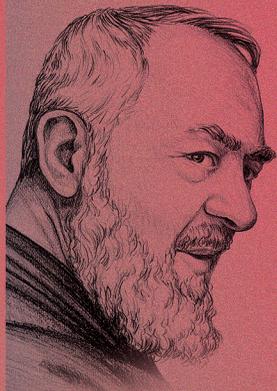
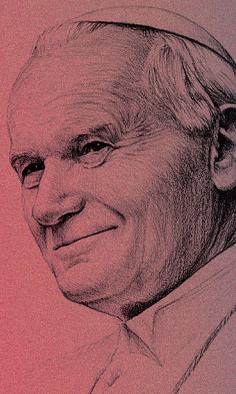


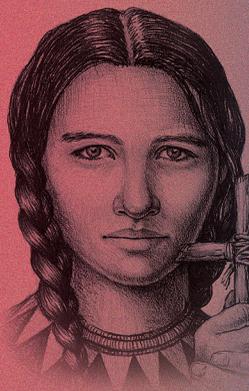


I AM GOING



ACTA SIMPLI

*Reflections on
the Last Words of
the Saints*



Mary Kathleen
Glavich, SND



“I am going...”

Reflections on the Last Words of the Saints

Mary Kathleen Glavich, SND

Illustrations by Christopher Santer



Contents

Introduction • 5

Saints A-Z • 9

Appendix A: Select Prayers • 215

Appendix B: Patron Saints • 221

Index of Saints Arranged by Name • 227

Index of Saints Arranged by Feast Days • 229

Index of Reflections Arranged by Title • 231

About the Author and Illustrator • 233

ACTA SAMPLE

Illustrations

Agatha • 9

Bernadette • 35

Clare • 53

Elizabeth Ann Seton • 67

Francis Xavier • 83

Ignatius of Loyola • 99

Jeanne Jugan • 103

John Paul II • 121

Kateri Tekakwitha • 133

Maria Goretti • 147

Pio of Pietrelcino • 175

Rose of Lima • 187

Teresa of Calcutta • 197

Thomas More • 205

Introduction

Dying words, especially those of heroes and other famous people, fascinate us. Some last words are common knowledge; we recall them as easily as our home address. Almost everyone knows, at least from Shakespeare, that as Julius Caesar passed from this life in 44 B.C., he asked, “*Et tu, Brute?*” And every student in the United States learns that, before his execution, American Revolutionary War hero Nathan Hale valiantly proclaimed, “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.” Recently, as Steve Jobs, cofounder and CEO of Apple, left this world, he looked past those gathered around his deathbed and mysteriously uttered, “Oh, wow! Oh, wow! Oh, wow!”

To us mortals, last words possess a kind of mystical significance. We deem them so important that we even allow condemned prisoners an opportunity to make a final statement. They may express remorse, anger, or gratitude to their families or wardens. They may apologize or steadfastly maintain innocence.

If you type *dying words* on an Internet search engine, you’ll get pages and pages of hits, including the following gems.

- Just moments before receiving a fatal gunshot wound during the American Civil War, General John Sedgwick is reported to have remarked, “They couldn’t hit an elephant at this distance.”
- President Grover Cleveland wistfully said, “I have tried so hard to do the right.”
- Some say comedian Lou Costello capped his fun-filled life by commenting, “That was the best ice-cream soda I ever tasted.”
- According to his wife, Beatle George Harrison said, “Love one another.”
- Leonardo da Vinci is said to have confessed, “I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have.”

More meaningful for us than the last words of historical figures and celebrities are those of our loved ones. As they depart for the next life, they might assure us of their love, make a request, or impart some final advice. We tuck their dying words tenderly into our hearts.

Saints are our heroes and members of our family, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Because they serve as role models, it follows that their final words are both a legacy and challenge. As we move along our earthly journey, we treasure the words they uttered at their death and ponder their meaning for our own faith life.

Our greatest saint is Mary, the Mother of God. Unfortunately, we do not know her final words, but we do have the last words she spoke in the Gospel of John: "Do whatever he [Jesus] tells you." Now that's good advice. Nor do we have a record of the dying words of Joseph, Mary's husband. In fact, spoken words of Joseph on any topic are not recorded in any of the four gospels.

Other popular saints leave us without uttering their last thoughts. Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, founder of the Society of the Sacred Heart, is one of these. Years before her death, she declared, "If God hears my prayers, there will be no last words of mine to repeat, for I shall say nothing at all." Her words were prophetic: Paralysis prevented her from speaking for the last days of her life. Another French saint, the beloved Saint John Vianney, known as the Curé of Ars, also died peacefully and silently in 1859. Perhaps humility kept his tongue in check. And although the great Saint Thomas Aquinas generated an avalanche of written words, apparently no one was able to record his final spoken words. You won't find Saint Benedict's last words in this book either, but his final gesture was a powerful statement. While standing in an oratory with arms uplifted in prayer after Communion, he died suddenly of a fever.

The dying words that have been preserved offer us a treasure trove for reflection. As we might expect, the majority of the saints died while uttering a prayer. Some humble saints, as holy as they were, still begged God for mercy. Many martyrs, in imitation of Jesus, forgave their enemies with their dying breath. Some saints delivered a final instruction to those surrounding their deathbed. And a few saints gifted with an irrepressible sense of humor and irony couldn't resist expiring with what might seem like a joke. Notable among this last group are the Roman deacon Saint Lawrence (page

136) and the English chancellor Saint Thomas More (page 206).

I was tempted to include the words of holy men and women like Blessed Miguel Pro. As this Jesuit faced the Mexican firing squad with his arms outstretched as if on a cross, he triumphantly proclaimed, “Long live Christ the king!” In the end I decided to focus solely on officially declared saints.

Each entry opens with a brief biography followed by the saint’s last words, a reflection, and a suggestion for taking the saint’s words to heart.

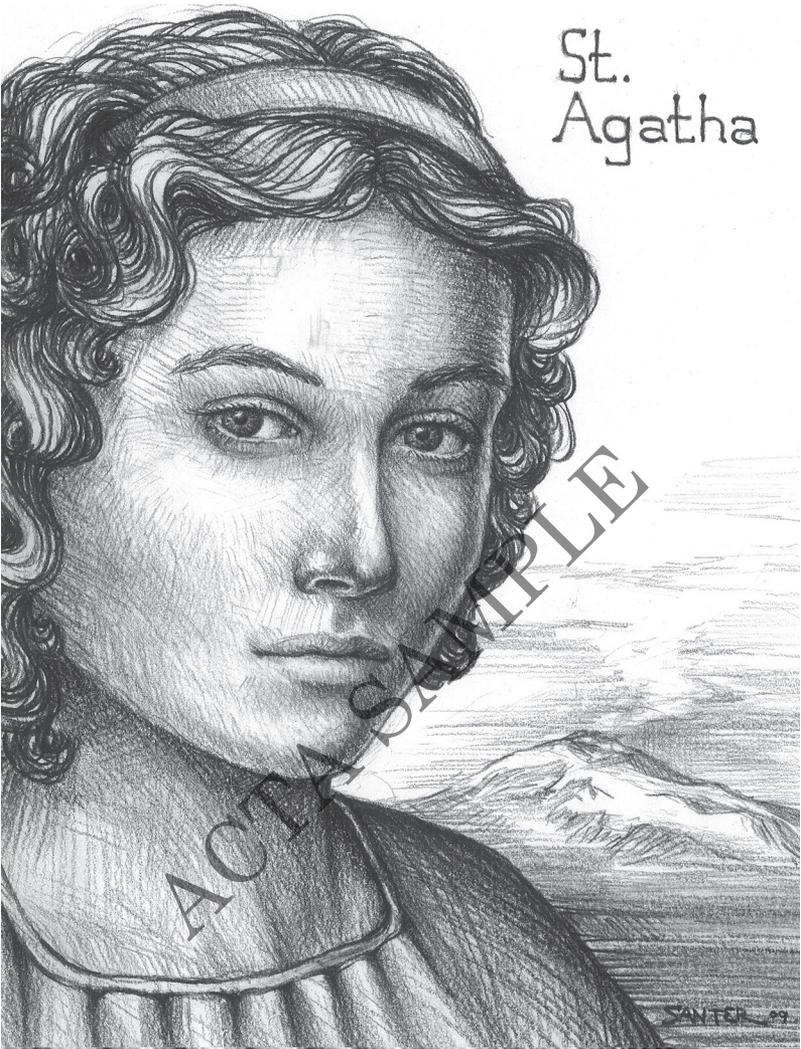
For those who would like to follow the liturgical calendar for the saints in this book, an index is provided on page 215. I have also included pages for you to record the dying words of family, friends, and others you admire.

We are unlikely to remember an event the same way as others. This is especially true in the case of a traumatic and emotional death. Our memories are colored by our relationship to the dying person and other factors. The same holds true for memories of the deaths of some saints. While most of the dying words quoted in this book have been authenticated, some might be the result of altered or embellished memory. And a few might reflect what someone *thought* the saint ought to have said! In any case, I hope you find these pages enlightening and inspiring.

It’s doubtful that the saints planned their dying words. Rather, their final utterances were most likely spontaneous, just a few words flowing from the inspired wisdom of their entire lives. We usually don’t think about our own death, much less our last words. What would you want your words to be as you exit this world and enter the next?

Mary Kathleen Glavich, SND

Note: The entry for each saint begins with the dates of birth and death, often approximate; titles; and feast day.



*Lord, my creator, you have protected me since
I was in the cradle. You have taken me from the love
of the world and given me patience to suffer.
Now receive my spirit.*

Saint Agatha

?–251 • Virgin, Martyr • February 5

LIFE

Saint Agatha, a Sicilian woman whose name means “good,” lived during a time of Christian persecution. She died for her faith and for defending her purity. Legends of her martyrdom include some gruesome details. According to one legend, Agnes rebuffed the advances of the governor and was imprisoned in a brothel for a month. One night, after the governor had her breasts cut off, Saint Peter, martyred almost two centuries earlier, appeared in her cell and healed her. Then Agatha was rolled over hot coals and taken to prison where she died. A year later, when an eruption of Mt. Etna endangered the people in her home city of Catania, the people of the city prayed to her and the lava flow bypassed the city.



LAST WORDS

*Lord, my creator, you have protected me
since I was in the cradle.*

*You have taken me from the love of the world
and given me patience to suffer.*

Now receive my spirit.

REFLECTION: A PERSONAL GOD

The Enlightenment, or Age of Reason, which evolved in the late seventeenth century, spawned Deism, or the Clockmaker God theory. This theory compared God to a person who makes a clock and then abandons it, letting it run by itself. Deists, including Benjamin Franklin, believed in God the Creator but did not think that he was involved at all in our lives. Saint Agatha's dying words reveal a belief diametrically opposed to this theory.

Agatha was truly "enlightened." God watched over her like a loving parent from the day she was born. She believed Jesus when he said, "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them," and "If God so clothes the grass of the field....will he not much more clothe you?" (Matthew 6:26, 30). Agatha shared Saint Paul's view of God's intimate, all-encompassing presence: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). She would also concur with Saint Catherine of Siena who said, "It seems to me that God has no other business than myself."

Convinced that God's fingerprints were all over her life, Agatha gave him credit in her last prayer for two of her extraordinary attributes: freedom from attachment to this world's pleasures and patience in enduring torments. Because she trusted that God's care extends beyond this present life, she asked him to receive her spirit. To Agatha, God was not a cold, distant being or force, but a loving Creator, a personal God who dotes on his human sons and daughters. She centered her life on God and loved him back so completely that she would accept no man as a husband, not even one of high rank. Steadfast in her convictions and commitment, Agatha sacrificed her life unconditionally.

RESPONSE

Sometimes the only explanation for unexpected, wonderful occurrences is the presence and action of our good God. Recall such times in your life and thank God for stepping in to help.

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga

1568–1591 • Confessor, Religious • June 21

LIFE

Saint Aloysius, an Italian aristocrat, was trained to be a soldier. During an illness, he read about the saints and was drawn to religious life, experiencing a revulsion to the violence and frivolous lifestyle of his culture. After serving as a page for the Spanish Infante Diego, he went against his father's wishes and joined the Jesuits. He relinquished his inheritance, made vows, received minor orders, and despite his poor health, practiced asceticism. While caring for plague victims in Rome, Aloysius contracted the disease. He died at age twenty-three, never having been ordained a priest.



LAST WORD

Jesus.

REFLECTION: THE NAME OF JESUS

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux wrote that the name of Jesus is “honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, a cry of joy in the heart.” Aloysius would have agreed emphatically. Jesus hemmed his life: Not only was Jesus his last word but it was reportedly his first!

According to the gospels, the angel Gabriel instructed Mary to name her child *Jesus*. Then, as if to insure that this was done, an angel repeated the instruction to Joseph. God the Father deliberately chose the name *Jesus* for his Son, giving as much thought to his child’s name as human parents do. The name *Jesus* is derived from the Hebrew for “God saves.” It expresses both the identity of Jesus as God and his world-changing mission: salvation.

Because Jesus is the name of the Son of God, it is the most holy and most powerful name. Saint Paul acknowledged this when he wrote that God gave Jesus “the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Philippians 2:9-10). Because Jesus is our savior, the one who died for us, his name is also precious, beloved.

No doubt, Saint Aloysius, who as a Jesuit was entirely devoted to Jesus, cringed each time the holy name was bandied about irreverently. Today is it not unusual to hear “Jesus” or “Christ” exclaimed in anger or surprise and to hear profanity in movies and online. How sad that God would have to order us in the second commandment to treat his name with respect.

A child once was asked to define *love*. “When someone loves you,” she said, “the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth.” People who love God pronounce his name with awe and care because it stands for the almighty One who loved us first. The Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus on January 3, just two days after the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.

RESPONSE

Do you dare point out to someone who habitually abuses the name of Jesus why you find it offensive? When you hear the holy name of Jesus used disrespectfully, counteract it at least by mentally praying, “Praised be Jesus Christ.”

Saint André Bessette

1845–1937 • Religious • January 6

LIFE

Sickly and not very literate, Saint André was an unlikely prospect for the Congregation of the Holy Cross. However, his pastor sent him to this religious community with the note, “I’m sending you a saint.” For forty years Brother André served as the doorkeeper at the College of Notre Dame in Montreal, Canada. Deep devotion to Saint Joseph compelled him to raise funds to build an oratory in his honor. This church became the Basilica of Saint Joseph’s Oratory. A prayerful, holy man, André provided spiritual direction. Innumerable instances of miraculous healing have been attributed to his intercession. When he died, millions filed past his coffin.



LAST WORDS

Here is the grain.

REFLECTION: RESURRECTION

Legend has it that the inventor of chess once showed the game to a king. When the king wanted to reward him, the wise man asked for what seemed a modest payment. He said, “On the first day give me one grain of wheat for the first square of the chessboard, on the second day two grains for the next square, four for the next, eight for the next, and so on for the sixty-four squares.” The king agreed, and, amazingly, on the sixty-fourth day owed the man 18,446,744,073,709,551,615 grains!

This story of multiplication of grains is linked to André’s life in three ways. First of all, God used one simple man, who could barely read or write, to do prodigious things and touch countless lives. Second, beginning in a small way by cutting boys’ hair for a nickel, Brother André managed to accumulate enough funds to build a basilica. Third, the story involves grain, and the saint’s last word was *grain*.

We might expect André to have died with the name Joseph on his lips. Instead he made the provocative statement, “Here is the grain.” Most likely he was thinking of resurrection, for Jesus, referring to himself, taught, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). Only if a grain dies and no longer exists as a grain can it burst forth with new life as a plant bearing many more grains. Saint Paul employed the same analogy to describe our death. He wrote, “What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

In his last words, Saint André manifested his faith in the divine Sower. He declared that he was ready to shed his life on earth and be reborn into new, eternal life. This is the life that Jesus won for us by undergoing death himself. Buried for three days, he rose from the earth ripe with glorified life and empowered to reproduce it in his followers a hundredfold.

RESPONSE

Multiply goodness. Perform a small, unexpected act of kindness for someone and ask him or her to pass it on.

Index of Saints

Arranged by Name

- Agatha 9, 10
Aloysius Gonzaga 12
André Bessette 14
Andrew Kim Taegon 16
Angela Merici 18
Anselm 20
Anthony Daniels 22
Anthony of Egypt 24
Anthony of Padua 26
Antonius of Florence 28
Bede the Venerable 30
Benildus 32
Bernadette 35, 36
Boniface 38
Bruno 40
Catherine of Siena 42
Charbel Makhlouf 44
Charles Borromeo 46
Charles Lwanga 48
Chi Zhuze 50
Clare 53, 54
Cyprian 56
David 58
Dismas 60
Dominic 62
Dominic Savio 64
Elizabeth Ann Seton 67, 68
Elizabeth of Hungary 70
Elizabeth of Portugal 72
Elizabeth of the Trinity 74
Frances of Rome 76
Francis de Sales 80
Francis of Assisi 78
Francis Xavier 83, 84
Frederick 86
Gabriel Possenti 88
Gemma Galgani 90
Gertrude the Great 92
Gregory VII 94
Hugh of Grenoble 96
Ignatius of Loyola 99, 100
Jeanne Jugan 103, 104
Joan of Arc 106
John Baptist de la Salle 110
John Bosco 112
John Chrysostom 114
John Neumann 118
John of the Cross 116
John Paul II, Pope 121, 122
John XXIII 108
Josephine Bakhita 126
Joseph of Cupertino 124
Julie Billiard 128
Justin Martyr 130
Kateri Tekakwitha 133, 134
Lawrence 136
Lawrence Ruiz 138
Louis de Montfort 140
Margaret Clitherow 142
Margaret Mary Alacoque 144
Margaret of Scotland 146
Maria Goretti 150
Martin of Tours 152
Mary Magdalene de Pazzi 154
Monica 156
Paschal Baylon 158
Paulinus of Nola 160
Paul Miki 162
Perpetua 164
Peter Chanel 168

Peter of Alcantara 166
Peter Verona 170
Philip Neri 172
Pio of Pietrelcino 175, 176
Pius V, Pope 178
Pius X, Pope 180
Polycarp 182
Rita of Cascia 184
Rose of Lima 188
Rose Philippine Duchesne 190
Stephen 192
Teresa of Avila 194
Teresa of Calcutta 197, 198
Thérèse of the Child Jesus 200
Thomas Becket 202
Thomas More 205, 206
Vincent de Paul 208
Vincent Ferrar 210
Wenceslaus 212

ACTA SAMPLE

Index of Reflections

Arranged by Title

- Accepting God's Will 169
Afterlife 87
Angels 63
Blessed Sacrament 159
Church 69
Churches 167
Courage to Do What Is Right 57
Desperation 49
Discernment 111
Enduring the Dark Night
 of the Soul 199
Eucharist 41
Evangelizing 171
Forgiveness 151
Gift of Faith 193
Gift of Laughter 137
Gift of Life 55
Giving God Glory 101
Glorifying God with Our Lives 31
God's Holy Will 125
Growing in Knowledge of God 21
Guardian Angels 77
Hands of God 117
Heaven 23
Heaven, Our Home 123
Holy Family 89
Holy Name of Jesus 85
Importance of Little Things 59
Indwelling of the Trinity 75
Integrity 207
Jesus as Model of Forgiveness 213
Jesus, Font of Mercy 143
Jesus Prayer 107
Joy 173
Kindness 113
Knowing Jesus 195
Living the Faith 203
Love 165
Love in Action 109
Loving God 201
Loving God Back 135
Marriage Metaphor 185
Martyrdom 39
Martyrdom, Red and White 131
Mary as Mediator 73
Mary, Our Mother 105
Mary, Refuge of Sinners 37
Mary's Magnificat 129
Name of Jesus 13
Offering Our Lives 139
Our Father 97
Our Lady 127
Our Longing for God 93
Passion and Death of Jesus 211
Patience 179
Personal God 11
Physical Appearance of Jesus 27
Portrait of a Christian 17
Positive Peer Pressure 25
Power of Example 163
Power of Jesus' Name 81
Prayer 177
Precious Blood 43
Preparing for Death 119
Promises 209
Promoting God's Kingdom 181
Psalms 79
Purposes of Suffering 189

Reasons to Praise God 115
Redemption 147
Religious Vocation 33
Remembering Deceased Loved
Ones 157
Responding to God's Call 47
Resurrection 15

Sacred Heart of Jesus 145
Sacrifices 183
Salvation at the Last Minute 61
Satan and Temptation 141
Self-denial 45
Self-oblation 191

Service 29
Speaking Up for Justice 95
Spreading the Name of Jesus 19
Suffering 155

True-blue Christians 51
Trust in God's Mercy 91

Value of Silence 71
Visions of Heaven 65
Work as a Means to Build
the Kingdom 153
Works of Mercy 161

ACTA SAMPLE

REFLECTIONS ON THE DYING WORDS OF EIGHTY-NINE SAINTS, INCLUDING:

SAINT ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY ✂ *I am going to Light,
to Love, to Life!*

SAINT DAVID ✂ *Be joyful, hold fast to the faith, and do the little
things that you have seen me do and heard about. I will walk the
path that our fathers have trod before us.*

SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI ✂ *I have done what was mine to do;
may Christ teach you what you are to do.*

SAINT GERTRUDE THE GREAT ✂ *When will you come?
My soul thirsts for you, O loving Father.*

SAINT LAWRENCE RUIZ ✂ *If I had a thousand lives,
I would offer them to God.*

SAINT PAUL MIKI ✂ *After Christ's example I forgive my persecutors.
I do not hate them. I ask God to have pity on all, and I hope my
blood will fall on my fellow men as a fruitful rain.*

SAINT ROSE PHILIPPINE DUCHESNE ✂ *Jesus, Mary, Joseph, I give
you my heart, my soul, and my life—oh, yes, my life, generously.*

Author: MARY KATHLEEN GLAVICH, a Sister of Notre Dame and noted religious educator, is the author of more than eighty books on faith formation, including the award-winning books *The Catholic Companion to Jesus* and *The Confirmed Catholic's Companion*.

Illustrator: CHRISTOPHER SANTER has exhibited works in galleries and museums across the country and is the Fine Arts Department Chair at Providence Academy in Plymouth, Minnesota.

Catholicism/Saints



ISBN 978-0-87946-595-7

5 1 2 9 5 >



9 780879 465957

www.actapublications.com

\$12.95