

LEADER'S GUIDE  
FOR

# Holy Terrors and Gentle Souls

STORIES  
ABOUT  
THE  
SAINTS



STEPHANIE WELLER HANSON

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## Contents

Introduction: Using the Stories	2
Guide for "For the Sake of What Will Come"	4
Guide for "Holy Boy"	6
Guide for "When Heward Jumped Down from the Wall"	8
Guide for "The Unsuitable Princess"	10
Guide for "The Holy Terror"	12
Guide for "The One Who Is with Me Is Kind"	14
Guide for "God Alone"	17
Guide for "The Gentle Mother"	20
Guide for "Sacred Fire"	23
Guide for "The Arithmetic of Love"	26

## Introduction: Using the Stories

As older adolescents grow into young adulthood, they face a variety of new challenges: voting, going to college or technical school, heading off to a full-time job, and living on their own, among others. At the same time, they become more aware of the complexities of our multicultural society and begin to wrestle with issues, on both personal and social levels, that demand a moral and merciful response from them.

The lives of the saints offer young people a model for negotiating these challenges. Although times have changed dramatically over the past two thousand years, the essential challenges of living the Gospel and becoming more fully human remain the same. The stories in *Holy Terrors and Gentle Souls: Stories About the Saints* are designed to help students critically engage and reflect on those challenges. The stories may be used to spark group discussion or for directed journal writing. The collection focuses on themes covered in the high school religion textbook *The Catholic Church: Journey, Wisdom, and Mission*, although the stories may be used independently of the textbook as well. The stories cannot hope to cover all the issues raised in *The Catholic Church*, but they can help students enter into the lives of the saints and their societies.

The saints in these stories had three characteristics in common. First, they invariably had an intimate, daily connection to God, built on trust, faith, and lived experience. Second, knowing their own sinfulness, they aimed for daily, continuing conversion. Finally, they were, in one way or another, prophets. They called their church and their societies to greater fidelity to the Gospel. This leader's guide uses these three characteristics as the framework for discussion.

We recommend that you not simply read to the group the questions in this guide. Rather, use the questions to prepare for leading the discussion, but allow it to flow organically. You might begin by asking, "What was this story about?" Allow members of the group to retell the story in their own words, then ask open-ended questions, such as these:

- What message did this story have for you?
- What did you like or dislike about the characters?
- What about the saints surprised you?
- What would you have done differently if you were the saint in the story?
- Have you had an experience similar to one in the story?

Feel free to take the discussion in another direction; you know your students and may want to address issues of interest to them. Occasionally, commentary for your benefit is provided in brackets and italics, but it is not intended to be the single right answer. Questions are organized under bold subheads that often, although not always, correspond to sections in the textbook. Where appropriate, textbook page references will be provided in parentheses. Another useful tool is the Scripture Connections section. It offers references that highlight various aspects of the story. If you read the passages ahead of time, you may be able to incorporate them into your discussion.

We hope this guide will be a springboard for discussion, journal writing, and group activities such as role-playing or writing more of the story. The stories may raise more questions than they answer. Likewise, some questions in this guide do not have easy answers. As group leader, how should you handle this? Bravely lead your group into the thick of the questions. Help your students to think about how Christ was present in the lives of these holy people, and how Christ is present today for them. You will not answer all their questions, but you may open doors for them to find the answers themselves.

## Guide for “For the Sake of What Will Come”

**Theme.** Chapter 2, “A Church of Converts: The Lasting Legacy of the Apostles”

### Background

The textbook says, “When Jesus first called [Simon Peter] away from fishing in Galilee, Simon would certainly have laughed if anyone had told him how his life would change” (pp. 28–29). This story explores those changes in Peter’s life. When Jesus reveals his stunning plan for Peter to build the church, Peter only dimly understands the leadership that will be required of him.

### Questions and Notes

**First among the faithful.** In the opening scene of this story, Jesus questions his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter alone responds, “You are the Messiah. The Son of the living God.” How does Peter know this? [*The Jews had long awaited the Messiah. However, the Gospels suggest that this is a personal revelation for Peter.*] Why don’t the other disciples give this response? If you had been one of the original disciples of Jesus, how would you have responded to Jesus’ question?

**Amazed by the Lord.** Jesus proclaims that Peter is the rock on which the church will be built, and adds, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Does Peter understand what Jesus is saying? What does Jesus say about leadership in other parts of the Gospel? [*Those who would lead must give themselves in loving service to others—see, for instance, John 13:12–17; Mark 10:41–45.*]

**Witnesses to Jesus’ coming death.** Jesus foretells his death in Jerusalem. When Peter tries to convince him not to

go to Jerusalem, what is in his heart? [*Peter speaks out of love for Jesus, but he is also afraid and angry.*] Do you think that Jesus understands Peter’s concern for him? If so, why does he rebuke Peter? [*Think of what the rebuke teaches Peter about Christian leadership and following Jesus.*] What does Jesus, as a human being, need at this moment?

**Walking with Jesus.** What do you think life is like for the people who are following Jesus, watching him preach, heal, and pray? The traveling band of disciples often lives in crowded conditions. Under such conditions, it is not uncommon for everyone to learn the virtues and failings of everyone else. Does Jesus intend for this sometimes uncomfortable situation to be part of the disciples’ experience? Why?

Martha is also a disciple. What does Jesus do that changes Martha’s life? [*He convinces Martha that God treasures her and that her life has purpose, even if not through being a wife and a mother.*] What needs of Jesus’ does she meet? Why does this friendship bother Peter? [*According to the Law, it is not proper for an unmarried man to be alone with women.*] Martha reminds Peter that the Lord has rebuked her, too. To what is she referring? [*Mary wanted to listen to Jesus, and Martha wanted Mary’s help in the kitchen (Luke 10:38–42).*]

What kind of relationship does Peter have with Jesus? How is it different from or similar to Martha’s relationship with Jesus? Is your relationship with Jesus similar to Martha’s or Peter’s in any way?

**The Baptist’s death.** What event changes Jesus, and why? Martha, a midwife, says that following Jesus now is like waiting for a baby to be born. Though Peter doesn’t fully understand, Martha speaks about the joy and the agony of birth, of taking the risk and not being in control of the outcome. The story ends with Martha posing a question to Peter. Is Peter ready to take the risk with Jesus? Why or why not?

### Scripture Connections

- Malachi 3:1–4 (I am sending my messenger before me.)
- John 16:20–22 (When a woman is in labor, she has pain.)
- 1 Peter 5:6–11 (Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.)