



Art by Julie Lonneman



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My granddaughter Lucy turned 3 a few days before the Feast of All Saints. She was in a mood to keep the party going.

On the feast day I made a dinner with Lucy and her baby sister, Bess, in mind: macaroni and cheese, bran muffins and a spinach salad heavier on the blueberries and sliced pears than the actual spinach.

And for dessert? Why, fudge-covered, cherry-topped ice cream sundaes, of course, the very food of heaven.

I wrote a simple grace for the girls to sing at dinner. Sung to the tune of "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," it goes:

Lord, for the saints,

We sing your praise.

We thank you all our days.

Lord, help us so to follow you,

That we might be saints, too.

We went around the table, telling the stories of our patrons and our favorites. We retold the story of her grandfather's patron, Martin, who would be obedient to his commanding officer and follow him into battle. But, like his supreme commander, Christ, Martin would not take up arms against another man. He would go without his sword, depending upon God alone.

I read aloud "Paterfamilias," Phyllis McGinley's poem about St. Thomas More, the man whose life and death have guided her grandfather.

Of all the saints who have won their charter —

Holy man, hero, hermit, martyr,

Mystic, missionary, sage or wit —

Saint Thomas More is my favorite.

For he loved these bounties with might and main:

God and his house and his little wife, Jane,

And four fair children his heart throve on,

Margaret, Elizabeth, Cecily and John.

We recalled the many stories of her father's patron, Nicholas, the bishop whose care was always with the small: children, the condemned, sailors in danger on the sea.

We talked of her baby sister, who, like their mother, bears the name of the Virgin Mary and, like their dear Tia, the name of Mary's cousin, Elizabeth. Lucy knows about having cousins as friends and she likes the story of Mary going to Elizabeth for shelter and help.

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We spoke of the courage of young Lucy and young Cecilia, whose names are her own, first and middle. Lucy is happy when the priest prays from the Roman canon at Mass, because it means she will hear her names spoken aloud before the whole community.

One of our daughters claims that we fitted our children for lives only as theologians or caterers, so I was delighted to eat and pray and tell stories. But Lucy, her chin resting in her hands, looked at me and asked, "Well, what are we going to do about it?"

"Do about what?" I asked.

"The saints," Lucy said. "What are we going to do about the saints?"

Lucy has a shaky sense of time and no sense at all of history, which began — just ask her — on the day she was born.

She wasn't hearing stories from long ago. She wasn't hearing stories of people in odd dress, adorned with halos and bearing palm fronds or platters heaped with eyeballs. She was hearing about a welcoming cousin and a young, pregnant woman in need of a place to stay and rest and consider the changes in her body and her life.

- She was hearing about a saint who loves God and his wife and his family and all the good gifts of the earth.
- She was hearing about a saint whose work is for the least and lost.
- She was hearing about a saint who is willing to face his own death, but not to bring death to others.
- She was hearing about girls who, though young and powerless, find their strength in Christ, and stand firm.
- She was hearing about people who are living in faith, now, and dying in faith, now. She was hearing about people in need, now.

March is the month of Lent, when we are asked to rebuild the foundations of our lives on the solid rock of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

We pray that God will open our eyes to the glory and the needs all around us, the abundance and the lack. We fast to remember how good are the gifts of the earth. We fast to remember those whose share in that goodness has been stripped from them and destroyed. We give alms to help those in need, to restore — to them and to us — creation's harmony and balance.

"What are we going to do about the saints?"

I hear Lucy's question as a challenge and a plea. I hear in her question an echo of the coming Easter Lectionary and its demand, "How then shall we live?" With what we know, what our eyes have seen and our ears have heard, with what we have received, what we have tasted and touched – how then shall we live? What are we going to do about the saints?

[Melissa Musick Nussbaum's latest book, with co-author Anna Keating, is *The Catholic Catalogue: A Field Guide to the Daily Acts That Make Up a Catholic Life*. Find her columns online at NCRonline.org/columns/my-table-spread.]

Editor's note: This reflection was originally published in the March 2013 issue of [*Celebration*](#). Sign up to receive [daily Lenten reflections](#).

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