



Spiritual Companions for People with Disabilities

In her book, *Saints to Lean on*, Janice McGrane, S.S.J. uses her own disability caused by rheumatoid arthritis to reflect on the lives of saints, some still awaiting canonization, who experienced physical and mental illnesses; and who serve as spiritual companions to people living with disabilities. The following are Saints whose spiritual strength was born from corporal weakness.

Saint Dymphna – Daughter of a 7th century Irish man who became irrational with grief after his wife's death, demanding that Dymphna marry him. When she attempted to flee from her father, he killed her. Her burial site in Gheel, Belgium is now a pilgrimage site for persons with mental illness. Saint Dymphna's feast day is May 15th.

Blessed Margaret of Castello - Born with multiple disabilities in the 13th century to upper class Italian parents who hid her in the family castle, she was totally abandoned at age 19 in the streets of Castello after a trip there for a miracle cure proved unsuccessful. Blind and homeless, Margaret began ministering to others like her who were outcasts.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola – In the 16th century in Spain, he was wounded in a military battle. During his long convalescence and surgeries to rehabilitate his legs, he experienced a conversion which led to his founding of the religious order, the Society of Jesus. Feast day is July 31st.

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha – A 17th century Native American with facial scarring and vision loss from small pox, she became known as the *Lily of the Mohawks*. Kateri developed her contemplative spirit in the natural beauty of the wilderness amid an oppressive non-Christian culture. July 14th is her feast day.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux - *The Little Flower* of 19th century France, suffered many childhood illnesses before entering a cloistered religious community, later contracting tuberculosis which ultimately killed her. She inspires those living today with chronic illnesses like cancer or AIDS. October 1st is Saint Thérèse's feast day.

McGrane, Janice. *Saints to Lean on: Spiritual Companions for Illness or Disability*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006.

For more information on welcoming persons with disabilities in your parish, contact Sharon Urbaniak, Diocesan Disabilities Action Team, Diocese of Buffalo, 716- 847-5514 or surbaniak@buffalodiocese.org

