5 saints who lived the gospel of life

Living the Gospel is difficult. We are called to see the face of Christ in every person we meet, but when that person is deformed, or disabled, or unpleasant, it can be hard to reach out with charity. As we try to build a culture of life and instill pro-life values in our families, we also have the example of many saints who lived out the gospel of life despite trials and obstacles.

When we think of pro-life saints, we typically think of Saint Gianna Molla, who heroically chose life for her preborn daughter instead of abortion—a choice which cost Gianna her own life. We think of Saint Gerard Majella, the patron saint of expectant mothers. We sometimes forget that there are many other saints out there who not only stood up for preborn babies and their mothers, but also brought attention to the needs of the poorest of the poor, the sick (including marginalized lepers), and promoted the sanctity of marriage.

Saint Damien de Veuster

We all aspire to be heroes. But as Christians, our goal is so much more than being a hero in the eyes of the world. We strive to become saints—like Saint Damien de Veuster—who build a culture of life in our society. Saint Damien served the lepers of the Hawaiian Islands for 16 years, giving up his life and his health in order to bring comfort to the most hated and feared people in society.

Saint Damien lived the gospel of life. He saw Jesus in every person he met, even when they were horribly disfigured by Hansen's disease. Saint Damien was outspoken. When he couldn't get proper medical supplies for his lepers, he wrote scathing

letters to the Board of Health in Honolulu to get them to see the humanity of the lepers. His outspokenness and persistence helped conditions on the island improve.

With his skill as a carpenter, Saint Damien and the inhabitants built suitable homes, a chapel, rectory, school, and hospital. After over a decade of service on Molokai, Saint Damien himself contracted leprosy and died after serving 25 years as a missionary to the Hawaiian Islands. His feast day is May 10. The story of Saint Damien is a great reminder that we should always treat others with respect and dignity—as members of our human family—no matter what their outward appearance, age, or ability.

Learn more about Saint Damien in the 1999 film *Molokai* starring David Wenham as Father Damien. Older students would enjoy reading *Damien the Leper* by John Farrow

Saint Thomas More

There is no saint more applicable to our times than Saint Thomas More. In the sixteenth century, Thomas was serving as Chancellor of England when King Henry VIII announced his divorce from his wife, Catherine, and adulterous marriage to his mistress, Anne Boleyn. Not only did Henry declare that his divorce was lawful and moral, he also made himself the head of the Catholic Church in England with the authority to change the Church's laws.

Thomas faced a moral dilemma—either sign an oath proclaiming Henry head of the Church in England or suffer death as a traitor for refusing to sign. Sir Thomas loved the Church. As a loyal Catholic, he couldn't deny that the pope was the head of the Church—in England or in the rest of the world. As a loyal subject to the king, Sir Thomas also felt he couldn't commit an act of treason to the crown by refusing to sign the oath.

Instead, Thomas chose to resign his position as Chancellor and retire to the country. His silence only provoked the King and his court to arrest and try Thomas for treason. Sir Thomas was found guilty and sentenced to be executed. Faithful to God to the last, at his execution, he said "I die the king's faithful servant, but God's first." His feast day is June 22. Like Saint Thomas, we face a dilemma in today's anti-family culture. We have a choice—we can either stay silent like everyone else as society tries to redefine marriage, or we can boldly remind others of the sacredness of the marriage bond between one man and one woman.

Learn more about the conflict between Saint Thomas and King Henry VIII in the 1966 film *A Man for All Seasons*, starring Paul Scofield as Sir Thomas.

Saint Maximilian Kolbe

Saint Maximilian Kolbe is probably best known as the Catholic priest who gave his life for another man in Auschwitz in an act of ultimate self-sacrifice. As a Franciscan friar, St. Maximilian eagerly spread the word of God. With the other friars, Saint Maximilian built a city in Poland dedicated to the Immaculata, Niepokalanów, where the friars toiled endlessly to spread the Gospel to all corners of the world.

When the Nazis took control of Poland in World War II, they arrested Saint Maximilian and took him to Auschwitz—a concentration camp. Not long after his arrival, three fellow prisoners escaped. As punishment, the camp officers selected ten men from Saint Maximilian's prison block to die. When one of the doomed men, Franciszek Gajowniczek, pleaded not to be chosen, Saint Maximilian stepped forward and offered to take his place. It was a bold move, considering he could have been shot on the spot just for speaking. Surprisingly, the Nazis agreed, and Saint Maximilian spent his final days in a

starvation bunker.

At the end of two weeks, he was the only one still alive. As the Nazi officer approached him with a lethal injection, the priest held out his arm to his executioner. He died on August 14, 1941, at the age of 47. At his canonization, the pope declared Saint Maximilian a "martyr of charity" for giving up his life for another person. His feast day is August 14th. Like Saint Maximilian, we also have to be prepared to give our lives for others—for our neighbors as well as for vulnerable and marginalized people in our society, like preborn children, expectant mothers, and elderly persons.

Younger children will definitely enjoy these coloring pages from Waltzing Matilda and the whole family can listen to this audio drama on his life from Holy Heroes.

Saint Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa)

St. Teresa of Calcutta became known for her work among the poor in Calcutta, India. As a religious sister in the order of the Sisters of Loreto, Saint Teresa heard a call from Jesus to found the Missionaries of Charity dedicated to serving the poorest of the poor in India and all over the world, especially children, the sick, the helpless, and the dying.

Saint Teresa believed that all people are great gifts from God! She treated every person with dignity and respect, no matter how dirty, poor, or helpless they were, and worked tirelessly in the defense of preborn babies. Saint Teresa of Calcutta is a great example of how we should live our lives as pro-lifers—always willing to help those in need and respecting the dignity of every human being from creation until death. Her feast day is September 5.

Help your kids learn more about Mother Teresa. Make Indian Sweet Bread and iced chai lattes, or no-bake Mother Teresa

pie. For younger students use these coloring pages of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta from Waltzing Matilda or get one of these adorable Tiny Saints. Read *Mother Teresa: A Life of Love* by John and Marieta Monette, or *Mother Teresa* by Demi.

Pope Saint John Paul II

Saint John Paul II's given name was Karol Wojtyła before he was chosen to be the first Polish pope to lead the Catholic Church. During his papacy, Saint John Paul II was a great hero for life. John Paul II traveled more than his predecessors, making 104 trips outside of Italy. He had a special love for young people and instituted World Youth Day as a way to bring them to Christ.

In addition to his many general audiences and public addresses throughout his 27-year pontificate, John Paul II wrote many encyclicals and other documents for the Church, showing his respect for human beings.

He believed that all human beings need to be protected and loved—from the moment of creation until death! *Evangelium Vitae*, or The Gospel of Life, was John Paul II's encyclical about the beauty of every human being and how each of us has a special duty to defend all persons—born and preborn. His feast day is October 22.

Younger child will enjoy this free coloring page of Saint John Paul II from CLSP's *Miracle of Life Coloring & Activity Book*. Find other printable activities on Catholic Icing or book lists on ShowerofRoses. Next month, celebrate the feast of Saint John Paul II with a Polish feast and finish with Kremówka Papieska (pope's cream cake).

Get to know these saints and share their inspiring stories with your children. These faithful men and women have "been there" with their struggles and temptations. They struggled,

but they also overcame their struggles and reached a higher goal—eternal life with God in heaven. Let the stories of these five pro-life saints inspire you to continue building a culture of life in your home. Find more pro-life saints and activities from the Culture of Life Studies Program.