

Noah Learns About The Saints

By Fr. Matthew Brumleve

You might know that one
of the things eight year old
Noah likes to do – is to visit
his Nonna Marie.

She lives in a big old house out in the country – with a big front porch, creaky stairs, and lots of big shade trees around it.

Noah especially enjoys the two weeks he gets to go to his Nonna's in the summer time. But there are other, shorter visits he gets to make throughout the year.

One weekend when Noah was at his Nonna's, Sunday rolled around, so they got in Nonna's big Buick, and drove very slowly and carefully to Nonna's church in town.

Of course they had to go early “to get a good seat”, although Noah noticed that Nonna usually stood around visiting long before they made their way to the front pew!

Noah liked Nonna's church – it was old, and the floor creaked, and it had the wonderful smell of candles burning and lingering incense in the rafter – although Noah much preferred the smell of Nonna's house filling with the aroma of baking cookies.

Noah always liked all the statues of people starring down at them from the walls, but he never knew who they were, why they were there, or why there was so many of them. So on that particular Sunday Noah just asked, "Nonna, who are these people on the walls?"

"Why those are saints, honey," said Nonna. (Nonna often called Noah, dear, or honey, or some other term of affection).

"And who are saints," Noah asked?

"I declare child, don't they teach you anything in those religion classes out in the suburbs," Nonna said in a playful mood. "Why the saints are only the holiest people

around. Each one of them used the gifts God gave them in a special way to help God's mercy and compassion be known. After Mass, I'll introduce you to a few of them."

Noah couldn't wait! Thankfully, Fr. Bill did not preach too long that day.

And the choir only sang one song at Communion and there was no second collection.

So after Mass was over Nonna took Noah by the hand and walked him to the side aisle. Noah was impressed that learning about the saints was so important, Nonna just waved to a few people instead of talking to them after Mass.

Quietly, and slowly – Nonna began her story. "These are our special friends called saints who look down on us from the walls like the look down on us from heaven."

“So saints are people who live with God in heaven?” Noah asked.

“That’s right dear”

“But how did they get to heaven?” said Noah.

“The saints got to heaven first of all by the grace and love, of God. Because they knew how much God loved them – they lived their lives in gratitude to God by using their gifts and talents God gave them to do something special with their lives to help those around them.

The Church wants us to see them as good role models and to get us thinking – if they can live a good life, then so can we!”

Nonna continued: “Remember that story in St. Matthew’s Gospel about people asking: when did we see you hungry and feed you,

thirsty and give you drink, naked a cloth you, sick and took care of you? And Jesus said ‘whenever you did to the least of my brothers or sister – you did it for me?’ Well these men and women could not open their eyes without seeing Jesus all around them.

“Like St. Christopher,” Nonna said. “After he became a Christian he decided to help people in a very practical way. He helped carry them across a river near his town when they were travelling, so they could keep dry.

“One day he put a boy on his shoulders to carry him across the river. As they crossed the boy got heavier and heavier. Finally St. Christopher asked, ‘who are you?’ ‘I am Jesus,’ the boy said, ‘you have help me cross this river many times, you just did not know it.’ So that’s why St. Christopher is always seen carrying the child Jesus. And he is here in our Church to remind us that when we do things for others, we always do them for the Lord.

“So I guess Jesus also should have said, ‘when did I carry you and keep you dry’ in his list.” Noah joked.

“And don’t you know,” Nonna said with a laugh, “That’s exactly what your mom and I did for you when you were little little – carried you and kept you dry!” Noah turned a little red with that comment.

“Is that a wheel next to this saint, Nonna?” Noah asked?

“Yes, dear. A wheel with spikes on it.”

“Whatever for?” asked Noah.

“Well this is Saint Catherine of Alexandria who lived in a time when Christians were persecuted for their beliefs. When Catherine was just a teenager – only 18 years old – she was brave enough to go to the emperor and tell him he must stop attacking good people and also stop worshiping false gods.

“The emperor was insulted and put her in jail. He said that she must die by being tortured by laying across a spiked wheel. When Catherine was first put on the wheel – a miracle happened – as it fell apart instead of piercing her. But then the emperor just ordered that her head be cut off – so she died anyway. St. Catherine reminds us that even when we are young – we have to stand up for what we believe in.

“Did all the saints die in such horrible ways?” Noah asked.

“Many did,” said Nonna. “Especially in the early years of the Church. We call them martyrs – because they shed their blood for the Lord. And that’s why Fr. Bill wears red vestments on their feast days – to remind us of they gave their very lives in service to the Lord.”

“But --- then there is St. Monica, our next friend – she died very peacefully after a long, but not always happy, life. Monica married a man who was not a Christian, and who was not always nice to her. He would not let their children be Baptized – and so Monica worried about how they were going to get along in life, without the guidance and support of the Lord. She especially worried about her oldest son, Augustine, who was hanging out with the wrong crowd and getting into lots of trouble.

“Monica prayed 27 years for the well-being of her son – and eventually Augustine gave up his sinful ways and his bad friends, and became a good Christian, even becoming a Bishop.

“Monica teaches us to never, ever give up hope – God works on his time, not ours. We should continue to pray for others – especially those in our families and those who do not always love as we should. Each of the saints has some important lesson to teach us like this. And remember – if they can live a good life – then we can too!”

So then Nonna said, “ Now that you have met a few saints, who is your favorite, Noah?”

“First, Nonna, let me make sure I got this right. Saints are people in heaven with God. And they are in heaven because God loved them. And because they knew God loved them, they used their gifts and talents to do something special to show their love for others.

“Wow, Noah, you are a quick learner.”

“Thanks, Nonna.” Noah took a deep breath and said: I like St. Christopher, and St. Catherine, and St. Monica. But I would have to say my *favorite* saint is grandpa Tony – because you tell me all the time he is in heaven with God. And grandpa certainly loved you, and he loved me, too! And he never, ever gave up on me – especially when he was trying to teach me how to ride my bike.”

Now, Noah did not know if this was the right thing to say or not, because he brought a tear to Nonna’s eye. . .

And after she wiped the tear away with her ever-present hanky, she just said, “you are a good boy, Noah, and I know you are going to do something special with your life. And someday, we will all be together in heaven with God, with all the saints – yes, even grandpa Tony.”

“Won’t that be a special day,” Noah said.

“Speaking of special days,” Nonna said, “let’s make this one by getting to the bakery before all the good donuts are gone!”

So Noah and his grandmother got into Nonna’s Buick – and drove to the bakery. But Noah thought as they drove along: who needs a donut to make this day special?

Just spending time with the Lord and with

Nonna and her special friends -- has already made this day *very* special.

