

**S A I N T
ANTHONY**
and
**S A I N T
JUDE**

***TRUE STORIES OF
HEAVENLY HELP***

Mitch Finley



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I owe a debt of gratitude to the hundreds of people who took the time to write their stories and send them to me. Equal thanks are due the many editors who published my letter in their magazine or newspaper inviting people to send me their stories.

FOREWORD

For those people who have a devotion to Saint Anthony or Saint Jude—or better yet, those people seeking to foster such a devotion—Mitch Finley’s *Saint Anthony and Saint Jude: True Stories of Heavenly Help* is a resource par excellence. It is “heavenly help” at your fingertips.

As a child, I grew up in a family that had great devotion to these two saints. My mother had a personal relationship with Saint Anthony. Her confidence in this wonder-worker and finder of lost items was as easy and unassuming as apple pie and homemade bread. Her devotion was more like a friendship, and I grew up with a devotion to Saint Anthony as a part of my early spiritual development. He was a friend and helper to my family. My memory is filled with many experiences of prayers answered by this loving saint, and even to this day I find myself saying a prayer to Saint Anthony every now and then.

And then there’s Saint Jude. Next door to my childhood home there lived a woman who was eager to tell everyone about Saint Jude and how he was the one to go to when you were at the end of your wits with worry and anxiety. She had personal experience in her own life with some miraculous events involving family members who found themselves rescued from desperate circumstances after petitioning the saint to intercede on their behalf. So we all knew why the large statue of Saint Jude stood in the center of her beautiful garden.

It is timely that this book has reappeared on the publishing map in its revised form. There is a new and growing interest in these two saints and their intercessory power. Many people

are looking for a resource that encourages them in their devotion. Mitch Finley's book can fulfill this need. In this fine work, one can find a simple rendering of the lives of these two saints, how Saints Anthony and Jude became known for their miraculous intervention. Mitch Finley deftly presents the tradition of devotion to the saints in its proper context, addressing those unhealthy misconceptions of devotion that give an impression of "magic" in regard to saintly intercession.

This revised publication of *Heavenly Helpers* contains new letters witnessing to the miraculous intervention of Saint Anthony and Saint Jude. The letters are an inspiration to all who are in need of encouragement and hope. The addition of the novenas and prayers at the end of the book lend a devotional and practical quality to the work as a whole.

Those who are already devotees to Saint Anthony or Saint Jude will find this book a welcome and encouraging resource that they will want to have for their daily devotional life. For those who have heard about the power of these "Helpers of Those in Need," and who wish to know more about who these saints are, what they have done, and ways to petition their intercession through prayer, will find all they need in *Saint Anthony and Saint Jude: True Stories of Heavenly Help*.

I applaud Mitch Finley for providing this resource in light of the growing interest in prayers and devotions that are the heritage of our Catholic tradition. In these times of devotional renaissance, there is a need for presenting to Catholics the best of our age-old wealth of devotions and prayers.

May Saint Anthony and Saint Jude continue to be the "heavenly helpers" of all who call upon them.

BROTHER DANIEL KORN, C.Ss.R.
DIRECTOR OF DEVOTIONS IN HONOR OF
OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP AND
SAINT GERARD MAJELLA

INTRODUCTION

Their Purpose Is Love

There is more to life and the world than what meets the eye, and I don't mean subatomic particles and the astonishments of quantum physics. You and I live spiritual cheek by spiritual jowl with people who once thrashed around in the here and now as we do, but no longer. They are right over there—as eternity is—just beyond our vision. They are so close that you would jump a foot in the air if you could see them. They are people who “passed over,” who—to use our dark word—*died*. Yet the life they enjoy is far more lively than mere biological percolation.

These people, who live “eternally,” care about us, and they are so intimate with the Divine Mystery that they cannot but act in loving concord with the Divine Will. When we speak to them, they hear us, and they respond to our cares and concerns even in the most trivial, everyday matters. Two of these people, for reasons hidden in the Divine Purpose, occupy a special place in the lives of countless Christians. Their names are Anthony of Padua and Jude Thaddeus, sometimes called “the Obscure.” Anthony and Jude help people by their eternal communion with the Divine. That is their purpose, and their purpose is love.

The Communion of Saints

Since the days of the early Christians—and since the fifth century in the Apostles' Creed—those who follow Christ have held a belief in “the communion of saints.” This idea came from the New Testament concept of *koinonia* (community), the fellowship in faith shared by all believers with the risen Christ. “Saints” is used here as Saint Paul uses it in his letters, meaning all the people of God who are one in their shared faith. (See, for example, 1 Corinthians 1:2.) The “saints” pray for one another and help one another. This union among the “saints” continues among both the living and those who live that better life called “eternal.”

Since the earliest centuries, Christians believed that it is possible for people of faith who died to help, by their prayers, those still on pilgrimage through time and space. Thus, Christians of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and—to a lesser extent—Anglican traditions feel free to ask deceased relatives and friends to pray for them.

Among the early Christians, veneration of martyrs for the faith was a communal activity. *Newsweek* religion editor Kenneth L. Woodward explains in *Making Saints*: “Whatever else it entailed, veneration of the saints was a liturgical act. Saints were remembered, invoked, prayed to wherever Christians assembled for worship.”

On a more formal level, “canonized” saints—those declared worthy of public veneration either by popular acclamation (in the early centuries) or by church authorities (since about the twelfth century)—attracted a popular devotion that often transcends locality, culture, and historical time and place. For reasons human and/or divine, various canonized saints, including the two this book concerns itself with, became more popular than others. These saints captured the popular imagination by the power of their image, the stories

about their lives, and—let us accept the possibility—by answering prayers more reliably than their heavenly peers.

Christian doctrine does not and never has held that the veneration of saints is “necessary for salvation.” On the contrary. Still, the veneration of saints has historical and scriptural roots. “The early Christians revered the Blessed Virgin and the martyrs,” say Gerald O’Collins, S.J., and Edward G. Farrugia, S.J., in *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*. The Letter to the Hebrews (11:1—12:1) lists many heroes and heroines of faith from the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament. “Origen (ca. 185–254) was the first to reflect seriously on devotion to the saints. The first nonmartyrs to be venerated were Saint Antony the Abbot (ca. 251–356) and Saint Martin of Tours (d. 397).”

Why Pray to Saints?

Clearly, the veneration of saints goes back to the earliest Christian communities. Still, there are many today who reject the idea not only for themselves—which they have every right to do—but for anyone else, as well. For such people, the veneration of saints is virtual heresy. “I used to pray to Saint Jude and other saints,” says Andrew R., of Bellmore, New York, in a letter I received along with those from which the stories in this book come. “Then,” he continued, “I read the Bible and prayed directly to Jesus.... People are being deceived by hundred-year-old traditions of praying to saints. Why would you need to if you have Jesus?”

For nearly two thousand years, Christians have honored and prayed to saints because they see in them God’s self-gift, or grace, at work in special ways. Since the Protestant Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century, most Protestants have rejected the veneration of saints. Yet we may ask, Why should people stop praying for one another after they die? Does it not stand to reason that someone who manifested the love

of God in special ways in this world would pray for us even after crossing the Great Divide? To pray to saints does not detract from faith in Christ but does him honor by honoring the power of his love at work in the saints.

To pray to a saint is to address oneself to the power and grace of God active in a human being who now enjoys eternal life. Just as God works through our prayers for one another in this world, God works through our prayers to saints and through their prayers for us. In 1964, the Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council declared that "our communion with those in heaven, provided that it is understood in the full light of faith, in no way diminishes the worship of adoration given to God the Father, through Christ, in the Spirit; on the contrary, it greatly enriches it" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, art. 51).

There comes a point in the attempt to understand all this when the human mind reaches its limits. There is a tremendous mystery here. Ultimately, the love of God is active in us and in the saints, and we are at a loss to grasp fully how it works. From the days of the earliest Christians, believers grasped with their heart that their relationships with those who died in the faith were not ended but transformed. They are still with us, in a marvelous but mysterious way, and they can help us by their prayers. Countless ordinary Christians who pray to Saint Jude, Saint Anthony, or another saint take it for granted that he or she prays to the saint for the saint's "intercession." People of faith venerate—respect or reverence—the saints, they do not worship them. Such people reject the suggestion that the saint has power independent of the power of God.

"We, the Christian community," wrote Saint Augustine in the fifth century, "assemble to celebrate the memory of the martyrs with ritual solemnity because we want to be inspired to follow their example, share in their merits, and be helped by their prayers...."

“But the veneration strictly called worship, *latría*, that is, the special homage belonging only to divinity, is something we give and teach others to give to God alone.”

The Christian faith, as lived for nearly two thousand years, includes participation in the communion of saints. To have friends both in this world and in eternity is to belong to a faith community that is both immediate and transcendent. That is what people do who have heavenly friends and helpers—including Mary, the mother of Jesus, Saint Anthony, Saint Teresa of Ávila, Saint Jude, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, and many others. Just as we sometimes rely on the love of our friends in this world, so we may rely on the love of our friends in the next world. Their love is God’s love, “for God is love” (1 John 4:8).

Some Slip Over the Edge

It is possible to abuse any good. It is possible to distort any truth into a falsehood. Thus, you will find people who relate to saints in clearly un-Christian, unhealthy ways. The technical meaning of “magic” is to try to control transcendent forces by the use of certain words and/or rituals. Some people believe that if you say a certain prayer a certain number of times to a certain saint, marvelous results are guaranteed. This is a magical approach to the veneration of saints, and it is sheer religious flapdoodle.

Reading this book, you will notice that people sometimes use the term “novena.” A novena is a traditional Christian approach to prayer. Correctly understood, all it means is to pray for nine consecutive days—from the Latin for nine, *novum*—for a specific intention. The idea of praying for nine days comes straight from the New Testament, from the account of the nine days of prayer by the disciples and Mary between Ascension and Pentecost, in the Acts of the Apostles (1:9, 13, and 2:1).

There is nothing magical about the number nine, or about saying a particular prayer for nine days. But it takes persistence to say a prayer nine days in a row, and so a novena is one response to the admonition of Jesus to be persistent in prayer and “to not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). When someone “makes a novena” to Saint Anthony or Saint Jude, the goal is not to do something magical, but to keep on praying and not give up. By extension, a novena may last for any length of time.

In some of the stories you will read here, people say that they promised Saint Anthony or Saint Jude to make a donation of money to a charitable organization, or “to the poor” if the saint would help them. Others promise to give up something, such as candy or “junk food,” or to light a candle in honor of the saint. This may sound like spiritual bribery, but perhaps not. To promise to give away money is to promise to take a tangible step toward being less dependent on money and more dependent on God. It can be a promise to do something to help others. To light a candle can be a promise to dedicate oneself to a deeper prayer life; to give up junk food can be a commitment to respect one’s body more. Ideally, the purpose is not to “bribe” the saint but to become less self-centered, a bit more focussed on the needs of others—in one way or another, to become a more faith-centered person. It can be a way to express gratitude by sharing one’s gifts with those who have less.

Why Don’t Saint Anthony and Saint Jude Always Come Through?

You will read many inspiring stories in this book, some telling of dramatic cures or astonishing cases of lost things found. All come from the people who lived the stories or, in a few cases, who heard the stories from those who did. Once again, we’re not talking about magic. It is not unusual for someone to pray or make a novena to Saint Anthony or Saint Jude

and not get what he or she wants. I dare say that countless people with terminal illnesses prayed to Saint Jude and still died. No doubt an equally countless number of people prayed to Saint Anthony to find something they lost, and whatever it was stayed lost. All the same, I doubt that any of these people would say that their prayers were a waste of time.

In *Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine*, Larry Dossey, M.D., discusses the scientific evidence for prayer as a method of physical healing. Dr. Dossey acknowledges that prayer does not bring about healing in every case. But, he says, scientific studies show that prayer does make a statistically significant difference, and it makes a difference often enough that it makes good sense to include prayer in a program of medical treatment.

The same is true when we lose something, or when we face what looks like an impossible situation. We should look high and low for what is lost, but it also makes sense to say a prayer, or make a novena, to Saint Anthony. When a hopeless situation arises, we should follow the doctor's advice and take our medication. But there is wisdom in asking Saint Jude to pray for us, too. We should pray to Saint Anthony or Saint Jude with persistence, because regardless of what else may or may not result, our prayers help us to be more aware of how close God is to us in our situation.

Dr. Dossey considers the question, If prayer makes a difference some of the time, why doesn't it make a difference all of the time? Think about it, he responds. If prayer brought about healing in all cases, the world would be overpopulated in no time because no one would die. Indeed, there would be no death. Christians believe that life does not find its ultimate fulfillment in this world, therefore it would not be good if prayer were to constitute a surefire method to cure all of the people all of the time.

Suffering and loss help us to grow up. If we could avoid all suffering and loss by prayer to Saint Anthony or Saint Jude,

we would remain emotionally and spiritually immature. Faith grows and deepens when we must cope with difficulty and darkness. Of course, getting what we pray for can nourish our faith, as well. Maybe that's why miracles and wonders continue to happen from time to time. Maybe miracles and wonders are like candy, however—too much would not be good for us.

Reading some of the stories here, you may find yourself thinking something like this: “Phooey. That result would have happened even if the person did not pray to Saint Anthony or Saint Jude.”

My response would be, “Maybe yes, maybe no.” Regardless, the person tells a true story about how he or she incorporated faith into an ordinary human situation. Perhaps the outcome would have been different if prayer had not been a part of the story, perhaps not. Who can say for sure after the fact? The point is that prayer is basic to the story. This is what happened, not something else. If you want to tell stories about lost things found with no appeal to Saint Anthony, or amazing events where prayer to Saint Jude played no part, go right ahead.

God Cares About the Small Stuff

Much skepticism about prayer is rooted in the presupposition—which can be neither proved nor disproved—that God has a singular disinterest in the piddling details of our everyday lives. Why should God give a tinker's damn whether I lost my paycheck, wedding ring, or car keys? The Creator of the universe has more important concerns than the illness of someone living in a small town in Nebraska. So goes this line of thought. But I think one of the main lessons of devotion to Saint Anthony or Saint Jude is that God is, indeed, interested in the small stuff, the ordinary sorrows and joys that fill our daily lives. Our God's merciful awareness is big

enough to encompass even the small stuff, and two of God's "helpers" are Anthony and Jude, who lived human lives filled with details, as any human life is bound to be.

Christian faith is most authentic when we incorporate it into the fabric of our ordinary lives in the everyday world. To the extent that we limit our faith to certain times, places, and situations, we keep faith from having an impact on our life as a whole. To the extent that we allow faith to determine our lifestyle in every respect, to that extent our life will blossom and bear fruit. Devotion to Saint Anthony and/or Saint Jude is a way to incorporate faith into the most mundane, ordinary concerns of daily life. Is something lost? Faith belongs here, too, and there is a special friend of God you can talk to about it. His name is Anthony. A situation seems hopeless? Faith has a role to play, and God has another friend who's interested. His name is Jude. Pray to him. Maybe it's consistent with the will and wisdom of God to get what you pray for, maybe not. Either way, prayer does a body—and soul—good.

Devotion to Saint Anthony and Saint Jude endures, even in the face of disdain from theologians, professional liturgists, and ordinary Christians too sophisticated or too skeptical to pray to saints. Such people "think that relating to the sacred is awesome and unreachable except through the official teachings of the Church," or, I would add, through the writings of the latest religious guru, or the latest psycho-spiritual gimmick. This is what Dr. Robert Orsi, a professor of religious studies at Indiana University, told the *New York Times*. "But lots of people find access to what they consider the holy through the saints."