



SILENT HOMILIES

The Sword They Set Down

Soldier-saints, and the peace that cost them a career



Silent Homilies

Little Treasures



The Sword They Set Down

*Soldier-saints, and the peace that
cost them a career*



*A small book about Christians who served,
Christians who refused, and the Church
that remembered both.*

Dedication



For those who have served, those who have refused, those who have
buried the dead of either side, and those who still have to decide.

Before You Begin



A parishioner once asked me after Mass whether a Catholic can be a soldier. It is a more complicated question than it sounds. The Church has saints who were soldiers, saints who left the army, saints who refused to join, and even Joan of Arc. The lives of the saints do not give us one easy slogan.

This little book will not settle the argument about war. Catholics argue about that with good reason, because lives hang on it. What I want to refuse are two cheap pictures. One treats every soldier-saint as if the Church had always been a peace society with nicer vestments. The other treats every uniform as if holiness could never live inside it. Neither picture survives contact with the calendar.

Read the lives slowly. Notice who left the army, who refused to join it, who stayed in it and still belonged to Christ, and who paid for a decision that even good people around them did not want them to make. The question at the end is not whether you have ever held a weapon. It is whether loyalty to Christ is real enough to shape a decision when duty, fear, career and conscience meet.

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Part One

The first soldiers

Chapter 1

Why the Church kept the soldier



If you walk through an old European church you will meet soldiers in the glass and on the walls long before you meet them in a sermon. St George on a horse. St Martin dividing a cloak. St Sebastian tied to a post. St Maurice in armour that no Theban soldier in the third century ever wore. Medieval Christians did not find it strange to honour soldiers who were also saints. They wanted to honour real courage. They did not want to bless cruelty at the same time.

The New Testament already knew that soldiers would come into the Church. Soldiers came to John the Baptist at the Jordan and asked what they should do. He did not tell them to desert. He told them not to extort money, not to accuse people falsely, and to be content with their pay. That is not a complete theology of military service. It is still a fact worth noticing. A centurion at Capernaum asked Christ to heal a servant and was praised for a faith Israel had not shown. Another centurion, standing at the Cross, said that this man was the Son of God. Cornelius, in the Acts of the Apostles, was still an officer of the Italian cohort when the Holy Spirit fell on his household. He is presented to us as a Roman centurion, and God still acted in his house.

None of those scenes settles every later question about war. They are simply facts the Church refused to tidy away. From the beginning she had members who carried the emperor's sword, and members who would not. That tension is older than Constantine. After Constantine it became louder, because the empire itself began to call itself Christian, and a Christian empire still had frontiers.

Later theology tried to give that tension a grammar. St Augustine, writing while the old world was coming apart, would not say that every use of force was sin, and would not say that every war was holy. St Thomas Aquinas, centuries after him, set out three basic conditions in the *Summa*: a lawful authority, a just cause, and a right intention. Catholic teaching later developed a fuller account of legitimate defence. The modern Catechism adds further conditions, including last resort, a real prospect of success, and a use of force that does not cause worse evils than the one being resisted. The point of all this was never to make war look clean. It was to stop Christians pretending that the commandment against killing had nothing to say once a banner was raised.

So the soldier-saints in these pages do not all tell the same story. Martin leaves the army. Marcellus throws down his military belt. Maximilian of Tébéssa will not even be measured for a tunic. Ignatius hangs a sword at Montserrat and founds an order. Camillus keeps a wound from his campaigning years and later cares for the sick. Francis wants military glory and then turns back. Joan rides towards Orléans. Franz Jägerstätter walks from a farm to a prison because he will not swear the oath. The Church has remembered all of them. She has not treated holiness as something that can only live on one side of a barracks gate.

A Small Reflection

One thing I find interesting is that the Church did not preserve only one kind of soldier saint. If she had wanted a simple message about war, she could have kept only the saints who left the army, or only the saints who stayed. She kept both. That does not mean every decision was equally right. It means moral life is more demanding than a slogan. Courage can look like service. It can also look like refusal. Before we recruit a saint to support the view we already hold, we have to tell those stories honestly.

A Short Prayer

*Lord Jesus, guide those who serve in the armed forces and those who face serious questions of conscience. Give all of us courage to choose what is right.
Amen.*

Chapter 2

The cloak at Amiens



Martin was still serving as a Roman soldier when he met a poor man outside Amiens on a bitterly cold day. According to his early biographer, Sulpicius Severus, he had been born at Sabaria, in what is now Szombathely in Hungary. His father was a tribune, so the boy grew up inside the army's world even before he wore its belt. The family later moved to Pavia in northern Italy. Against his parents' wishes, Martin asked for instruction in the Christian faith when he was about ten. He was still only a catechumen — a learner, not yet baptised — when the recruiting laws for a soldier's son caught up with him. Sulpicius says he was enrolled at fifteen.

He served in the cavalry, in the kind of unit that rode with the imperial guard. Near the gate of Amiens, in a winter cold enough to kill a man who had no wool, he met a beggar whom the rest of the troop had already passed by. He had already given much of his money away. He still had his military cloak. He drew his sword, cut the cloak in two and gave half to the man.

That night, Sulpicius says, Martin dreamed. He saw Christ wearing the half he had given. He heard Him say to the angels that Martin, who was not yet baptised, had clothed Him. Sulpicius says that Martin, then about eighteen, went to be baptised.

He did not leave the army at once. The cloak story is often told as if it were already a discharge paper. It was not. According to Sulpicius, Martin remained in service for about two years after his baptism. The

break came later, when Julian — the emperor the Church would call the Apostate — was still a Caesar in Gaul and a campaign against the Germans was being prepared. Martin asked to be released. He said he was Christ's soldier and was not allowed to fight. He was accused of cowardice. He offered to stand in the front line the next day armed only with the sign of the Cross. He was imprisoned. The battle did not happen as expected. He was discharged.

What followed belongs in other books: the years with St Hilary of Poitiers, the hermitage, the reluctant consecration as bishop of Tours, and his death at Candes, which most accounts place in 397. For these pages the Amiens gate is enough. A man who still carried a regulation sword used that sword to divide a cloak. The first thing he cut was not an enemy. It was his own warmth. The Church later made him patron of soldiers and of the poor at the same time. She did not want either group to claim him without the other.

A Small Reflection

At Amiens the interesting detail is how Martin used the sword he was already carrying. He used it for an act of charity. That does not mean a sword, or a war, has no moral character of its own. Catholic teaching does not say that objects and actions become good or bad only because of our intention. The later question of whether Martin should remain a soldier is a different question. The story therefore does not allow us to reduce Christian morality to “swords are always wrong” or “soldiers are always right.” It simply shows a young catechumen using what he had in his hand to clothe a man who would otherwise have frozen.

A Short Prayer

St Martin, pray for soldiers and for the poor. Teach us to recognise Christ in people who need our help. Amen.

Chapter 3

The military belt



On 21 July in the year 298, during the public birthday celebrations of the emperors Diocletian and Maximian, a centurion named Marcellus did something a parade ground is not built to forgive. The feast required sacrifice to the gods of Rome. Marcellus was a Christian and would not take part. In front of the standards of his unit he took off the military belt — the *cingulum* that marked a man as belonging to the army — and threw it down. He threw down his arms as well, and the vine-staff that only a centurion carried. He said that he was a soldier of Jesus Christ, the eternal King, and that he would not serve emperors who asked for worship.

We know more about Marcellus than we do about many early martyrs because an early account of his trial survives. The better reading of that account takes the final trial to Tingis, which is modern Tangier. The officer who first heard him would not decide the case himself. Marcellus was sent on to a higher court.

On 30 October 298, at Tingis, the official report was read aloud. Had he, a centurion of the first class, publicly thrown away the signs of his allegiance? He had. The judge asked what madness had possessed him. Marcellus answered that there was no madness in those who fear the Lord. The sentence was death by the sword. A shorthand writer named Cassian was so angry at having to record the verdict that he threw down his tablet as well. He was imprisoned and later beheaded. The Church remembers both men.

Marcellus was not making a general argument against every army. His refusal came when military ceremony required an act of worship he could not give as a Christian. The belt on the ground was first of all an act of fidelity to Christ. Rome understood that. Rome killed him for it.

A Small Reflection

Most of us will never face a Roman military ceremony. Christians can still find themselves in situations where everyone around them is expected to approve something they believe is wrong. That does not mean every uncomfortable moment is a call to public refusal. A refusal should be based on a formed conscience, not merely on personal discomfort. Marcellus's story is useful because the issue was clear. The feast asked for worship. He would not give it.

A Short Prayer

Lord Jesus, when we are asked to approve what we cannot approve, give us courage and a well-formed conscience. Amen.

Chapter 4

The recruit who would not join



Three years before Marcellus threw down his belt, a younger man stood in a forum in Numidia and would not even begin. His name was Maximilian. An early account of his trial gives his age with unusual care: twenty-one years, three months and eighteen days. The place was Theveste, now Tébessa in eastern Algeria. The date was 12 March 295. His father, Fabius Victor, was a veteran. The law expected the son of such a man to serve.

They tried to measure him for a uniform. Maximilian would not give them a name for the roll. He said he was a Christian and could not serve. The proconsul, Dion, pointed out that there were already Christians in the imperial guard. Maximilian said that was their business. He could not do evil. He could not fight for this world. His army was the army of God.

Dion asked the father to reason with him. Victor, who was himself a Christian, would not force the boy. The proconsul asked what harm soldiers do. Maximilian said that Dion knew well enough. The sentence was death by the sword for contempt of the army. Maximilian answered, *Deo gratias*. A woman named Pompeiana took the body to Carthage and buried it near St Cyprian. The Church keeps his feast on 12 March.

Maximilian's no is not the only Catholic sentence about armies. The same century had officers at the altar and officers at the block. The trial record itself puts the tension in Dion's mouth: other Christians serve. Maximilian did not call them apostates. He simply would not become

one of them. Twenty-one is very young to be that clear. Most of us at twenty-one are still trying on lives.

A Small Reflection

Christians in the Roman Empire did not all make the same decision about military service. The official who tried Maximilian used that fact against him. Other Christians were already serving. Maximilian still refused. The Church kept his story without pretending that every Christian of his century had to make exactly the same decision. That is harder than either side of a modern argument usually wants. It asks us to take conscience seriously without turning one martyr into a rule for every barracks.

A Short Prayer

Lord Jesus, help us to honour those who serve honourably and those who refuse what they cannot do in conscience. Keep us from using either group as a slogan. Amen.

Part Two

Later lives

Chapter 5

The sword left at Montserrat



The most famous conversion in the history of Catholic soldiers did not happen in a battle. It happened in a bed. Íñigo of Loyola was born in 1491 in the Basque tower-house of Loiola, the youngest of a large and proud family. He was raised for courts and for war. In May 1521, defending Pamplona against the French, a cannonball shattered one of his legs and wounded the other. The French treated the broken officer kindly and sent him home on a litter.

The surgeons at Loyola broke the leg again to set it straighter. Íñigo cared how a leg would look in tight hose at court, and he insisted on the vanity as much as on the medicine. He nearly died. During the long convalescence he asked for the usual romances of knighthood. The house had two books instead: a life of Christ and a collection of lives of the saints. He read them because there was nothing else. He noticed something about his own thoughts. Daydreams of a lady's favour excited him while they lasted and left him empty afterwards. Thoughts of doing what St Francis and St Dominic had done left him quieter and more at peace when they ended. He did not yet have the later Jesuit name for that difference. He only noticed it.

That observation is the beginning of what the Church later called Ignatian discernment. It is not a rule that says, "Follow whatever leaves you peaceful." Feelings can mislead us. Ignatius learned, slowly, to notice which thoughts led him towards God and which only flattered him for an hour.

When he could walk he went to the Benedictine shrine of Montserrat. In front of the statue of Our Lady there he made a night watch with a pilgrim's staff. He left his sword and dagger before her. He was not yet a priest. He was not yet the founder of anything. He was a lame courtier who had decided that the old career was over. From Montserrat he went down to Manresa, where the next year nearly broke him, and where the notes that became the Spiritual Exercises began.

The Society of Jesus was approved by Paul III in 1540. Ignatius died in Rome on 31 July 1556. He spent the second half of his life sending other men into rooms that looked a great deal like danger: India, Japan, the courts of Europe, the colleges, the arguments. He had not become a man who despised courage. He had changed the field. People whose plans have suddenly changed through illness or injury may find this part of his life especially familiar.

A Small Reflection

God did not wait for Ignatius to become impressive. The change began while his original plan was lying broken beside him, and while he was still vain enough to worry about the shape of his leg. Some thoughts give pleasure while we imagine them and leave us empty afterwards. Thoughts that lead towards Christ can leave a quieter peace. That difference is worth noticing. It still has to be tested by prayer, Church teaching and honest conversation. Peace after a thought is a clue. It is not, by itself, a complete proof.

A Short Prayer

St Ignatius, pray that we may recognise what leads us closer to Christ and have courage to change direction when we need to. Amen.

Chapter 6

The wound that would not heal



Camillus de Lellis was born in 1550 at Bucchianico, in the Abruzzo. His mother died when he was still small. His father was a soldier of fortune. The boy grew tall — later portraits make him look like a man who could fill a doorway — and he grew hungry for cards. He enlisted. He fought in the Venetian wars and in the service of Naples. He also gambled away what the wars did not take. A wound in his leg, received in those years, never properly closed. It would remain open, off and on, for the rest of his life. The Church later made him patron of nurses and of hospitals.

At twenty-four he was poor enough to take work as a servant at the Capuchin house at Manfredonia. Something in the place reached him. He tried to join the Capuchins. The wound opened and they sent him away. He tried again. The wound opened again. The order that would have given him a brown habit could not keep a man whose flesh would not heal. We cannot say that God gave Camillus the wound for this purpose. The wound did keep bringing him back into contact with hospitals, and that experience became part of the life he eventually chose.

He went to the Hospital of St James in Rome, first as a patient, then as a servant, then as a man who could not bear how the sick were treated. In 1582 he began, with a few companions, the work that became the Order of Clerics Regular Ministers to the Sick — the Camillians. They wore a red cross on the habit. They bound themselves to care for the plague-stricken when other people left the city. Camillus was ordained in 1584. He died in Rome on 14 July 1614. Benedict XIV canonised him

in 1746.

Camillus did not become gentle by theory. He had been the sort of man who needed gentleness and had not received it. He had been a patient before he became a founder. If you work in a hospital, or visit one, and you have ever wondered whether a rough past disqualifies a person from holy work, Camillus is one of the answers the Church chose to keep.

A Small Reflection

Camillus first knew the hospital as someone who needed care. Later he became someone responsible for improving that care. Chronic pain does not automatically make a person kind. In his case, the unhealed wound kept him near the sick, first as a patient and then as a man who could no longer ignore how they were treated. The Church has often found workers among people who already know a place of suffering from the inside.

A Short Prayer

St Camillus, pray for the sick and for those who care for them. Help us not to waste the hard things we have already lived through. Amen.

Chapter 7

The campaign Francis never reached



Francis of Assisi was not a professional soldier. He is in this book because he wanted to be one, and because the wanting is part of why he became the man we know. He was born in 1181 or 1182, the son of a wealthy cloth merchant in Assisi. The young men of that town played at arms the way young men of other centuries play at whatever looks like honour. In 1202 Assisi fought Perugia at Collestrada. Francis went. Assisi lost. He spent a year as a prisoner in Perugia, fell ill, and came home diminished.

A few years later a chance appeared that looked like the old dream repaired. A knight named Walter of Brienne was gathering men for a campaign in the south. Francis bought fine armour and set out. At Spoleto he fell ill again. In the night, as he later told it, he was asked who could do more for him, the servant or the master. He turned back. The horse that was meant to carry a new knight to glory carried a confused young merchant home instead.

What followed is known even to people who do not go to church: the kiss of a leper, the voice from the San Damiano crucifix, the stripping in the square before Bishop Guido, the Portiuncula, the stigmata at La Verna, the death at Assisi on 3 October 1226. Some of those later stories belong more to devotion than to strict biography. For these pages the useful fact is smaller. Francis did not become poor because he had never wanted a sword. He became poor after he had wanted one very much. The peace he later preached was not the peace of a man who had never imagined winning.

That is why soldiers have often been able to pray to him without feeling lectured. He knows the heat of the wish. The Church has never required every young man who likes horses to become a friar. She has only kept, in Francis, a reminder that a Christian may first have to refuse the story he was telling himself about his own bravery.

A Small Reflection

Francis had already invested money, pride and expectation in the campaign. Turning back meant admitting that the life he had imagined for himself was not the life he should continue. Conversion, in his case, was not the discovery of a personality he had always had. It was a change of road after he had already started down another one. Many of us will never buy armour. We still know the temptation to keep going because the story we have started sounds impressive.

A Short Prayer

St Francis, pray for those who need courage to change direction. Help us to want the life Christ is actually offering. Amen.

Chapter 8

Joan and the banner



Joan of Arc does not fit the subtitle as neatly as Martin or Ignatius. She did not set the sword down and walk into a cloister. She picked a banner up. She was born around 1412 at Domrémy, a village that sat on the cracked edge of a civil war inside a war with England. At seventeen she left home because she believed St Michael, St Catherine and St Margaret had told her to go to the Dauphin and raise the siege of Orléans. In May 1429 Orléans was relieved. In July the Dauphin was crowned at Reims. In May 1430 she was captured. On 30 May 1431 she was burned in the market place at Rouen. She was nineteen.

At her trial she said she loved her banner far more than her sword, and that she carried the banner herself so as not to kill anyone. She also said she had never killed a man. The banner, as she described it, was sown with lilies and bore the names of Jesus and Mary. Those details matter. Joan was involved in a real military campaign. She was not a later painting of a pacifist in armour.

The Church took a long time to say what she was. A nullification trial in 1456 overturned the first verdict. Beatification came in 1909. Canonisation came in 1920. Pius XI later named her patron of France. She is also, with St Martin, among the patrons people still ask when a son is in uniform.

Joan is not a proof that God endorses every war that calls itself holy. She is a particular girl in a particular collapse of order, who asked for a sign, received one that her own side was willing to test, and then refused

to deny the voices in order to keep her life. The first trial took place under heavy political pressure. The later Church judged that the condemnation had been unjust. That later judgement does not turn her banner into a blank cheque for the next campaign.

What she offers here is the hard case. Holiness can live inside a camp. It can live in a girl who wears a soldier's coat because the road is not safe, who is moved by the sight of the wounded, and who asks for Mass and Confession. If Martin teaches the leaving of arms, Joan teaches that leaving them is not the only Catholic story. The two saints do not cancel each other. They stop us from turning either life into a slogan.

A Small Reflection

Joan reminds us that the Catholic tradition cannot be reduced to the claim that holiness always requires leaving military life. Canonisation does not mean the Church has blessed every military or political decision around her campaign. It means this particular life, with its prayer, its obedience to the voices she believed were from God, and its death, belongs to the Catholic story. Her youth and her death should make Christians cautious about using saints to give easy religious approval to political causes.

A Short Prayer

St Joan of Arc, pray for those who serve their country and for those who must make difficult decisions in war. Help them to remain faithful to Christ. Amen.

Chapter 9

A farm in Upper Austria



Franz Jägerstätter was born on 20 May 1907 in the hamlet of St Radegund, between Salzburg and Braunau, and was first called Franz Huber. The farm was small. The church was near. As a young man he was not a plaster saint. He liked a motorbike. He had a child before he married. In 1936 he married Franziska Schwaninger, who was a steadier Catholic than he had been, and the marriage changed him. They had three daughters. He served briefly in the Austrian army in 1940, was sent home as a farmer needed on the land, and then, when the call came again in 1943, refused.

He was not a member of a party. He was not a writer of manifestos. He had read what he could. He had seen what the new oath required — loyalty to Hitler — and he had decided that a Catholic could not give it. The parish priest, and even the bishop he consulted, tried to talk him into a quieter path: take a non-combatant post, think of the children, do not make a scene. He loved the children. He still would not swear.

He was imprisoned at Linz, then at Tegel in Berlin. On 6 July 1943 the Reich court-martial condemned him for undermining military morale. On 9 August, at Brandenburg-Görden, he was beheaded. He was thirty-six. He had hoped the date might fall near the Assumption, so that he could keep the feast somewhere else. Franziska kept the farm and the three girls and the memory when almost no one in the village wanted the memory. For years he was the man who had made life harder for his neighbours.

On 26 October 2007, in the cathedral at Linz, he was beatified as a martyr. Pope Benedict XVI allowed the decree. The feast is kept on 21 May, the day of his baptism. The Church did not put his death-date first. She put the day he was first claimed.

Jägerstätter matters here because he is close to us. He had a kitchen. He had a wife who had to live with the consequences. He had clergy who were not villains and who still reached a different judgement about the oath. The Church later recognised his martyrdom. That is enough. We do not need to settle the inner lives of the men who advised him. We do need to notice that the old pattern did not end when the emperors became Christian. Sometimes a state learns the words of the faith and still asks for a loyalty Christ cannot share.

A Small Reflection

Conscience can be lonely even inside the Church. Loneliness by itself does not prove that conscience is right. It still needs truth, formation and prayer. Franz reached the judgement that he could not swear the oath, and that judgement cost his family dearly. Catholic teaching is that a certain, well-formed conscience must be followed. The hardship that follows does not make that obedience wrong. It does mean that those who love us may have to live with the cost. Franziska's years after the execution are part of the story. They should not be used to argue that Franz ought to have acted against his conscience.

A Short Prayer

Blessed Franz, pray for those who face difficult decisions of conscience. Give them courage, wisdom and trust in God, and support the families who live with the cost. Amen.

Part Three

What this asks of us

Chapter 10

What the Church actually teaches



After so many stories a reader may want one sentence that covers every case. The Church does give real moral principles. What she does not give is one universal answer that every Catholic must make in every military situation.

Can a Catholic serve in the armed forces? Yes. Military service is not intrinsically incompatible with Catholic faith. The Catechism says that those who serve their country honourably in the armed forces contribute to the common good and to the maintenance of peace. The Church still sends chaplains. She still buries the dead. She still remembers saints who served without apostasy.

Can a Catholic refuse to bear arms for reasons of conscience? Yes. The Catechism says that public authorities should make equitable provision for those who, for reasons of conscience, refuse to bear arms. Those people remain obliged to serve the human community in some other way.

Can a soldier obey every command? No. No authority can make an intrinsically evil act morally good. The moral law remains in force during armed conflict. Orders to kill the innocent, to torture, or to commit other crimes cannot be turned into virtues by a signature.

When may military force be used? The Church insists first that everyone should work to avoid war. Because of the evils that accompany all war, she urges prayer and action so that we may be freed from it. Governments may still have the right of lawful self-defence when peace

efforts have failed. The Catechism sets strict conditions for legitimate defence by military force. The damage threatened must be lasting, grave and certain. Other means must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective. There must be serious prospects of success. The use of arms must not produce evils worse than the evil being resisted. Those conditions belong, in the first place, to the prudential judgement of those responsible for the common good.

Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas knew that rulers could give religious language to wars that were not just. That is one reason Catholic tradition developed moral tests for the use of force. We should also be very careful about using Christian language simply to make a political or military cause look holy.

Conscience, in Catholic teaching, is not the same thing as a strong feeling. A person must follow a certain conscience. A person also has a duty to form that conscience. It is shaped by Scripture, the teaching of the Church, prayer, reason, and honest conversation with people who are not simply there to agree. “I feel this is wrong” is the beginning of a question. It is not yet the whole answer.

Leaving a sword does not make you better than the person who still carries one. Ignatius left his at Montserrat and then sent men into danger for the rest of his life. Camillus left the camp and walked into plague wards. Comparison is cheap in people who have never had to choose. Christians facing these decisions need prayer, the sacraments, a formed conscience and wise pastoral guidance.

A Small Reflection

Catholics can sometimes reach different legitimate prudential judgements and still remain brothers and sisters in Christ. That does not mean truth is relative. Some acts are always wrong. Some wars fail the Church's own tests. Conscience must be formed honestly. It should not be confused with fear, convenience or political preference. The work is to tell those differences without despising the person whose lawful decision is not ours.

A Short Prayer

Lord Jesus, give us courage to follow you when doing so is difficult. Help us to form our conscience well and to treat those who choose differently with charity. Amen.

Chapter 11

After the stories



Most of us will not be asked for a cloak at a city gate, or a belt on a parade ground, or a head at Brandenburg. We will be asked for smaller decisions that do not look dramatic at the time. There are times when following Christ means continuing faithfully in a difficult duty. There are other times when following Christ means refusing something that others expect from us. The challenge is knowing the difference. That requires a formed conscience, prayer, Church teaching, honesty, and sometimes good spiritual advice.

If you have served, these pages are not a scolding. Martin remained the patron of soldiers after he left the army. Chaplains still bless units. The Church buries the dead of every side she can reach. Military experience can include friendship, sacrifice, fear, loss and difficult moral memories. The Church should be a place where all of this can be brought before Christ. Nobody needs to pretend to be impressive.

If you have never served, do not borrow a drama that is not yours. The farmer in St Radegund is closer to most of us than the girl at Orléans. He had a table and three children and a parish priest who wished he would be sensible. The question is whether there is a loyalty in ordinary life that Christ cannot share.

When you pass a war memorial, pray for the people named there and for all who died in the conflict. When a young person asks whether a Christian may join up, do not give them a slogan. Give them Martin and Maximilian both, and Joan, and Franz. Help them to understand

Catholic teaching, the nature of the service, the limits of obedience, and the duty to form conscience. If they need it, send them to a good priest or chaplain. When you next hold a child at a font, remember that the first loyalty named over that child is loyalty to Christ.

Setting something down is not the end of usefulness. Martin became a bishop. Ignatius became a founder. Camillus became a nurse when the word was still only a need. What changed was their work, not the One they were trying to serve.

A Small Reflection

The saints in this book do not hand us a costume. They hand us a question. Is there still something we would set down if the Lord asked? For most of us the answer will not involve a parade ground. It may involve work, money, reputation, friendship or family. Sometimes courage means continuing. Sometimes it means stopping. The Church has remembered both kinds of courage because both can be ways of belonging to Christ.

A Short Prayer

*Christ our peace, teach us what to set down, and what to take up only
because you have asked. Amen.*

A Last Word



The Church remembered Christians who carried weapons and Christians who refused them. That is not an accident of history. She needed both the courage that stays at a difficult post and the courage that walks away from one.

The important question is not which saint can be recruited to support the opinion we already have. The question is whether our loyalty to Christ is real enough to shape a decision when obedience, conscience, fear, duty and cost meet.

Prayer, a formed conscience, Church teaching and wise guidance help us discern what faithfulness requires. That work is not always finished in an afternoon.

May the saints who knew weapons obtain for us a clean heart, a formed conscience, and a peace that does not excuse us from the truth.

St Martin of Tours, pray for us.

St Ignatius of Loyola, pray for us.

St Joan of Arc, pray for us.

Blessed Franz Jägerstätter, pray for us.

Sources and Further Reading



Sacred Scripture: Luke 3:14; Matthew 8:5–13; Mark 15:39; Acts 10.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2263–2267 and 2307–2317, on legitimate defence, peace, war, military service, conscientious objection and the moral law in armed conflict.

St Augustine, *City of God*. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II–II, q.40, on lawful authority, just cause and right intention. Later Catholic teaching, including the Catechism, develops a fuller account of the conditions for legitimate defence.

Sulpicius Severus, *Life of Saint Martin*. The cloak at Amiens, Martin's baptism at about eighteen, and his remaining in service for about two years afterwards are taken from this near-contemporary account. Exact years of birth are still debated.

The Acts of Marcellus and the Acts of Maximilian of Theveste. English readers can find them in Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

The Autobiography of St Ignatius of Loyola, for Pamplona, the reading during convalescence, Montserrat and Manresa.

Lives of St Camillus de Lellis and the early constitutions of the Ministers of the Sick. Canonisation by Benedict XIV, 1746.

Early lives of St Francis of Assisi, especially Thomas of Celano and the Legend of the Three Companions, for Collestrada, the imprisonment at Perugia, and the turning back at Spoleto.

The condemnation and rehabilitation of Joan of Arc (Rouen 1431; nullification 1456); her own trial answers about the banner and the sword; canonisation in 1920; later naming as patron of France.

Vatican documentation of the beatification of Franz Jägerstätter, Linz, 26 October 2007; feast on 21 May, the day of his baptism. His prison letters remain the best way to hear him in his own voice.



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