

November Quiz Answers

A Theologian. (a). Duns Scotus, Franciscan Theologian (1266–1308). November 8.

The definition of God as infinite Love was a particularly important theme for Scotus. He disagreed with Anselm, who understood the Incarnation as a necessary payment for sin. He also disagreed with Thomas, who argued that the Incarnation, though willed by God from eternity, was made necessary because of the existence of sin. For Scotus the Incarnation was willed through eternity as an expression of God's love, and hence God's desire for consummated union with creation. Our redemption by the cross, though caused by sin, was likewise an expression of God's love and compassion rather than an appeasement of God's anger or a form of compensation for God's injured majesty. Scotus believed, in turn, that knowledge of God's love should evoke a loving response on the part of humanity: "I am of the opinion that God wished to redeem us in this fashion principally in order to draw us to his love."

A Queen. ©. St Elizabeth of Hungary. Franciscan queen (1207–1231). November 17.

St. Elizabeth was the daughter of Hungarian royalty. At the age of four, in a politically arranged match, she was betrothed to the future landgrave (prince) of Thuringia in southern Germany.

After her marriage, Elizabeth gave birth to three children in quick succession, and she rejoiced that as landgravine of Thuringia, she now had much greater scope for her charitable activities. She established several hospitals for the indigent and aroused scandal by nursing the sick and even lepers with her own hands. Her instinctive spiritual poverty was only magnified with the arrival of the first Franciscan missionaries in Germany. She was captivated by the story of Clare and Francis, and she eventually embraced the rule of a lay Franciscan.

In all her piety and service to the poor, Elizabeth received the loyal support of her husband. When famine struck the kingdom, while Ludwig was away, Elizabeth took it upon herself to open the royal granaries to the poor. Many lives were spared through her generosity. Nevertheless, upon his return Ludwig was shocked to discover that his wife had become an object of scorn among the rich and elite members of the court. Aside from her charity, they were offended by a personal discipline she had imposed on herself never to eat any food that might be the fruit of injustice or exploitation. Her life was an example of piety, holiness, and Christian discipleship to many of her generation.

A monastic. (b). St. Hilda of Whitby Anglo-Saxon Abbess (610–680). November 17.

Whitby was a double monastery—that is, one comprising both men and women who lived separately but gathered to chant the office. In the tradition of Celtic monasticism, in which Hilda was formed, it was not unusual for a woman to preside over such a mixed community. Hilda set a standard for holiness, wisdom, and scholarship, promoting through her example "the observance of righteousness, mercy, purity, and other virtues, but especially in peace and charity." Bede, the church historian, observes that in her monastery "no one there was rich or poor, for everything was held in common, and none possessed any personal property." Five of her monks went on to become bishops. As a reflection of the prestige of Whitby, the monastery was chosen as the site for the important church synod of 664. The synod was called, ostensibly, to resolve disagreements about the correct date of Easter.

A social activist. (d). John LaFarge Priest and Champion of Interracial Justice (1880–1963). November 24.

John LaFarge hailed from one of America's most distinguished families. After studying classics at Harvard, he decided to become a priest, and so traveled to the Jesuit school at Innsbruck, Austria, to study

theology. As he embarked his mother cried out to him (for no reason that she could later remember), “Whatever you do, don’t become a Jesuit!” “You needn’t worry!” he shouted back. But several years later a Jesuit he became.

One of his first assignments as a priest was to serve as chaplain in the hospital and prison on Blackwell’s Island in New York City. This experience first awakened his commitment to the social dimensions of the gospel, a commitment that was further intensified with his assignment as part of a parish team in Leonardtown, Maryland. The parish was largely black, and it was the first time that the privileged Father LaFarge had been truly exposed to the bleak marginalization of blacks in American society and in the church. He determined to dedicate his priesthood to awakening the conscience of America to this reality.

In 1926 he moved back to New York to join the staff of *America* magazine, a Jesuit journal. LaFarge spent the rest of his life at the magazine. Through his editorials, articles, and columns, he gradually gained a reputation as the premier Catholic champion of what he called “interracial justice”.

He also wrote several books on the issue of racism and social action. One of them fell into the hands of Pope Pius XI. In 1938, during a papal audience, Pius asked LaFarge to draft an encyclical on racism. “Say simply,” the pope said, “what you would say to the whole world if you yourself were pope.” LaFarge was overwhelmed by the challenge, but he complied, drafting a powerful statement of the church’s attitude toward the “sin” and “heresy” of racism. It is tempting to imagine the possible impact such a document might have made in the impending struggle against Nazism. Sadly, it was never published. Soon after LaFarge had finished his draft, the pope passed away and the encyclical was shelved by his successor.

An abolitionist preacher. (e) *Sojourner Truth* (1797–1883). November 26.

Sojourner Truth was born a slave in Hurley, New York, around the year 1797 (her master did not record the exact date of her birth). Her parents named her Isabella, a name she abandoned at the age of forty-six when she took up her calling as a prophet and preacher.

As a young woman Isabella was given in marriage to an older slave, with whom she bore five children. But early one morning in 1826 she walked away from her master’s farm and stole herself from slavery, taking only her infant daughter and leaving her other four children behind. She worked as a servant in and about New York City for several years.

By 1843 Isabella became convinced that God was calling her to some greater mission. So, she set off on foot and left New York, carrying her few possessions in a pillowcase, unsure about her destination, determined to be a preacher. With her new freedom she felt it was time to replace her slave name. After appealing to God for inspiration, she chose the name Sojourner Truth, which reflected her calling to travel “up and down the land, showing the people their sins and being a sign unto

As Sojourner Truth she commenced an itinerant ministry of the word, preaching from the Scriptures she had practically learned by heart and delivering God’s judgment against the evils of slavery. Her autobiography, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, which she dictated and published in 1847, became a powerful weapon in the abolitionist cause. Yet, as eloquent, and effective a speaker as she was in the antislavery movement, Truth divided her energies with the growing movement for women’s rights. Many abolitionists were wary of the feminist movement, worried about compromising the struggle against slavery by linking it with another unpopular cause. But Truth insisted that there was no separating the issues. “If colored men get their rights, and not colored women,” she said, “colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as before”.

She never let fear or conflict silence her. More than once she tamed a hostile audience with her disarming wit. When an angry heckler once declared, “Old woman, I don’t care anymore for your talk than I do for the bite of a flea,” she replied, “The Lord willing, I’ll keep you scratching.”

These extracts from the lives of the saints are taken from Robert Ellsberg’s *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for our Time*, 2004.