

from the MATTHEW 10-27 HouseTops

A Publication of the Crusade of Saint Benedict Center



Saint Benedict Center

The Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

To Our Readers:

We are extremely happy to have as a new patroness for our crusade to convert America the recently canonized St. Katherine Drexel. Of course, all the saints in heaven intercede on behalf of those who are laboring to fulfill the third petition of the Our Father — “Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” — but St. Katherine has a very special relation to us, a relation of time and country. Her heroic self-donation, so well told by our tertiary, Brother Lawrence Mary, would appeal to the generous idealism of all Americans, were that idealism raised to the supernatural order. I remember reading once that Our Lord revealed to the holy mystic of Bavaria, Theresa Neumann, that He has a special consideration for America because of the generosity of its people. Our Saint indeed had means of expressing the ideal of generosity not available to every one of us. Yet, the true reason why she is a saint can be imitated by every boy and girl: she spent her life entirely in the service of God, making His interests her own.

St. Katherine’s wish to save souls by converting them to the true Faith shows that hers was no mere natural philanthropy. Until we are adopted by grace and made “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4), our works are without supernatural merit. Our saint knew this and knew that it applied not only to her, but to everyone. Thus, she prayed for “the conversion of those who are yet in darkness or estranged from His fold.” If she had her way, American generosity would become *sanctity*.

Our readers who appreciated immensely the history of the Cristeros, our brothers in neighboring Mexico, will get the rest of the story in this issue. And, as we thank Gary Potter for his labor of love in bringing out a history that needed to be known, we convey to him echoes of the appreciation it already received in its first part.

In a prayer Catholics love to address to Our Lady, we call Her our “most gracious Advocate.” We thank Mark Alessio for his loving meditation on this title, revealing to us some of the theological and devotional treasures which lay hidden beneath it.

And, very timely in the face of the “New Age” heresies, is the defense of the veneration of holy relics by our Brother André Marie. The Catholic Faith, as our Father Feeney used to say, is an incarnational religion, and veneration of relics is an essential part of that Faith.

The readers will be sure to discover in this, as in all previous issues of the *Housetops*, many gems to build up faith and devotion.



In the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

Bro. Francis, MICM

from the MATTHEW 10-27 HouseTops

Contents

Serial No. 56 • Winter, 2002-03

Katherine Drexel: A Saint for Modern Americans Page 2

The saint for this issue is someone many of our readers could have known: an American of recent vintage. Contrary to the liberals' portrait of her as "Martin Luther King in a veil," Brother Lawrence Mary shows us her true colors.

Left Behind..... Page 15

No, it's not a review on the Protestant Rapture novel of the same name, though there is a reason for the nominal coincidence. Brother André Marie treats the subject of relics.

Mary, Advocate of the Church Page 25

The Blessed Virgin is our Mother, Mistress, Mediatrix and Advocate with God. Mark Alessio brings us the teachings of the Popes and great Marian Saints on the last mentioned of these titles: Advocate.

Catholic Wisdom Page 42

Bite-sized portions of pious food for thought.

Valor and Betrayal, Part II Page 43

The conclusion of Gary Potter's piece begun last issue on the modern Catholic warriors popularly known as "the Cristeros."

Did You Know...? Page 52

Catholic Trivia that's not so trivial.

Let's Own Up Page 53

Gary Potter reviews *The Popes Against the Jews* by David I. Kertzer.

Cover: "Immaculate Conception" by Francisco Zurbarán. **Center:** An ancient reliquary of the True Cross surrounded by relics of various saints from the private collection of Edward McCabe (RIP) donated to St. Benedict Center by Johanna and Helene Armeno. Artistic design by the M.I.C.M. Sisters. **All photos for the St. Katherine Drexel article** (except for Cardinal Cushing) are courtesy of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Archives.

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KATHARINE DREXEL: A SAINT FOR MODERN AMERICANS

By Brother Lawrence Mary, M.I.C.M., Tert.

On October 1, 2000, Pope John Paul II solemnly decreed that Katharine Drexel, Founder of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People, is a saint of the Catholic Church. A third-generation, thoroughly “Red-blooded” American had been added to the rolls of the canonized saints.

First, let us briefly summarize the significant events in the life of our saint. Katharine Drexel, the second of three sisters, Elizabeth, Katharine and Louise, was born in 1858. Her father, Francis, was a Catholic; her natural mother, Hannah Langsroth Drexel, a Baptist Quaker, died soon after giving birth to Katharine. Two years later, her father married a Catholic, Emma Bouvier, who gave birth to a third daughter, Louise, in 1863. In 1887, in a private audience with Pope Leo XIII, Katharine pleaded for priests to serve the American Indians. His fateful reply was that she, herself, should become that missionary. At the end of 1888, at the age of thirty, she received permission from her spiritual director to become a religious and joined the Sisters of Mercy for her training. In 1891, she founded the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Negroes. (Intending to extend the focus of her order, she later changed the word “Negroes” to “Colored People.”) The order grew to include sixty schools and missions while the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament eventually numbered more than five hundred. In 1935, when she was seventy-seven years old, St. Katharine suffered a severe heart attack and until her death in 1955 lived in prayerful retirement. Her cause was opened in 1964 and in 2000 Pope John Paul II canonized her.

A Privileged American Catholic Childhood

If anyone could be described as having been “born with a golden spoon in her mouth,” it would have been Katharine Drexel and her sisters, Elizabeth and Louise. Few American girls would have had more of an excuse to be distracted by the world and what it has to offer than these daughters of one of the most prominent and wealthy families in the United States. Their father, Francis Drexel, was an outstanding banker and exchange broker — a founding partner in what was known at the time as Drexel, Morgan and

Company.

Francis Drexel and his second wife, Emma (Bouvier), were more than devout Catholics. They were determined to instill truly Catholic teachings and norms of behavior into their children. They understood the principle, later summed up by the great Fr. Leonard Feeney, that “Catholicism is a manner.” Thus, from an early age, Emma trained her daughters in the dispensing of alms and



performing other works of Catholic Charity. She had the charitable heart of a great Catholic woman who wanted her children to capture the spirit of true Catholic Charity and learn how to give alms prudently — in sharp contrast to other wealthy Americans of the day who engaged in self-serving, pompous philanthropy.

Convinced that a proper education and formation are essential ingredients of a Catholic manner, Francis and Emma retained two devout Catholic women, both of whom would have a major influence on the Drexel girls. Johanna Ryan, their trusted servant, was from Ireland, where she had tried to become a Sister of the Sacred Heart but was

unable to continue because of her health. Although a simple person, she was unflinching in her defense of the Faith and taught the girls of the necessity of the Catholic Faith in order for one to be saved. The absolute sincerity of Johanna’s faith was somewhat indecorously demonstrated during an audience with Pope Pius IX in 1875. After the family had visited a few moments with the Holy Father, she fell to the floor, threw her arms around his knees and exclaimed, “Holy Father — praise God and His Blessed Mother — my eyes have seen our dear Lord, Himself!”

A more reserved Miss Mary Cassidy, the governess, was also from Ireland. The Drexels hired her after