

Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2)

Phoebe was an important leader of the early Christian church. Paul entrusted her to deliver his letter to the Romans, and in the opening of that letter describes her as both a “deacon” of the church in Cenchrea, as well as a “presiding officer over many,” including himself. Since the letter to the Romans was written prior to any official development of roles like deacon, presbyter, and bishop, it is likely that Paul means to introduce her as both pastor and overseer of her congregation. Phoebe is thus considered one of the first female ministers of the early church.

Mary (Luke 1:26-38)

Mary was a young woman, probably 12 or 13, who was betrothed to a man named Joseph, when she was visited by an angel who told her that she would bear a son, and that this child would be the salvation of her people. “How can this be?” she asks, since she was a virgin. The angel explained that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and that she would become pregnant with the Lord’s child. Terrified, and knowing that her fiancé could legally have her killed for becoming pregnant out of wedlock, she nevertheless says yes to God on faith: “May it be unto me according to your word.”

St. Blandina (162-177)

Blandina was a slave who lived in Lyon, France during the reign of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Many during that time feared that the Christians were cannibals who committed incest. Blandina was thrown into prison and tortured at length, until the executioners finally became exhausted, wondering what else they could do to her. She was suffocated, picked at by wild beasts, and burned, but she always remained calm, and just kept repeating “I am a Christian, and we commit no wrongdoing.” Finally, she was put into a net and thrown to a wild bull.

Dorcas (Acts 9:36-43)

Dorcas (Tabitha in Aramaic) was an early Christian disciple who lived in Joppa. She dedicated her life to caring for the poor, particularly the needs of the widows of the community, who were especially vulnerable. Dorcas was well-known for the beautiful tunics and garments she sewed for those who could not afford to buy clothing. She was so revered and beloved for her many acts of charity, that when she died, Peter came to visit her, and raised her from the dead. This miracle reportedly brought many people who lived in that area to faith in Christ.

Mary Magdalene

Mary of Magdala was one of Jesus’ closest friends and his most dedicated and loyal disciple. After being healed of seven demons, she traveled with him and stood at the foot of the cross during his execution. Mary is the first one Jesus appeared to after being raised from the dead, suggesting that her faith and love for him was the strongest of the disciples. Thus, she is the first one who is sent to proclaim the Good News, making her “apostle to the apostles.” After the ascension, she goes directly before Caesar to proclaim the good news, using an egg to illustrate her message of rebirth.

St. Cecilia (200-230)

Cecilia, the patron saint of music, was a Christian noblewoman in Rome. She was forced to marry against her will, but as the musicians played at her wedding, she sang in her heart to God. She ended up convincing her husband to convert to the Christian faith, and they were both executed as martyrs. The executioner tried to behead her in her own home, but gave up after 3 blows, leaving her to bleed to death. She lived three more days, and spent her last moments singing, preaching, and making arrangements for her belongings to be given to the poor and her home to be turned into a church.

Florence Li Tim-Oi (1907-1992)

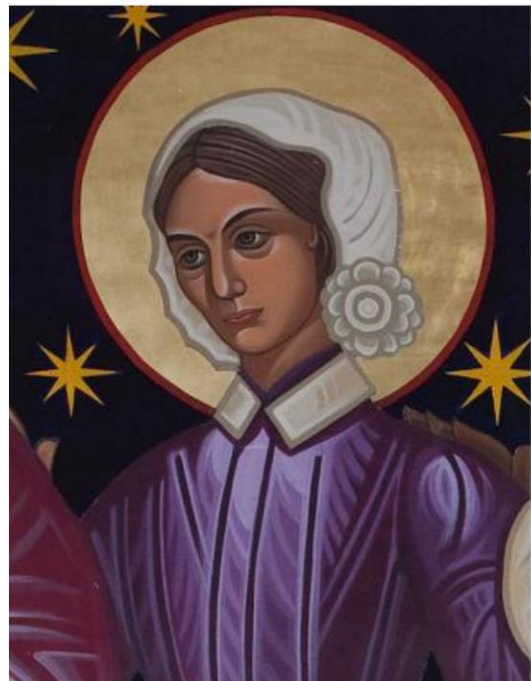
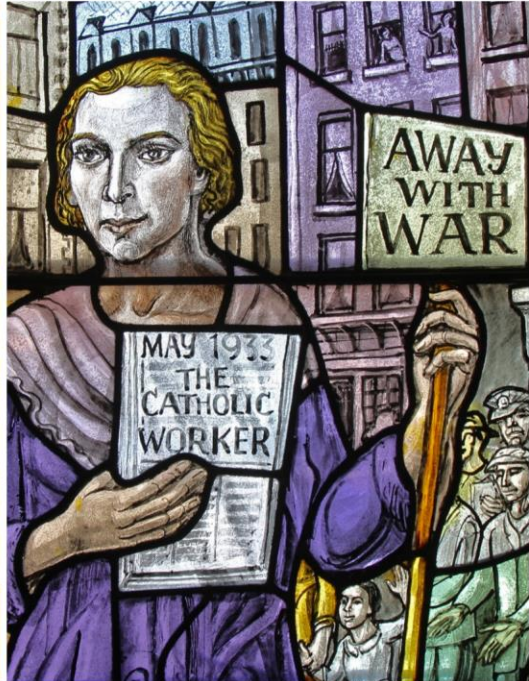
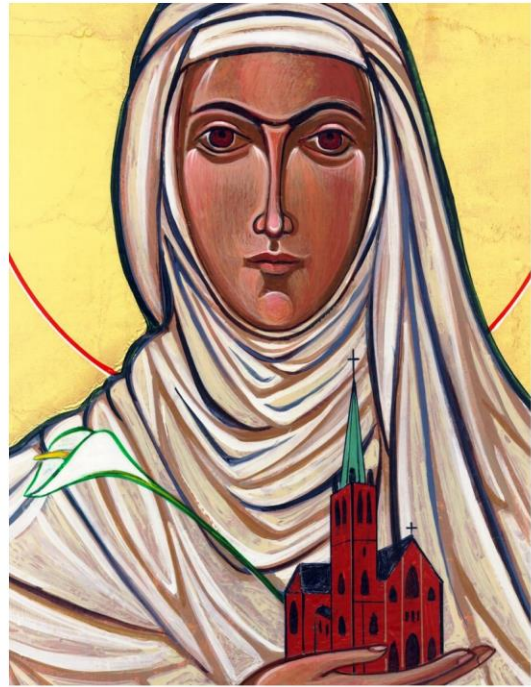
Florence was the first woman to be ordained a priest, in 1944—30 years before the Anglican church voted to approve the ordination of women. She had already been working as a deacon in Hong Kong during WWII, and her bishop felt that he was simply confirming the gift of ministry that had already been given to her by God. In 1948 the house of bishops demanded that she resign. Without any support or acknowledgment from her church, she faithfully continued to serve as priest to Christians in the dangerous and war-torn territory of southeast China, for the next three decades.

Esther (Book of Esther)

Esther was a Jewish orphan who was forced to marry King Xerxes of Persia after he deposed his first wife for not sleeping with him when he was drunk. When Xerxes’ advisor offered to pay him 10,000 silver pieces to get rid of the Jews, the king agreed, not even realizing his own wife was among them. Esther risked her life by approaching the king and inviting him to a dinner, where she used her charm and clever wit to win him over. When she revealed herself to be a Jew and exposed the advisor’s evil plot to destroy her people, the king decided to kill his advisor instead of the Jews.

St. Brigid (451-525)

Brigid was born a slave in Ireland. She was so concerned with feeding the poor that she once gave her family’s entire store of butter away, only to have it restored through prayer. Her father eventually tried to sell her to the king, who was a Christian. As they spoke, she stole the king’s bejeweled sword and gave it to a beggar. The king insisted she be freed, saying, “Her merit before God is greater than ours.” Later, when St. Patrick came to hear her vows to become a nun, he accidentally used the form for ordaining a priest. But he said, “So be it. She is destined for great things.”



Mother Teresa (1910-1997)

Teresa was an Albanian-Indian nun who lived most of her life in India, where she founded the Missionaries of Charity, an organization that ran homes for those dying of HIV/AIDS, leprosy, and tuberculosis, and caring for “the poorest of the poor” through soup kitchens, clinics, and counseling. She writes, “It is not always easy to love those close to us. It is easier to give a cup of rice to relieve hunger, than to relieve the loneliness and pain of someone unloved in your own home. Bring love into your home. For this is where our love for each other must start.”

Dorothy Day (1897-1980)

Believing that “the Gospel takes away our right forever to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving poor,” Dorothy established the Catholic Worker Movement, a pacifist community providing aid for the poor and non-violent direct action on their behalf. She wrote, “People say, what is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time. A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our words and deeds is like that. No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There is too much work to do.”

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Teresa was a Spanish Carmelite nun, mystic, and prolific writer. She is one of four women to be considered a “Doctor of the Church.” She writes: “Christ has no body now, but yours. No hands, no feet on earth, but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ looks compassion into the world. Yours are the feet with which Christ walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which Christ blesses the world... If you will try to live in the presence of God for one year, you will see yourself at the end of it at the height of perfection, without your even knowing it.”

Joan of Arc (1412-1431)

Joan was born in northeast France during the Hundred Years War. At the age of 13, she received a vision to help the French king drive out the British. Despite the mocking of French military commanders, she insisted. “I would’ve rather remained spinning wool at my mother’s side, yet I must go and do this thing, for my Lord wills it.” At the age of just 16, she helped lift the siege on Orleans, turning the tide of the war. She was eventually captured by the British and executed on charges of cross-dressing, because she insisted on wearing her military clothing in order to protect herself from rape.

Julian of Norwich (1342-1416)

Julian was an anchoress who lived in a cell adjoined to a church in Norwich, England. At age 30 she suffered from a serious illness, during which she had 16 visions of Jesus, which she later recorded. She writes, “As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother... He revealed that in these sweet words where he says: I am he, the power and goodness of fatherhood; I am he, the wisdom and the lovingness of motherhood; I am he, the light and the grace which is all blessed love... Our savior is our true Mother, in whom we are endlessly born, and out of whom we shall never come.”

Lady Godiva (1040-1080)

Godiva, Countess of Mercia, was an English noblewoman and wife of Leofric, Earl of Mercia. They were generous benefactors to religious houses and founded a number of monasteries. However, the villagers in town suffered grievously under her husband’s taxation. After he levied a new tax that would have stripped the poor of everything, even the clothes off their backs, she took to her horse and rode naked through the streets, proclaiming “You have done this and it is your shame; I am not ashamed myself, for this woman’s body was created by God.”

Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

Catherine was a Dominican nun, theologian, philosopher, and contemplative. She is one of four women to be considered a “Doctor of the Church.” In her writings, Jesus appears, saying: “I charge you to love me with the same love that I have loved you...[but] you cannot do this, because I have loved you without being loved. Every love that you have for me is a love that comes from duty, because you ought to... Therefore, I have put you in the midst of your neighbor, so that you can do for them what you cannot do for me, that is, to love them without any self-interest.”

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

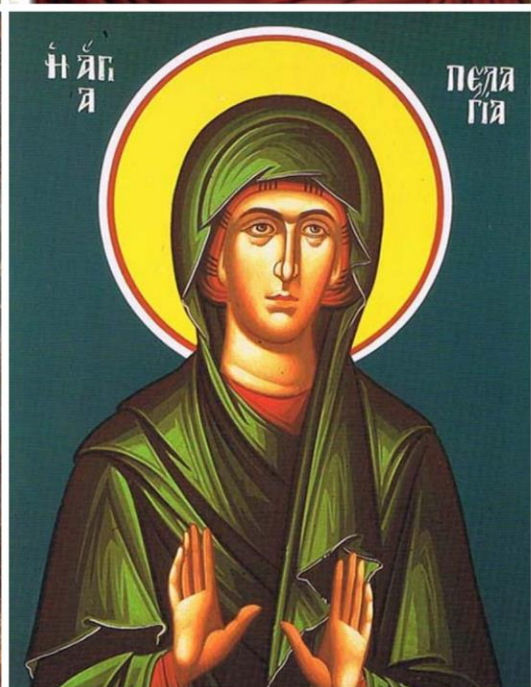
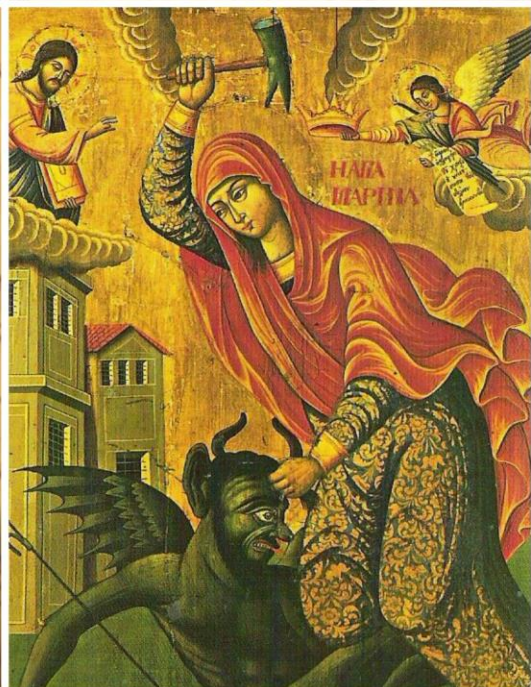
Hildegard was a German Benedictine nun, artist, composer, playwright, biologist, theologian, and one of four women to be considered a “Doctor of the Church.” She writes, “We cannot live in a world that is not our own, in a world that is interpreted for us by others. An interpreted world is not a home. Part of the terror is to take back our own listening, to use our own voice, to see our own light... Humanity, take a good look at yourself. Inside you’ve got heaven and earth, and all of creation. You’re a world – everything is hidden in you.”

Florence Nightingale (1820-1910)

Florence was an English woman who was influential in the development of modern nursing, particularly through her work tending to wounded soldiers during the Crimean War. She recruited and trained women to serve in places of disease and violence at a time when Victorian sensibilities taught that women of her standing should not go into such situations, or pursue education or professional careers. Despite her intense personal devotion to Christ, she was loving towards people of other religious faiths, and openly critical of the church whenever it worsened the situation of the poor.



I WILL LEND THEE THIS SOFT WARM CLOAK.



St. Clare of Assisi (1194-1253)

Clare was one of the first followers of St. Francis of Assisi. She founded the Order of Poor Ladies, an order of women who live a life of poverty, austerity, and seclusion. Clare wrote their Rule of Life – the first set of monastic guidelines to be written by a woman. She taught that “We become what we love, and who we love shapes what we become.” To her sisters she offered this prayer: “Go forth in peace, for you have followed the good road. Go forth without fear, for He who created you has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you as a Mother.”

St. Marina of Antioch (289-304)

Marina was the daughter of a pagan priest who disowned her when he learned she was a Christian. At age 15, the governor became enamored by her beauty and tried to persuade her to renounce her faith and marry him, but she refused. Angered, he threw her into prison, where she was beaten, tortured, and burned. The Devil came to her saying, “O Marina, if you obey the governor it would be for your good, for he is merciless, and wishes to erase your name from the earth.” But she overcame him, saying, “Stop it, O Satan.” She was beheaded, but we still remember her name, to this day.

St. Dymphna (7th century)

Dymphna is the patron saint of the mentally ill, emotionally disturbed, and those with anxiety and nervous disorders. She was the daughter of an Irish king who went insane after the death of his wife. His advisors tried to convince him to re-marry, but he refused, since no one was as beautiful as his wife had been. His thoughts became so twisted that when he looked at Dymphna, he only saw his wife, and he tried to marry her. She escaped to Belgium, where she set up a hospital for the mentally disturbed, using her depth of understanding to care for their needs.

Simone Weil (1909-1943)

Simone was a French philosopher, teacher, activist, and Christian mystic. Born to a Jewish family and raised agnostic, she had two powerful revelations in her late twenties, during which she said she felt Christ himself coming to take possession of her. Though rapturously in love with Jesus, she refused to be baptized, choosing instead to remain in solidarity with those who were still seeking redemption. She wrote, “The danger is not that the soul should doubt whether there is any bread, but that, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry.”

Perpetua & Felicity (c. 203)

Perpetua, a noblewoman, and Felicity, a slave, were both arrested as Christians and sentenced to execution at the military games. Perpetua was the mother of an infant. When her baby was brought to visit, she writes, “I at once recovered my health, and my prison became a palace to me”. Felicity was pregnant, which would have prevented her execution, but she gave birth to her daughter the day before the games. The two friends died in the arena side by side, crying “Stand fast in the faith, and love one another. Do not let our sufferings be a stumbling block to you.” They are the patron saints of mothers.

St. Pelagia (4th century)

Pelagia was the most famous actress and harlot in all of Antioch. One day, a passing group of priests all turned their eyes away from her, but their bishop was undeterred by her, and condemned his priests for taking less care of their souls than she had of her body. Pelagia befriended him, and eventually turned to Christianity, giving away her riches, freeing all her slaves, and moving to the wilderness, where she disguised herself as a male recluse. Many of the villagers sought her for her great wisdom, thinking she was a man, and only at her burial did they finally discover she was a woman.

St. Zita (1212-1272)

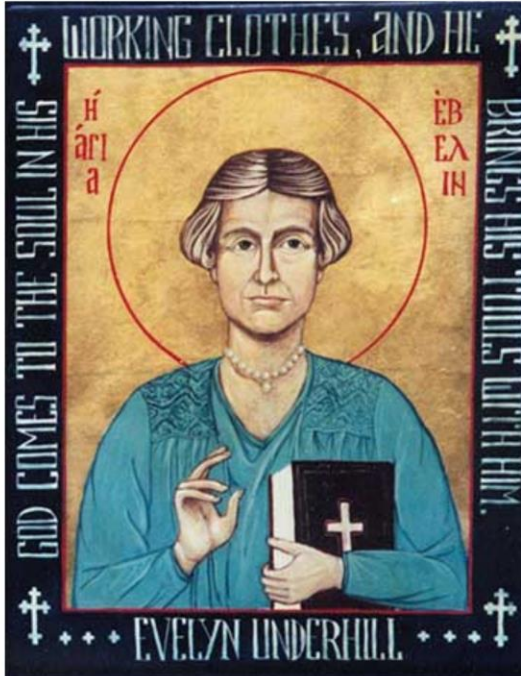
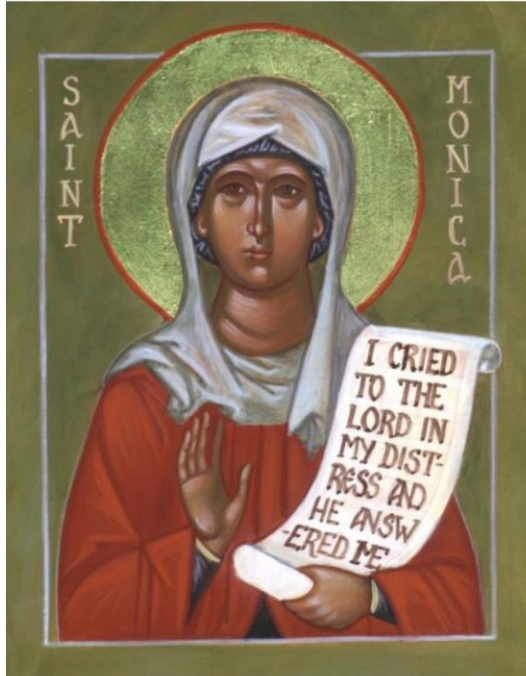
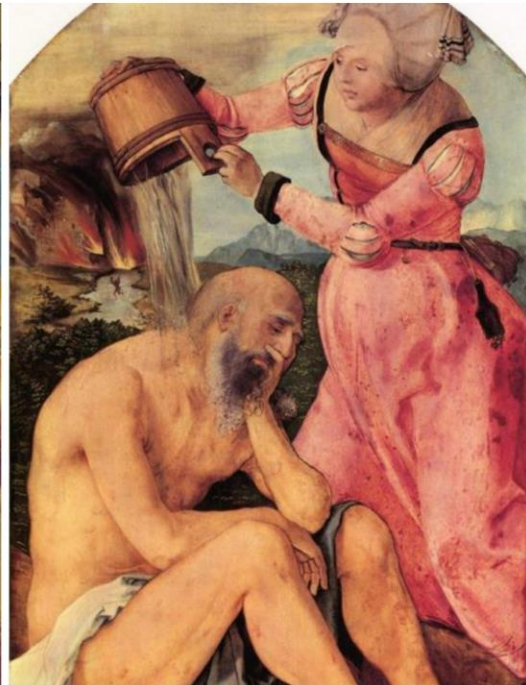
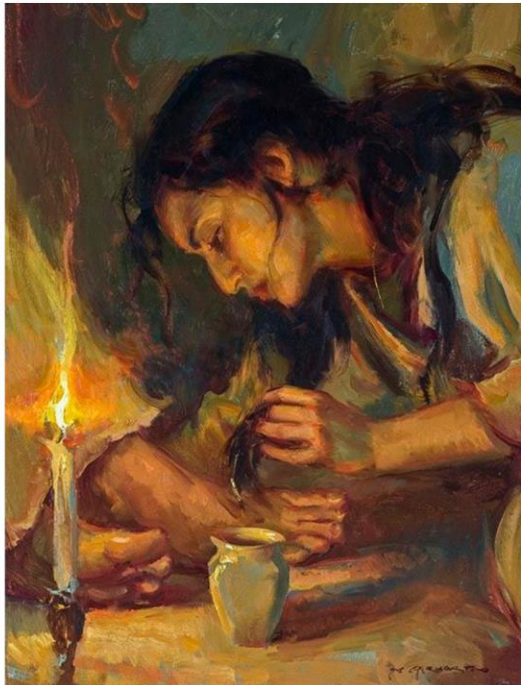
Zita was a poor Italian woman who worked as a domestic servant. She was constantly overburdened and frequently insulted, even beaten by her fellow servants. But she never let it disturb her own sense of inner worth or peace, nor did she let it deter her from seeking to do God’s will. Zita was known for giving away all she had to the poor, even the cloak off her back. Legend has it that one morning Zita left her chore of baking bread to tend to someone in need. When the other servants tried to report her, they discovered that the bread had been made by angels.

Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231)

Elizabeth was a princess of the Kingdom of Hungary. In the spring of 1226, when floods, famine, and the plague were wreaking havoc in her territory, she distributed robes and ornaments from her household to the poor afflicted people, and built a hospital where she provided for nearly a thousand people. Legend has it that during one of her many trips delivering bread to the poor in secret, she encountered her husband, who suspected she was stealing from the castle and demanded she reveal the contents under her cloak. When she did, he saw only a vision of roses.

St. Marina the Monk (5th century)

Marina’s father, desiring to retire to a monastery, tried to marry her off at a young age, saying “What shall I do with you? You are a woman.” So she shaved her head and donned men’s robes, and joined the monastery along with him, as a monk named Marinus. Years later, the pregnant daughter of a local innkeeper accused Marina of being the father. She was sent away, and lived as a beggar outside the monastery gates, taking care of the child that she had been accused of fathering. When she died, the monks were filled with remorse, discovering she had been a woman all along.



Sitidos (Book of Job)

One of the most overlooked women in the Bible, Sitidos is the name that Jewish tradition gave to the wife of Job, a woman who suffers all the same calamities he does, including the loss of her children, her livestock, and her livelihood. While he philosophizes for 42 chapters, complaining, "Oh that my words were recorded," his wife only has one recorded sentence: "Do you persist in your integrity?" she asks. "Curse God and die." Though she is framed as faithless and punitive, her skepticism causes Job to ask questions that ultimately lead to a much deeper understanding of God and suffering.

Thérèse of Liseux (1873-1897)

Thérèse was a French Carmelite nun, poet, and playwright. She is often referred to as "The Little Flower," and is one of four women to be called a "Doctor of the Church." She writes, "If a little flower could speak, it seems to me that it would tell us quite simply all that God has done for it, without hiding any of its gifts. It would not, under the pretext of humility, say that it was not pretty, or that it had not a sweet scent... Holiness consists simply in doing God's will, and being just what God wants us to be... If every flower wanted to be a rose, Spring would lose its loveliness."

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896)

Harriet was an American abolitionist who supported the Underground Railroad, housing several fugitive slaves in her own home. Her best-selling novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, depicted the harsh realities that African Americans had to endure under slavery, which was pivotal in mobilizing the abolitionist movement in the North. She once said, "When you get into a tight place, and everything goes against you till it seems as though you could not hang on a minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn."

The Sinful Woman (Luke 7:36-50)

While Jesus was eating with a group of high-profile Pharisees, a woman with a reputation for being "sinful" dared to enter the house, bringing with her an alabaster jar of expensive ointment. She bravely but humbly approached Jesus from behind. As she knelt down to anoint him, her tears washed his feet, and so she dried them with her hair. The Pharisees were horrified, commenting on "what kind of woman" she was. But Jesus lifted her up as an example of worthiness, because of her example of uninhibited love, generosity, humility, and sincere gratitude.

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941)

Evelyn was an English writer, pacifist, and mystic, known widely for her works on spiritual practice. She writes, "Never let yourself think that because God has given you many things to do for Him – pressing routine jobs, a life full up with duties, and demands of a very practical sort – that all these need separate you from communion with Him. God is always coming to you in the Sacrament of the Present Moment. Meet and receive him there with gratitude in that sacrament. However unexpected its outward form may be, receive Him in every sight and sound, joy, pain, opportunity, and sacrifice."

Eve (Genesis 2-4)

Eve is the name given to the original woman in the creation account found in the Hebrew Bible. She was created when the original human was split in two. She is the only person in Scripture other than Jesus to talk to both God and Satan. When the serpent told her that eating from the forbidden tree would not actually kill her but would make her wise, she did not have "the knowledge of good and evil" to discern the lie hidden behind the serpent's truth. She ate the fruit and gave some to Adam, thus bringing all of humanity into consciousness, along with all its consequences and all its blessings.

Photina (John 4:1-42)

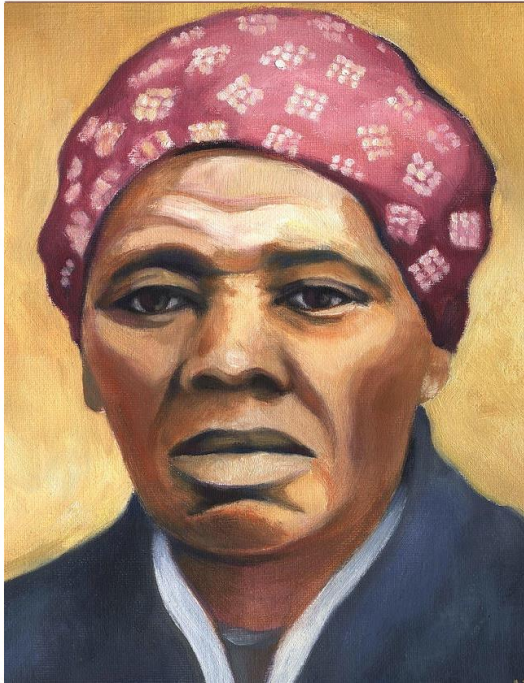
This Samaritan woman from Sychar had been married five times, and was living with a man who was not her husband. She was an outcast, even in her own hometown. Yet she gets to have the longest conversation with Jesus recorded in Scripture. Jews and Samaritans did not talk to one another, so she was taken aback when Jesus first initiated conversation with her. But she was smart and quick-witted, bantering back and forth with him until she finally comes to see him as the long-awaited Messiah. It was through her that the other Samaritans in the village came to know Jesus too.

St. Monica (331-387)

Monica was the mother of Augustine of Hippo. She was a Christian woman who was married early in her life to a Roman official with a violent temper and a penchant for adultery. His son initially followed in his footsteps, becoming lazy and selfish. Monica wept for him every night. Eventually she threw him out of the house, but then followed him as far as Rome and Milan, hoping to someday see him change his ways. After 17 years, and largely on account of her example of steadfast love, Augustine converted, becoming one of the most important theologians in the Christian church.

Judith (Book of Judith)

Judith speaks more words than any other woman in the Bible. A widow during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, her people were terrified, and had lost all courage to fight. She pleaded with her leader not to surrender, but was mocked and sent away. So she took matters into her own hands, and snuck into the enemy camp at night. She entered into the tent of the military leader, charmed him, got him drunk, and after he passed out, she cut off his head with his own sword. Returning home with his head in a bag, Judith had won her people's freedom, along with their respect.



Rahab (Joshua 2)

Rahab was a prostitute who lived in the city walls of Jericho. She welcomed two Israelite spies who had come to plan their siege on the city. When the king's men came to her door, she risked her life to conceal the men. But later, she demanded that the men save her life in return when they came back to take the city. They agreed, and gave her a red cord to hang from the window so that they could find her. She escaped the city and married into the Jewish faith. Significantly, this clever prostitute is one of four women listed in Matthew as being a direct ancestor of Jesus.

Lydia (Acts 16)

Lydia of Thyatira is regarded as the first European Christian. She was a wealthy and powerful woman who lived in Philippi near Rome, where she ran a cloth business. One day while standing with a group of women by the river just outside of town, they were approached by Paul, Silas, and Timothy, who told them of their faith in Christ. Lydia decided that she and her entire household should be baptized that day, and she converted her own home into what is considered the first house church in Europe. She is thus one of early Christianity's most important church leaders.

Deborah (Judges 4-5)

Deborah was a counselor, warrior, and prophet who led the tribes of Israel in an attack against the oppressive King Jabin in the 12th century BCE. The Song of Deborah, found in Judges 5:2-31, is believed to be one of the oldest parts of the Hebrew Bible. Significantly, it celebrates a military victory brought about by two women: Deborah, and Jael: a woman who drove a tent peg into the skull of the enemy's military commander. "When locks are long in Israel," Deborah sings, "When the people offer themselves willingly, bless the Lord!"

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883)

Born a slave in New York, Sojourner escaped with her daughter in 1826. In 1851 she gave a speech to women's rights activists in Ohio: "That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages... Nobody ever helps me into carriages... And ain't I a woman? ...I could work as much and each as much as a man...and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? ...That little man back there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with it."

Harriet Tubman (1822-1913)

Harriet was an American abolitionist and spy who helped free hundreds of people from slavery. Born into slavery herself, she escaped to Philadelphia when she was 27 years old, only to immediately turn around and rescue her relatives. One by one, by the dark of night, she led groups of enslaved Americans across the Mason-Dixon line and into freedom, utilizing a secret network of safe houses and allies called the Underground Railroad. During the Civil War she worked as an armed scout and spy. She was often referred to as "Moses," and it was said that "she never lost a passenger."

Sarah (Genesis 16-21)

In the context of ancient Hebrew patriarchal society, a woman's value and sense of worth derived largely from her ability to bear children, especially male children. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, was unable to get pregnant, and spent much of her life heartbroken and jealous of her servant girl, Hagar, who bore a son for Abraham on her behalf. But at the age of 90, she overheard three strangers tell her husband that she would give birth to a son the following year. In response, Sarah bursts into laughter. At age 91, Sarah bears a son and names him Isaac, meaning "laughter."

Rosa Parks (1913-2005)

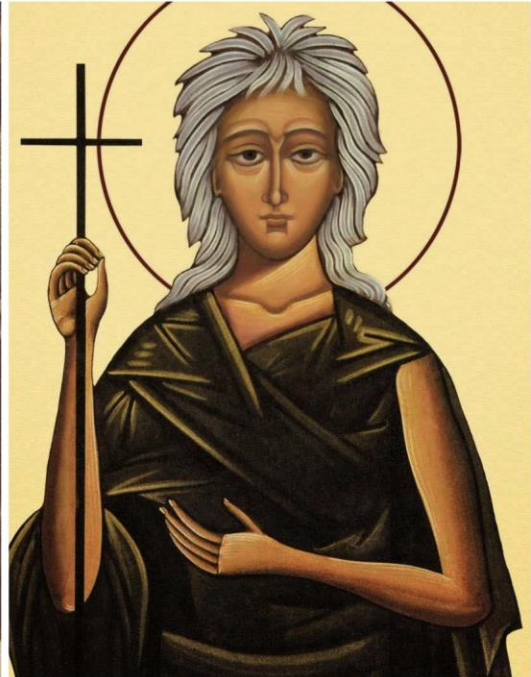
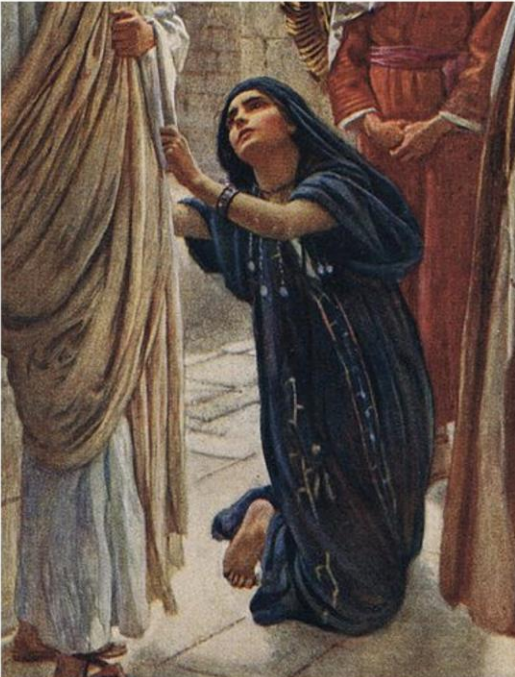
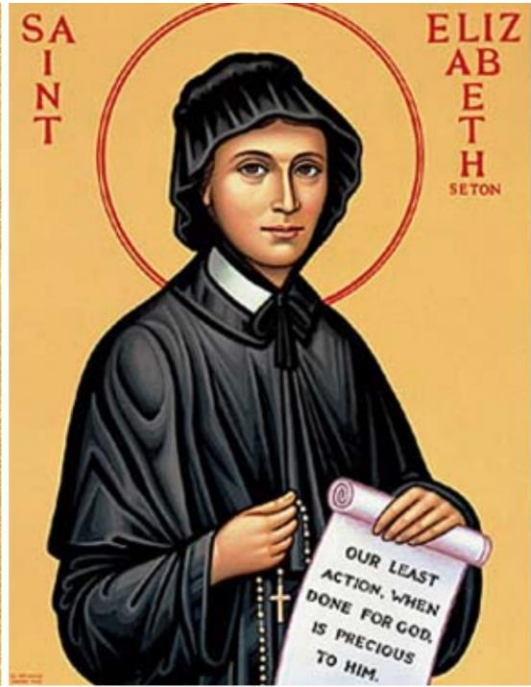
Rosa was born in Tuskegee, Alabama, during a time when segregation was legally enforced. In 1955, when ordered to give up her seat to a white passenger, Rosa refused. Though she was not the first to give up her seat (6 other women had done so in previous months), her case received more publicity than any other, and she became a symbol for the Civil Rights Movement, inspiring and giving courage to many. Though she is widely honored today, at the time, Rosa lost her job as a seamstress and she received death threats for her actions for many years.

St. Lucy (283-304)

Lucy was born into a wealthy family, but her father died when she was 5 years old, leaving she and her mother vulnerable. Fearing for her daughter's livelihood, her mother arranged for her to be married to a wealthy pagan man. But Lucy convinced her mother to give all their wealth away to the poor, which caused her fiancé to denounce her to the governor. When the governor commanded her to burn a sacrifice to the Emperor, she refused. She was sentenced first to a brothel, and then was brought forward to be tortured by having her eyes gouged out, before finally being put to death.

Ruth (Book of Ruth)

Naomi fled Bethlehem due to a famine and came to Moab, where both her sons married Moabites. When both sons and her husband died, Naomi returned to Bethlehem, only to find that her friends were now wealthy, while she was destitute. But her daughter-in-law Ruth had insisted on coming with her, and kept them alive by gathering up grain from a certain field owned by Rahab's son, Boaz. This man took Ruth to be his wife even though Moabites were considered "foreigners" and enemies of Israel. She is one of the women mentioned in Matthew as a direct ancestor of Jesus.



Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821)

Elizabeth was born to high society during the American Revolution. At 19, she married a wealthy man and had five children before his business failed and he died of tuberculosis. At 30, she found herself widowed and penniless. To support her children, she opened a school in Baltimore. In 1805 she converted to Catholicism. She writes, "The accidents of life separate us from our dearest friends, but let us not despair. God is like a looking glass in which souls see each other. The more we are united to Him by love, the nearer we are to those who belong to Him."

The Bleeding Woman (Luke 8:43-48)

There was a woman who had been menstruating for 12 years straight. No one could heal her. When she saw Jesus in the crowd, she desperately reached out to him, touching the edge of his cloak. Her bleeding immediately stopped. Having felt the power go out of him, Jesus asked who touched him. The disciples laughed, "people are touching you from all sides!" But this woman's touch was different. This was a powerful touch, of true faith. The woman presented herself to Jesus, trembling. But he did not chastise her. He commended her for her faith, acknowledging that it had healed her.

St. Mary of Egypt (344-421)

Born in Egypt, Mary ran away from her parents at the age of 12 to the city of Alexandria, where she lived as a prostitute. At age 29, she traveled to Jerusalem on a kind of "anti-pilgrimage," hoping to turn other pilgrims away from their faith through lust, paying her way through sexual favors. But when she arrived and tried to enter the church, she was barred by an unseen force. Struck with remorse, she prayed to an image of Mary that was outside. She decided to be baptized, and after receiving communion went into the desert to live as a hermit. There she was sought out by many for her wisdom.

St. Margaret (1045-1093)

Margaret of Scotland was a truly liberated woman in the sense that she was free to be herself, which for her meant loving God and serving others. She was the daughter of an English prince, who married King Malcolm III of Scotland. As queen, she exerted great influence over her husband and her country. Unlike many aristocrats, she was not only generous with money and material gifts, but she sought to be in real relationship with the poor. She was known for serving breakfast to orphans every day before eating, and for regularly washing the feet of the poor, in imitation of Christ.

Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207-1282)

Mechthild was a Christian medieval mystic in Germany. At the age of 23 she decided to "renounce all worldly honor and riches" to become a Beguine. She was a prolific poet, writing: "Ah, dear love of God, always embrace this soul of mine...O lady love, cast me beneath your feet! I delight when victorious you vanquish me...for in that, O lady, lies my true safety. O sweet love of God, when I sleep too long, unmindful of things that are good, then, please, wake me up and sing for me, O lady, your song, with which you touch my soul as if with the sweet sound of strings."

Syrophenician Woman (Mark 7:24-30)

Jesus went to a house in Tyre, hoping to keep his presence a secret. But a Syrian woman whose daughter was sick heard about him and went there, begging for Jesus to heal her little girl. Jesus was rude to her, saying "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." But the woman responded cleverly, "Even dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs," suggesting that even a mere crumb of faith would be enough. Jesus was impressed and healed the girl. This is arguably the only time in Scripture that Jesus changes his mind, and it is after being corrected by a woman.

Thecla (c. 30)

Thecla sat by her window for three days listening to St. Paul's teachings. Her fiancé, fearing she would follow Paul and pursue a life of chastity, turned her in to the authorities. When a nobleman tried to rape her, she fought him off, but was then put on trial for assaulting a nobleman. She was sentenced to be eaten in the arena by wild beasts, but was saved when the female beasts gathered to protect her against the male aggressors. In the arena, she baptized herself, in the amphitheater trench. She is considered an apostle and "protomartyr among women."

Hadewijch (13th century)

Hadewijch was a Belgian mystic and poet. She lived several years as a Beguine – a single woman living in intentional community with other women – before leaving to pursue a wandering life. In one poem she writes: "The madness of love is a blessed fate; And if we understood this We would seek no other: It brings into unity What was divided, And this is the truth: Bitterness it makes sweet, It makes the stranger a neighbor, And what was lowly, it raises on high."

St. Edith Stein (1891-1942)

Edith was a German Jew who converted to Catholicism after reading Teresa of Avila and became a Carmelite nun. She was ultimately arrested by the Nazis, and died in a gas chamber at Auschwitz. She is considered a martyr and a mystic. She writes, "All that we do is a means to an end, but love is an end in itself, because God is love....When night comes, and you look back over the day and see how fragmentary everything has been, and how much you planned that has gone undone, and all the reasons you have to be embarrassed: just take everything exactly as it is, put it in God's hands, and leave it with Him."