

# FOREWORD

JAMES MARTIN, SJ

Michael O'Neill McGrath, OSFS, universally known as "Mickey" or "Brother Mickey," is one of the finest and most beloved Christian artists of our age. His new book on Saint John XXIII is a beautiful addition to what is becoming an important artistic legacy.

Mickey and I came to know one another perhaps 20 years ago, when I was tasked with soliciting art to illustrate articles in *America* magazine. When I wondered aloud where I might find good Catholic art, a friend said, "Do you know about Brother Mickey?" and showed me a few prayer cards that he kept in his Bible. I was hooked. Mickey's art—whether the subject is Jesus, the Holy Family, the saints, or even general spiritual concepts like gratitude, freedom or vocation—is a rare combination of beauty, inspiration and joy. Especially joy. His images burst with color and energy, and make one feel happy not only to be a believer—but to be alive.

Brother Mickey is also a gifted speaker, much in demand across the country, where in parishes and schools and retreat houses and conferences he invites participants into the faith using color and line and shape. Mickey encourages everyone to come know God, through the use of joyful images.

That's why this newest book is such a perfect fit. Has there ever been a more joyful evangelist than John XXIII? Although Pope Francis gives him a run for his money! Comfortable joking about appearance ("God knew from all eternity that I would be pope--why couldn't he have made me better looking?"), about his election as pope "(Anybody can be the pope: the proof is that I have become one)", and about the Vatican bureaucracy (Journalist to Pope St. John XXIII: "How many people work in the Vatican?" John XXIII: "About half of them."), John was an accessible and inviting religious leader.

But John was not simply a roly-poly, jolly old man. Deeply learned in the faith and widely versed in international affairs, John helped to "open the windows" of the church with the modernizing and reforming Second Vatican Council. Much of what we are today in the church is thanks to his vision. In turn, Mickey's new book helps to "open the windows" of John's own saintly life through these arresting new images .

One more thing I'd like to say about Mickey. I'm grateful to him for introducing me to the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales, who is also quoted liberally in this delightful new volume. I'm embarrassed to say that I didn't know much about Francis's warm, humane and utterly sensible spirituality before knowing Mickey; but I am also delighted to say that, thanks to Mickey, he is one of my favorite saints.

Shortly after I told Mickey how much I was enjoying a book he had recommended on Francis, he sent me one of his lovely prayer cards with a Salesian quote on it: "Be who you are and be that perfectly well." This is of course the essence of sanctity: being the person God calls you to be, no more, but more importantly no less.

I pray that Mickey's new book will show you, through these new and beautiful images, how Saint John XXIII embodied that quote, and also how God calls us all to be the joyful evangelists of a new and beautiful world.

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**James Martin, SJ, is a Jesuit priest and author of many books including *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*.**



## Life couldn't get any

better for American Catholics in the early sixties: Schools and churches were overflowing; Jack and Jackie Kennedy were in the White House with their two children, (and since my mother's name was Jackie, the First Family was even more revered in our home); and Pope John XXIII (1881 – 1963) was opening wide his grandfatherly arms to embrace the entire world. Even a first grader such as I could not ignore the frenzy of universal affection and enthusiasm Pope St. John generated when he opened all those windows in the Vatican.

I also remember the shadow side of the euphoria- the ongoing Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Air raid drills and fallout shelters filled my six-year old imagination with panic during this brief but scary time. On October 11, 1962 in the midst of the international crisis, Pope John XXIII opened Vatican II, the most significant event of the Roman Catholic Church in modern times. Television brought war and peace into our living rooms on the evening news, each signaling the end of an old world order and the emergence of something new and daringly different. Half a century later, in a whole new millennium, we are still reeling from the effects of that time, struggling to make things work peacefully across even greater divides.

In 1974, eleven years after Pope John's death, and filled with Vatican II fervor, I joined the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales as a religious brother. Salesian spirituality, derived from the teachings and writings of St. Francis de Sales, is a way to God through peace of mind and loving friendships, highlighting the little virtues such as gentleness, cheerfulness, and patience. It is timeless, practical, and extremely challenging. Our unofficial community motto, written by de Sales himself is, "Be who you are and be that perfectly well." We Oblates embrace our full humanity, even the sinful parts.

I was overjoyed to learn as a young novice that de Sales was one of Pope John's favorite saints and Doctors of the Church, beginning in his seminary days when he first read

*The Introduction to the Devout Life*, standard reading in all seminaries at that time. He loved St. Francis' practical, down to earth wisdom, his joyful optimism and his keen understanding of the human heart. And since Francis was the first major spiritual writer to promote true devotion for laypeople, it is easy to see his influence on Pope John in calling Vatican II.

Fifty years after Pope John's death, Pope Francis has similarly captivated the world with his charm, humility, and his ecumenical devotion to all people, especially those living in the margins of poverty and alienation. His pronouncements against clericalism, his determination to clean house, his promotion of the dignity of women, gay people, and children, and his unflagging

joyfulness in the midst of it all echo the spirits of these two great saints. How fitting that Pope Francis is responsible for John's canonization in April 2014, alongside Pope John Paul II, the pope who beatified John in 2000!

Hopefully, this collection of drawings, cartoons, and quotations will inspire the same optimism and "aggiornamento" (the spirit of moving forward) that characterized Pope St. John's prophetic life. That spirit filled the heart of St. Francis de Sales, who lived through the religious and social upheaval in the days following the Reformation. Time and again he called for dialogue and peaceful discourse, promoted love over fear, and encouraged prayerful devotion in the hearts of the faithful. That

same spirit is what prompted John to convene Vatican II, and is evident once again in the words and actions of Pope Francis, our first pope formed by Vatican II but not present at it. Each of these three men, in his own way, reminds us that nothing is more life-affirming, or more life-giving, than our humble acceptance of God's tender love and mercies.

But I must mention two other figures, both artists, whose works also offer a fascinating look at Pope St. John XXIII. Frederick Franck was a renowned American artist, a Quaker, who, out of devotion to Pope St. John and his prophetic message of peace, traveled to Rome uninvited to be present at the Vatican Council. In his book, *Outsider at the Vatican*, he says, "My response to Pope John's call had been to grab my

sketchbook and to draw his council. I could not react as a theologian or liturgist, but only as one whose eyes were involved, an observer, and whose spirit and heart were open.” His beautiful drawings and watercolors of the proceedings and the cardinals and bishops who sat for him also record the progression of Pope John’s illness and last days—devastating for Franck to observe.

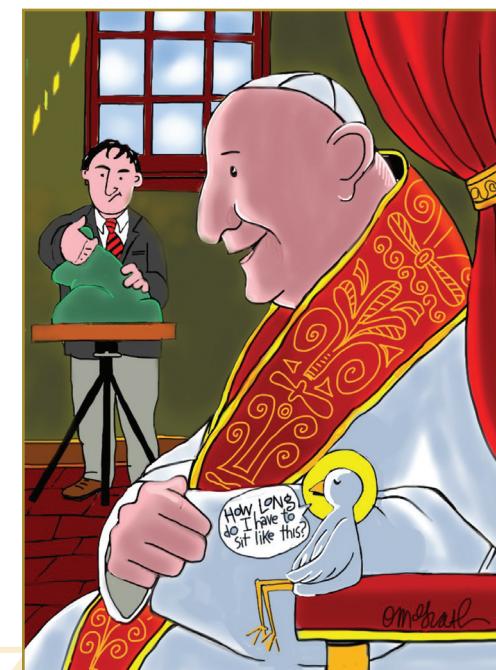
The other artist is Giacomo Manzu, the world-renowned Italian sculptor who created the bronze “Doors of Death” at the entrance of St. Peter’s Basilica, and who became the official artist and sculptor of the Pope. In their private sessions together, the gentle pope and the communist atheist forged a deep and beautiful friendship in the face of bitter opposition from the curia. It was Manzu

who was summoned in the middle of the night to create the clay death mask of his dear friend. Each of these artists reveals in his unique way the depth of beauty inside Pope St. John’s heart and soul in ways that history books cannot do.

In celebration of Pope St. John’s canonization I decided to illuminate some of my favorite quotes and anecdotes from him, highlighting those that also capture the spirit of the two Francises, whose quotes are also sprinkled throughout. So here they are on the same pages: Two popes and a saint OR two saints and a pope!

If you are serious about maintaining inner peace in the face of all your stress and anxiety, let me gently

suggest a way for you to pray every morning: pour yourself a cup of coffee or tea, sit in a comfortable chair, acknowledge God’s presence with a prayer of thanks, open this book to a page that makes you smile, and for just ten or fifteen minutes, pay attention to the dawn of a new Pentecost breaking open within you. Then, off you go, bringing the Holy Spirit and a small trail of peace, creativity, and joy into our weary world.



“We can ask St. Francis de Sales, the Doctor of Sweetness, to give us the grace to make bridges with others, never walls”<sup>1</sup>  
*Pope Francis*

“No one of the recent Doctors of the Church more than St. Francis de Sales anticipated the deliberations and decisions of the Second Vatican Council with such keen and progressive insight.”<sup>2</sup>  
*Pope Paul VI*



## ST. FRANCIS de SALES

(1567-1622)

Patron of writers, journalists, and the Catholic press, St. Francis de Sales, the “Gentleman Saint”, is one of the giants in the history of Christian spirituality. He was born and lived in Annecy, a town in the French Alps near the Swiss border at the time of the Catholic Reformation. Francis’ classic work is the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, which remains a best seller to this day. In it, he suggests a practical, down to earth way for all people, especially the laity, to discover their own spiritual path.

Cheerfulness, optimism, and a refusal to be dominated by stress and anxiety through the practice of the little virtues are hallmarks of Salesian spirituality, and the very ones which Pope St. John found so attractive. Francis de Sales was a man of even-tempered peace who sought open, respectful dialogue with all people, even his Calvinist foes in Geneva where he was the Catholic bishop but was forbidden to enter the city. These aspects of his life are what so strongly influenced Pope St. John’s passion for ecumenism, reconciliation, and peace.

# ANGELO RONCALLI

LATER POPE JOHN XXIII

Angelo Roncalli was born on November 25, 1881 in a small town in northern Italy called Sotto Il Monte. One of ten children, he was the son of very poor farmers who were richly blessed with love and faith. At the age of fourteen, as a seminarian, Angelo began the life-long practice of keeping a prayer journal which was published after his death entitled *Journal of a Soul*.

Following a year of military service, Angelo was ordained a priest in 1904, and served as secretary to a bishop devoted to social justice and workers' rights.

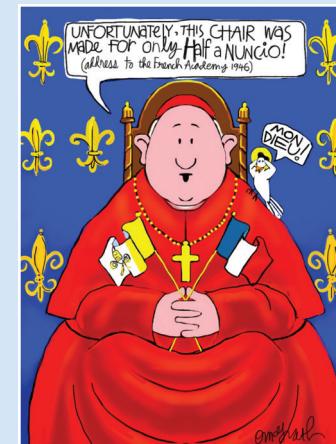
Bishop Tedeschi became Angelo's great mentor and life-long inspiration. After serving as an army chaplain in World War I, and witnessing first hand the horrors of war, Angelo rose in the church ranks and perfected his natural gift for diplomacy.

In 1925, he was consecrated a bishop and sent as a papal envoy to Bulgaria where for the next ten years he worked tirelessly at mending relations with the Orthodox church. It was a desperately lonely position in a rugged country where he felt little support from anyone. But he carried on with joy and op-

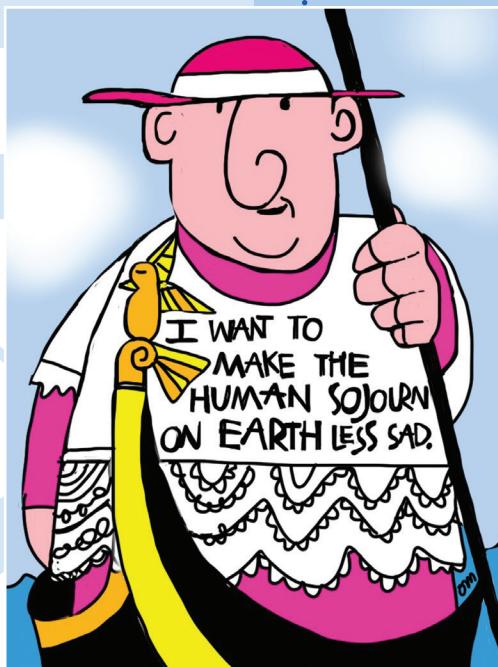
timism nonetheless. By the time of his departure ten years later, he had won over many hearts and learned how to move forward in the face of strong opposition.

Bishop Roncalli next served the church as an apostolic delegate to Greece and Turkey in 1935, a position he held until the end of World War II. Once again, his great diplomatic skills and his profound love for the gospels helped him to break down barriers with Orthodox Christians, Turkish Muslims, and Jews, thousands of whom he helped escape Nazi persecution.

In 1944, Pope Pius XII appointed Angelo Roncalli the Papal Nuncio to France, a very important position in those postwar days of rebuilding a nation and reconciliation with former enemies. Before long he was widely known and loved in Paris and beyond.



In 1953, Bishop Roncalli was appointed the cardinal patriarch of Venice. He loved Venice, and the Venetians adored him. He once remarked that Venice gave him a foretaste of heaven, which made it that much sadder to leave there in 1958 when he was elected pope and transformed the church. No one was more surprised than he.



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“A church without prophets falls into the trap of clericalism. When clericalism reigns supreme, true believers weep because they cannot find the Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

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Pope Francis

**OTHER BOOKS BY**

## Michael O'Neill McGrath

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### **World Library Publications:**

Blessed Art Thou: Mother, Lady, Mystic, Queen  
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These books feature works by Richard Rohr OFM, James Martin, SJ, Rob Bell and many other talented contributors, including art by Bro. Mickey. Proceeds of each book go to various charities that feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit the sick.