

Dear Crespi Family and friends:

The month of February may be the shortest month of the year, but this year from Ground Hog Day to Sadie Hawkins Day on February 29th, this month is full of holidays and Saints Days, as the Church moves from Ordinary Time into the Lenten Season beginning with Ash Wednesday on February 22nd.

We may be aware of the stories of Saint Blaise, the saint whose name we invoke at the *Blessing of Throats*, whose Memorial we celebrate on February 3rd and Saint Valentine, the Patron Saint of Lovers, remembered on the 14th; however, there are other saints that symbolize overcoming adversity with the grace of God's love and their incredible faith.

St. Ansgar, was orphaned and raised in a Benedictine Abbey in Northern Germany in 801. He was very smart and learned lessons easily. But he had a careless attitude about religion despite residing within a religious community, until he had a vision where he saw his mother living with Our Lady. His attitude changed rapidly and he became a serious scholar of religion. He is known as the "Apostle of the North" for his conversion of Denmark, Westphalia, and Sweden. He was under constant threat from marauding barbarians and the possible return of both Denmark and Sweden to paganism. But his faith and his belief in bringing Christianity into these kingdoms kept



him going. Known as an extraordinary preacher, Ansgar's ability to be humble and ascetic as a priest, imitating the Lord in his dealing with the sick and the poor, made him well loved by the Scandinavians.



St. Josephine Bakhita, was born about 1869 in Darfur, Sudan. She was a member of the celebrated Daju tribe; her uncle was the Chief of her village. She lived a happy carefree life with her three brothers and three sisters not knowing what suffering was. Kidnapped by Arab slave traders when she was about eight years old, forced to walk roughly 600 miles, barefooted, she was sold twice before she arrived at the city of El Obeid. For the next twelve years she was sold another three times before she was merely given away. Her name forgotten she took to calling herself *Bakhita*, which means lucky in Arabic. Forced to convert to Islam she lived in El Obeid until the city was threaten by the Mahsist revolutionists. In 1883, she was once again sold in Khartoum to the Italian Vice Consul, allowing her for the first

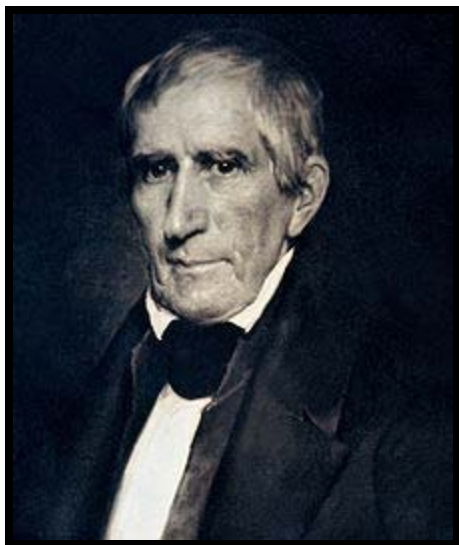
time to enjoy some peace in her life. She was given as a gift to a wealthy Signora and lived for three years as nanny to her daughter in Italy. When the family sold their properties to return to the Sudan, Bakhita and her charge were sent to the Canossian Sisters in Venice temporarily until the family was settled in Suakin. However when the Signora returned, Bakhita refused to leave the sisters converting to Catholicism and taking the name Josephine, she entered the order and took her vows as a Canossian nun in 1896. She spent the remainder of her life in the convent at Schio in Vicenza, acting as everything from cook, to sacristan, to door-keeper. Her smile and gentle calming voice made her well known to the people of Vicenza and she became known as the *Madre Moretta*, or black mother.

During World War II she shared the hopes and fears of the town people and was considered a saint among them. When asked by a young student what she would say to her capturers if she ever saw them again, she replied: "If I were to meet those who kidnapped me, and even those who tortured me, I would kneel and kiss their hands. For, if these things had not happened; I would not have been a Christian and a religious today." She died in 1947.

Her order recognized her sanctity immediately. Josephine was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2000. The Pope honored the Saint in her native land when he declared "*Rejoice, all Africa! Bakhita has come back to you...Free with the freedom of Saints.*"

St. Paul Miki along with 26 others was crucified in Nagasaki, Japan in 1597 after having marched 600 miles. The captives sang the Te Deum all the way.

St. Paul was from a wealthy Japanese family. His father was a military leader. Converted to Christianity by the Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier, Paul became a Jesuit and was well known for his preaching. The powerful *daimyo*, was afraid of the influence the Jesuits seemed to have over the people and began to persecute them. Paul preached his last sermon from the cross and forgave his persecutors, reminding all of those in view that he was Japanese; he was pierced with a lance and died. St. Paul and his companions, three of whom were young boys, were canonized by Blessed Pope Pius XI in 1862. Their memorial is on February 6th.



As Americans we celebrate Presidents' Day on February 20th. Two Presidents whose birthdays we traditionally celebrate Lincoln's Birthday on the 12th and Washington's birthday on the 22nd. But we also have the birthdays of our 9th and 40th Presidents falling in month of February as well.

William Henry Harrison, our 9th President, was best known as the frontiersman Tippecanoe for successfully putting an end to Tecumseh's Indian Confederacy in the Northwest Territory. This defeat opened up the fertile Ohio area for settlement. Born in Virginia in 1773, he was a young member of Virginia's planter aristocracy, having studied history and the classics; he later studied medicine in Richmond before he enlisted in the First Infantry. A hero in the War of 1812, Harrison was nominated by the Whig Party for the office of President in 1840. His inaugural

address, written by Daniel Webster, was one of the longest in our history. He caught cold while delivering it and died a month later, making him the first President to die in office.

Born February 6, 1911, our 40th President, Ronald Reagan ushered in new kind of government during his eight year Presidency. Born to a middle-class family in Illinois, Reagan led a normal All-American childhood. He played football and acted in school plays. In 1937 a screen test landed him a career in Hollywood where he appeared in fifty-three films. President Reagan served two terms as President in which time the Berlin Wall came down. Reagan won the respect of other world leaders and ushered in the longest period of American prosperity during peacetime on record.



I hope that you find February a month of reflection on the gifts our God has given us with his love and the reflections of the Saints who like us faced the stresses and fears of life. As a country preparing to elect a new President, take time to become familiar with our rich history and the lives of all our Presidents, learning about their individual contributions to our freedoms as Americans.

May Our Lady of Mount Carmel continue to guide us through our journey.

Rev. Thomas Schrader, O. Carm.
President