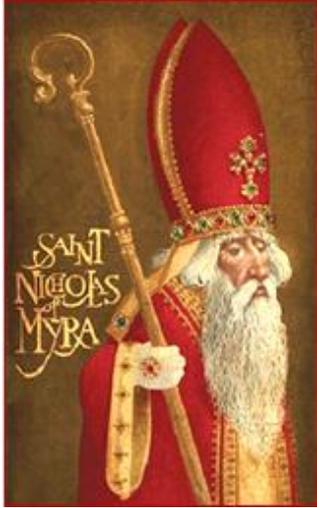


## SAINT NICHOLAS



Years ago, a little girl named Virginia O'Hanlon wrote to the editor of the *New York Sun* asking if Santa Claus was real. His answer, which spoke of skeptical men in a skeptical age who only believed in what they could see, is as relevant today as it was when Frank Church wrote it.

The name and face of Santa has been plastered over advertising, billboards, movies and television. We have single Santa's looking for wives, reluctant Santa's trying to escape their destinies, drafted Santa's to replace one who is "retiring", and even bad Santa's. The stories all have happy endings, with the magic of the North Pole somehow saving the day.

None of them are real, and many of them are even distasteful. Thankfully, none of them is Santa, either, because Saint Nicholas, like every saint, is real.

He was born in Asia Minor and was bishop of the town of Myra in the fourth century. When he died he was buried in the cathedral there. When the Saracens conquered Myra in the early eleventh century, his remains were moved to the Italian city of Bari in 1087. His tomb is visited by thousands every year, even to this day.

His bones exude a clear liquid, called the "manna of Saint Nicholas", which is extracted from the shrine every year on May 9 in a formal ceremony conducted by the Rector of the Basilica in Bari, in the presence of the delegate of the Pope, the Archbishop of Bari, an Orthodox Bishop, civil authorities, the local clergy and the faithful. This has happened every year since 1980. The manna is distributed and is considered a relic with healing properties.

Nicholas is the patron saint of children, Russia, Greece, Sicily, sailors, prisoners, bakers, and pawnbrokers. His image is second only to Mary's in religious icons of both the Eastern and Western churches.

The stories of his generosity and kindness are legendary. Santa Claus is a translation of his name. When our children are little, we tell them to "ask Santa" at Christmas time. They can ask for anything - without limit. All Santa wants in return is goodness. Isn't that exactly how we are supposed to relate to God?

But God is bigger than anything that we can comprehend. Developing an effective and complete relationship with God is the work of a lifetime, a work which most of us do not finish before our time here is done. That is why He sent His Son, so we would have someone we COULD connect with.

Saint Nicholas is a person who made that connection. When people pretend to be Santa, they act with levels of generosity and charity and kindness that they do not normally exhibit. In other words, they get closer to God. In doing so, they discover happiness.

And even in the convoluted versions of Santa being pushed by today's secular media, that message of happiness through goodness continues to resonate.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He is not just an idea. He was, and is, a saint, a saint who reminds us that we are loved without limits, a saint who challenges us to remove the limits on how we love others, a saint who calls us to holiness as we prepare to celebrate the greatest gift mankind has ever received.

And all we have to do is follow his example.

- Article written by Peg Luksik 12/6/2016 for [Catholic.org](http://Catholic.org). Peg Luksik is the Chairman of [Founded on Truth](http://Founded on Truth).