



On **March 12, 1622**, something happened that the Christian world had never witnessed before. In a solemn ceremony in Rome, five extraordinary men and women were proclaimed saints **at the same time**. That day marked **the first great collective canonization in the history of the Church**.

The new saints were very different from one another: a farmer from Madrid, a mystical reformer, a founder of a religious order, a missionary who traveled across half the world, and a priest who revolutionized the spiritual life of Rome. Yet they all shared what was essential: **a life completely given to God**.

The protagonists of that historic moment were:

- **Saint Isidore the Farmer (San Isidro Labrador)**
- **Saint Teresa of Jesus**
- **Saint Ignatius of Loyola**
- **Saint Francis Xavier**
- **Saint Philip Neri**

That joint canonization was not merely a liturgical act. It was **a theological, pastoral, and spiritual message for the entire Church**. Four centuries later, it still carries great significance for Christians today.

This article seeks to help you understand **what truly happened that day, why it was so important, and what it can teach us about living the faith in the twenty-first century**.

An Unprecedented Event in the History of the Church

The Historical Context: A Church in Renewal

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Catholic Church was going through a decisive moment. After the wounds of the Protestant Reformation, the **Council of Trent (1545-1563)** had initiated a profound spiritual, doctrinal, and pastoral renewal.



What the Church needed were **living models of holiness**, concrete examples showing the world that the Gospel continued to transform lives.

The canonization of 1622 responded precisely to that need.

Pope **Gregory XV** decided to raise to the altars five figures who represented **different paths to holiness**:

- family life and daily work
- the mystical life
- the reform of the Church
- missionary evangelization
- urban pastoral ministry

In a sense, it was **a complete portrait of the living Church**.

Five Different Paths Toward Holiness

Saint Isidore the Farmer: Holiness in Everyday Life

Saint Isidore lived **in Madrid in the twelfth century** and was a simple farmer. He did not found religious orders or write spiritual books. His life seemed simple: work, family, and prayer.

Yet behind that simplicity was a profound interior life.

Tradition tells that while he was praying, **angels plowed the fields in his place**. Beyond the symbolic character of the story, the message is clear: **God acts in the life of the one who places Him at the center**.

Saint Isidore reminds us that holiness **is not reserved for monasteries or great theologians**.

It is also found:

- in honest work



- in family life
- in daily fidelity

It is the holiness of ordinary life.

Saint Teresa of Jesus: The Adventure of the Soul

If Saint Isidore represents the holiness of the countryside, **Saint Teresa of Jesus** represents the holiness **of the inner life of the soul**.

Born in 1515 in Ávila, Teresa was a woman of extraordinary intelligence and a mystic of remarkable depth. She reformed the Carmelite order and left spiritual writings that remain a universal reference.

For Teresa, the spiritual life is like **an interior castle** where the soul meets God.

Her fundamental teaching is simple and revolutionary: **God dwells within us**.

Her well-known prayer summarizes her spirituality:

“Let nothing disturb you,
let nothing frighten you.
All things pass away; God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.
Whoever has God lacks nothing.”

Saint Teresa teaches modern believers something essential: **faith is not merely religious practice; it is a living relationship with God**.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Intelligence at the Service of God

Saint Ignatius was the opposite of what one might imagine a saint to be.

He was **a soldier, ambitious, proud, and in love with glory**. But a wound in battle changed his life forever.



During his recovery he read the lives of the saints... and something began to change within him.

From that conversion were born:

- the **Spiritual Exercises**
- the **Society of Jesus**
- a new way of discerning the will of God

Ignatius taught something deeply relevant today: **faith also involves discernment, intelligence, and decision.**

It is not only about feeling God, but about **actively seeking Him in all things.**

Saint Francis Xavier: The Saint Who Carried the Gospel to the Ends of the World

If Ignatius was the strategist, **Francis Xavier was the great adventurer of the Gospel.**

In just ten years he traveled through:

- India
- Indonesia
- Japan

He baptized thousands of people and opened missionary paths that would change the history of Christianity.

He died in 1552 at the gates of China, dreaming of bringing the Gospel even farther.

His life reflects the missionary mandate of Christ:

“Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.”



| *(Mark 16:15)*

Francis Xavier reminds the Church that **faith cannot be kept only for oneself**. It is meant to be proclaimed.

Saint Philip Neri: The Joy of the Gospel

Saint Philip Neri was known as **“the saint of joy.”**

He lived in Rome during the sixteenth century and transformed the city with a deeply human way of evangelizing:

- closeness
- humor
- friendship
- music
- simple prayer

He founded the **Oratory**, a space where Christians could grow spiritually in community.

Philip understood something that remains fundamental today: **holiness is not sadness or rigidity**.

Authentic faith produces **deep joy**.

The Theological Meaning of That Collective Canonization

The Church does not canonize saints merely to honor their memory.

They are canonized in order to **propose them as universal models of Christian life**.



The canonization of 1622 communicates several profound theological lessons.

1. Holiness Has Many Paths

The five saints represent different states of life:

- layperson (Saint Isidore)
- contemplative religious (Saint Teresa)
- founder and reformer (Saint Ignatius)
- missionary (Saint Francis Xavier)
- urban pastor (Saint Philip Neri)

The message is clear: **there is no single way to become holy.**

2. Holiness Is Possible for Everyone

Centuries later the Second Vatican Council expressed this clearly:

all Christians are called to holiness.

It is not a goal reserved for a few chosen people.

It is a **universal vocation.**

As Scripture says:

“*Be holy, because I am holy.*”

(1 Peter 1:16)



3. Holiness Transforms the World

Each of these saints changed history:

- Teresa reformed contemplative life
- Ignatius transformed education and mission
- Xavier opened Asia to Christianity
- Philip renewed Rome
- Isidore showed the holiness of work

Holiness **is not an escape from the world**, but a transformation of the world.

What Can Christians Today Learn?

Four centuries later, these saints still speak with surprising relevance.

1. Sanctify Daily Life

Like Saint Isidore:

- work honestly
 - live with humility
 - place God in everyday life
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2. Cultivate the Interior Life

Like Saint Teresa:

- dedicate time to prayer
- seek interior silence
- recognize that God dwells in the soul



3. Discern and Decide

Like Saint Ignatius:

- examine decisions
 - seek the will of God
 - live with purpose
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4. Be Missionaries in Our Own Environment

Like Saint Francis Xavier:

- share the faith
 - live with courage
 - do not hide the Gospel
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5. Live the Faith with Joy

Like Saint Philip Neri:

- cultivate friendship
 - live faith with humor and closeness
 - transmit hope
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The Great Lesson of 1622

That collective canonization was far more than a solemn act in Rome.

It was **a universal proclamation of possible holiness.**



Five different lives.
Five distinct paths.
One single destiny: **union with God.**

The story of these saints reminds us of something essential: holiness is not an impossible perfection, but **love lived with radical commitment.**

And perhaps the most important question that March 12, 1622 leaves us is not historical.

It is personal.

What place does God occupy in our lives today?

Because, as Saint Teresa taught, the true spiritual adventure begins when the human person dares to enter his own heart... and discovers that **God was already there waiting.**