

SAINTS WHO SUFFERED STIGMATA IN LIFE

by Melissa Butz Corsi

Stigmata is an occurrence where a person experiences wounds corresponding to the wounds Christ suffered during his crucifixion, offering a unique closeness to God. They can be visible to others or invisible, with the pain being constant. As we celebrate the Oct. 4 Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi — who is believed to have received the stigmata 800 years ago, in 1224 — take a look at a few Saints in our history who have experienced the phenomenon.

St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

Feast day: Oct. 4

The first recorded occurrence of stigmata dates back 800 years with St. Francis of Assisi. He received it on Sept. 14, 1224, on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross in La Verna, near Assisi, Italy. While his wounds would often bleed, one of the miracles is that they never became infected. The saint had a vision of a man-seraph with six wings who was on a cross. While meditating on what it meant, he realized he was sharing an experience with the crucified Lord that surpassed a bodily martyrdom to one of spirit and heart. As the vision left him, his love for God grew, and he became marked with the outward sign of the stigmata on his hands, feet, and side of his body.

St. Pio of Pietrelcina (1887-1968)

Feast day: Sept. 23

One of the most recent and well-known saints to have the stigmata is St. Pio of Pietrelcina, otherwise known as Padre Pio. He received it in 1918 and was subject to studies by both the Vatican and modern medicine. Neither could find or determine a cause besides divine intervention. Padre Pio, who had stigmata for more than 50 years, felt the pains before he received any visible signs. He described receiving the stigmata as a terrible event and asked God to withdraw the visible wounds because he was embarrassed to have them. Many relics of gloves, socks, or cloth that absorbed the blood from his wounds circulate regularly for the faithful to venerate.

St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

Feast day: April 29

St. Catherine of Siena, an Italian saint and Doctor of the Church, obtained the stigmata in April of 1375 at the church of St. Christina in Pisa. After she received Communion during Mass, bloody beams radiated out of the crucifix and pierced her hands, feet, and heart. She asked the Lord not to make the wounds visible to others, and He listened. As the rays approached her, they changed

into bright light, remaining invisible to others until her death. The cross from which she received the stigmata is still visible to pilgrims in Siena, Italy.

St. Faustina Kowalska (1905-1938)

Feast day: Oct. 5

Polish nun St. Faustina Kowalska is usually associated with the image of Divine Mercy and the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. However, she also silently suffered from the invisible stigmata, which she received during a Holy Hour on Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday. St. Faustina could feel pain in her hands, feet, side, and head from the crown of thorns. She could also read souls so when she would come into the presence of someone in mortal sin, her pains would increase.

St. Rita of Cascia (1381-1457)

Feast day: May 22

St. Rita of Cascia is an Italian saint who was a wife and a mother of two boys. A family enemy assassinated her husband, and, as a result, St. Rita's two sons wanted vengeance but died of natural causes before they were able to carry out their plan. Without any family left, she entered the monastery of St. Mary Magdalene in Cascia. Her stigmata came in the form of wounds from the Crown of Thorns on her forehead. She is known as



Center: St. Francis of Assisi.
Left from Top to bottom: St. Rita of Cascia, St. Veronica Giuliani, St. Mariam Baouardy.
Right from top to bottom: St. Faustina Kowalska, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Gemma Galgani, St. Pio of Pietrelcina.

the saint of impossible causes for the many difficulties she encountered throughout her life.

St. Gemma Galgani (1878-1903)

Feast day: April 11

St. Gemma is an Italian mystic who received the stigmata on June 8, 1899, the Vigil of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, during eucharistic adoration. It began when she had a vision of her guardian angel and the Blessed Mother. Her guardian angel asked her to recite an act of contrition, and Our Lady covered Gemma with her mantle. At that moment, Jesus came with his open wounds, and flames came from them, touching her hands, feet, and heart. The pain continued until 3 p.m. on the Feast of the Sacred Heart. It then reoccurred every Thursday from 11 p.m. to 3 p.m. St. Gemma also had marks from the scourging and the crown of thorns, plus a wound on her shoulder from the heavy Cross that dug into Jesus.

St. Mariam Baouardy (1846-1878)

Feast day: Aug. 26

St. Mariam was born in the Holy Land to Greek Catholic parents. Her parents died when she was young but dedicated her to both the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. When living with her uncle, a servant of his tried to convert her to Islam. She refused to leave the Catholic faith, so the servant cut her throat and left her in the street for dead. Doctors say this should have killed her, but St. Mariam described "a nun dressed in blue" who brought her to a cave, took care of her, and predicted her life's events. St. Mariam later discovered it was Our Lady and eventually entered the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. The other sisters were bothered by her experiences, which included ecstasies and the stigmata, which she received as a novice every week. She founded a Carmelite monastery in India and another in Bethlehem before her death at 32.

St. Veronica Giuliani (1660-1727)

Feast day: July 9

St. Veronica's mother died when she was young. At her death, she entrusted each of her five daughters to the five wounds of Jesus. St. Veronica was designated in prayer the wounded heart of Christ. The Italian saint entered the Poor Clares — an enclosed order of nuns — at 17 years old after persuading her father to let her become a nun. She desired to share in Christ's suffering from a young age and was said to have been pierced in her heart by the stigmata before she received the visible signs. The first were the marks from the crown of thorns on her head.

Church officials studied her wounds, and for a period, forbade her from attending Mass apart from Sundays and holy days until they concluded their investigation into the stigmata's authenticity. St. Veronica's 22,000-page handwritten diary, which she kept at the behest of her spiritual director, is used to study mysticism and offers immense knowledge of spiritual teaching. As a result of this, many have asked that she be declared a Doctor of the Church.