

When You Learn About Our Ancestors in the Faith, their deeds cry out for modern imitation. These are a few that Mike Aquilina listed in his book, Faith of our Fathers, and ties in with Fr. Saucier's homily series: Year of the Church in History.

1. COME TO SEE YOUR HOME AS A DOMESTIC CHURCH.

Modern Christians have a tendency to think of the "church" as their parish buildings. That is a partial truth, but it is not enough. We have to believe that our families are the Church, that our homes are the Church, and that the kingdom of God begins in the place where we hang our hats and eat our meals. We need to imitate the early Christians in seeing our homes as the places of worship and fellowship, and as schools of virtue. "That's the role that parents and grandparents play in the domestic church." – St. Augustine, Sermon 94.1

2. MAKE YOUR DOMESTIC CHURCH A HAVEN OF CHARITY.

One of the most striking descriptions of the early Church comes from Tertullian, who wrote: "It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents, who say, 'See those Christians, how they love one another'" – Tertullian, *Apologeticum* 39.7. This Charity has to begin at home. Yet how many Catholics who decry the lack of reverence in their parish church, then go home to desecrate their domestic Churches – by harsh words towards their children or toward their spouses – or by gossip about their neighbors or their coworkers? We will all be called to account for this. Remember the words of Tertullian. They will know you are Christians – not by the icons on our walls, or the grotto in our front yard – but by the love in our hearts, expressed in our homes.

3. MAKE YOUR DOMESTIC CHURCH A PLACE OF PRAYER.

That does not mean that your day has to be dominated by devotions, but you should have some regular, routine family disciplines of prayer. The early Christians saw this as necessary and so observed "stational hours" of prayer throughout the day – and even throughout the night. There are many ways to pray as a family, and you should seek out the ways that work best for your [family]. The important thing is to do something, start somewhere. Begin with something small and manageable, and then give yourself time to grow into it.

4. MAKE THE MASS THE CENTER OF YOUR FAMILY'S PRAYER LIFE.

Families should keep Sunday as a special day, and this takes effort. We are all overscheduled these days, but we should never book our Sunday too solid for the Liturgy – and we should try to get there all together, as a family. Missing Mass should be unthinkable for us, as it was for the early Christians. One of [Mr. Aquilina's] favorite stories from the early Church is about Martyrs of Abitina. This group of North Africans who lived during the Roman empire's most ruthless persecutions. Remember that, for pagans, Sunday was an ordinary workday. So when these families gathered together for Sunday Mass, they were an easy target.

In fact, the judge who tried them could not believe they would expose themselves so willingly. He asked them why they did, and they told him: “We cannot live without the Mass.” They would rather have died than miss Mass. We should be as reluctant to stay home on Sundays and holy days.

5. KNOW THAT, AS A DOMESTIC CHURCH, YOU ARE “ON MISSION.”

Like the universal Church, you are sent by Christ to bring the Gospel to the world. You are sent outward from your home. You are sent. That is the root meaning of the word apostle, and you [...] and all our children are called to be apostles to the world.

Imagine yourself as one of those invisible Christians living in the ancient cities that were rotting with epidemics. What would you have your family do?

Nowadays, medicine exercises a greater degree of control over the ancient plagues. But we should all ask ourselves: What epidemics are consuming the families in our neighborhoods today? What is it that leaves them scarred and barely able to go on in life? How about rejection? Loneliness? Abandonment... that constant sense that they are not wanted by someone they dearly love? Perhaps we need to expand our definitions of poverty and epidemic, in order to see the people our families must serve today. There are people on our blocks who are very lonely, elderly and alone, mourning, or otherwise in need. How might our families help? Sometimes it is as simple as making occasional meals...or opening the door of our home. One of the Great Fathers of the Western Church, St. Jerome, said: “The eyes of all are turned upon you. Your house is set on a watchtower; your life fixes for others the limits of their self-control” – St. Jerome, Letter 60.14. This statement cannot be true unless we open our lives and our homes to others.

6. CULTIVATE THE VIRTUE OF HOPE.

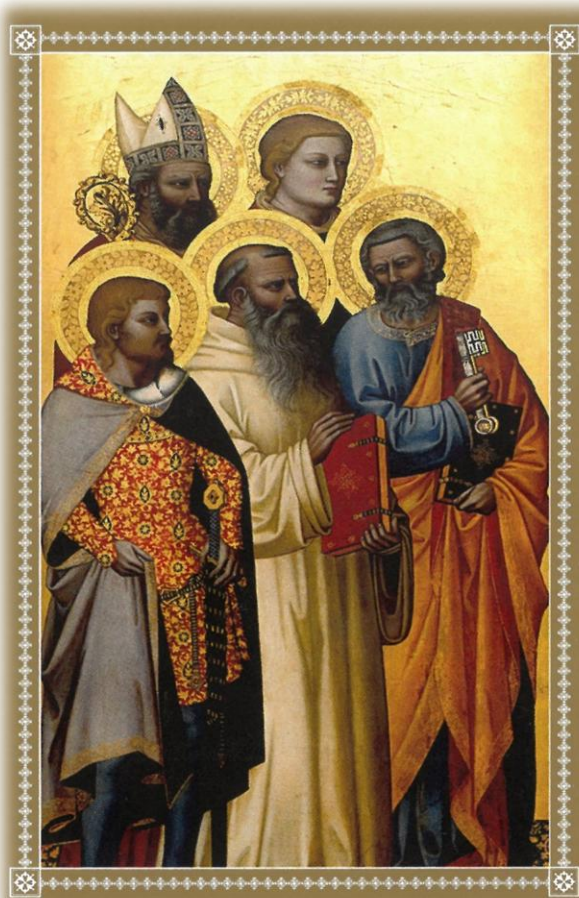
Divine grace has unlimited power. It can transform persons; it can and has transformed cultures. We have to believe in miracles. We have to believe that people can change. It is too easy for us to look beyond our backyard and see people who are hopelessly lost, whom the culture has [irreversibly infected] against the Gospel. But this is simply not true. Read the agnostic Rodney Stark, and you will see that miracles do happen: people do change, towns and cities and nations can convert to Christianity. If we have faith the size of a mustard seed, we can do as much with our situation as the ancient Christians did with Greco-Roman culture.

7. FINALLY, LIVE BY THE TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH.

We need to raise our homes up to the standard of Jesus Christ. It is a high standard, but the alternatives today are deadly. The early Christians did not convert the Empire by compromise on divorce, contraception, homosexual activity, abortion, or infanticide. The early Christians hated these sins, even as they passionately loved the sinners who committed these sins – the sinners who lived in their neighborhoods. We, too, need to hate these sins and keep them far from our

homes. But we need also to help other homes, other families to live according to the Church's teachings. We need to evangelize [with charity] the families who need us. If we do not, then we can look for ourselves in the parable of the Good Samaritan, where we walk on by with the priest and the Levite who ignored the man in the ditch. But if we do – if we make the effort to evangelize our homes and our neighbors – we will surely see a new rise of Christianity...

- Faith of Our Fathers: Why the Early Christians Still Matter and Always Will
by Mike Aquilina; *Family on a Mission* pgs. 34-37



Oh My Jesus, Thou well knowest
that I love Thee; but I do not
love Thee enough. Oh! make me
to love Thee more.

O Love which burnest always
and is never extinguished, my
God, Thou Who art charity
itself, kindle in my heart that
divine fire which consumes the
saints and transforms them into
Thee. Amen.

- From the *Raccolta*, 1898 ed.