would try to convince the skeptical audiences of the truths of the teachings of the Catholic Church.

In one debate, he was much more convincing and talented than his opponent but this very same opponent shot a barb of challenge that changed Frederic's life. He said that Ozanam had articulated Catholic belief well but that there was little evidence of action that backed up and expressed those beliefs.

This public challenge to his faith humbled Ozanam and motivated him to serve the poor. He was so dedicated to the poor that eventually he founded the St. Vincent de Paul Society which continues its global mission to this day.

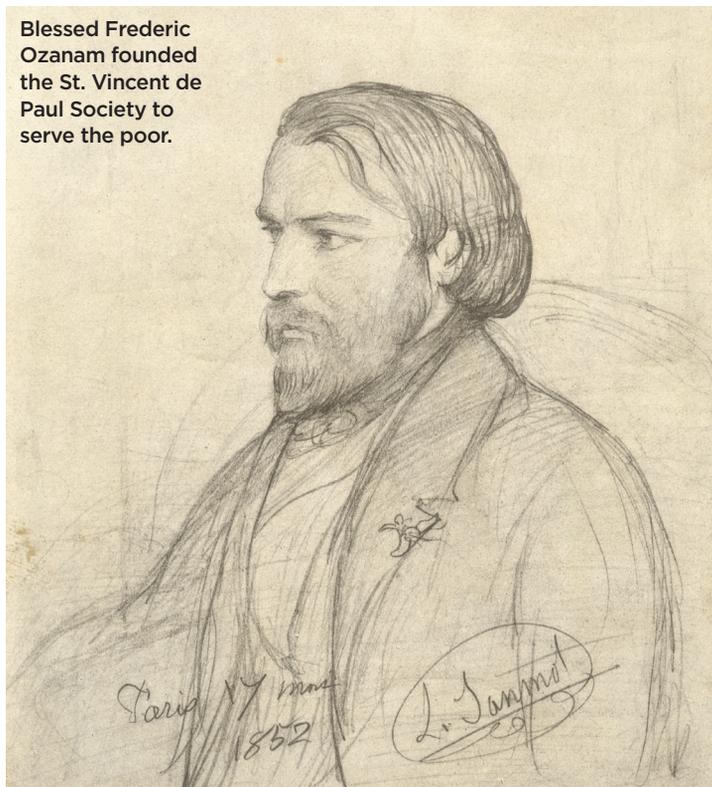
The Catholic belief in the unity of faith and reason joined up with the Beatitudes and Corporal Works of Mercy in Ozanam's life and his Catholic faith became more holistic, integrated and compelling. He was a literary scholar, a lawyer, a journalist, a human rights advocate and lived the Sacrament of Marriage with his wife Amelie with great devotion and a missionary spirit. His compelling story motivates young people to expand and integrate every dimension of their Catholic faith.

As a beautiful Philadelphia debutante, St. Katharine Drexel (1858-1955) had style, charm, manners, education and talent. Katharine came from one of the wealthiest families in the history of the United States. She might very well remind us of her fellow Philadelphian Grace Kelly, the great 20th century film actress and Princess of Monaco. What could possibly motivate a rich, beautiful and talented young woman like Katharine Drexel to embrace vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a prophetic woman religious?

Once as a young woman, she visited Pope Leo XIII and asked him to assist the missions to African Americans and



St. Katharine Drexel was a debutante who devoted her life to Christ and caring for African Americans and Native Americans through United States missions.



Blessed Frederic Ozanam founded the St. Vincent de Paul Society to serve the poor.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Native Americans in the United States. Pope Leo's wise and challenging reply was: "What about you...What about you?!" This question disturbed Katharine but helped lead her to her vocation as a woman religious who dedicated her life and her family fortune to serve African and Native Americans and establish schools and universities.

The Holy Spirit is asking every young person the same question Pope Leo XIII asked St. Katharine Drexel: "What about you? What about the direction of your life? Have you really given your entire life to God or are you holding something back? What are you being called to do to advance the mission of the Church and become a saint?"

Saints inspire young people to be generous and to dream. Saints inspire life directions - I know from direct personal experience. Saints inspire young people to be saints in their own place, culture and moment of history.

Saints inspire young people to have a burning desire for Heaven and eternal life, a burning desire that lights their path and destiny on Earth. †