



Invest time each week to expand your vocabulary and deepen your faith.

22 September 2024

WORD OF THE WEEK

Stigmata \stig-'mä-tə\

From the Latin for "marks." **Stigmata** refers to the five wounds Christ suffered on the cross in his hands, feet, and side. Hundreds of saints, known as **stigmatics**, or **stigmatists**, have borne some or all of these marks visibly or invisibly on their bodies.

Pronunciation: <https://tinyurl.com/Take5-Stigmata>

CONTEXT

Sensing that Christ was giving her the **stigmata**, Catherine of Siena begged him to plant the wounds where he would, but to render them invisible.

—Anneli Rufus, *Magnificent Corpses*

The Catholic Church has accepted an occurrence of **stigmata** as authentic, but has never defined their origin or nature, thus allowing for physical, psychological, and preternatural explanations for these phenomena.

—Richard McBrien, *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*

WHY IT MATTERS

Saints as varied as Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, and Padre Pio have endured the **stigmata** as a literal sharing in the suffering of Christ. Many more people throughout history, however, have borne the pain, shame, rejection, and vilification of an unjust and indifferent world. To willingly embrace and share in the suffering of the poor Christ in our world today is a mandate for every disciple. **Stigmata** is a vivid reminder of this summons.

From *The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia*: The experience of **stigmata** is generally believed to be a sign of favor by the Lord and an indication of personal holiness. There are approximately 300 recorded cases.

RELATED WORDS

Wounds of Christ | Crown of Thorns | Crucifixion

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

What does it take to be canonized as a saint?

Canonization has been a formal church procedure since the 13th century. Informally, the church has noted “holy ones” since the first generation. Martyrs killed for belonging to Christ, even if flawed individuals, earned the claim of “no greater love” since they did indeed “lay down their life for a friend.” Sainthood was later extended to confessors: those who defended and suffered for the faith. The category opened next for those who gave testimony in lives of austerity and penance: known as white martyrs in contrast to red martyrs who shed their blood. Those who taught Christian doctrine with new clarity—doctors of the church—were admitted to the circle of sanctity, along with evangelists and models of heroic virtue who spread the faith by word or deed. A reputation for miracles never hurt. The church is cautious in its claims about canonization. It reminds us the church doesn’t make saints: God does. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints simply lifts up some holy lives for contemplation and imitation.

—Alice Camille, from *Questions Catholics Ask* <http://tinyurl.com/QCA-canonization>

REFLECTION OF THE WEEK

FEAST OF PIUS OF PIETRELCINA, PRIEST (SEPTEMBER 23)

Marked for holiness

Padre Pio epitomizes the idea of a saint whose life was marked by heavenly signs. Of the more than 300 **stigmatists**—persons whose bodies carry marks resembling the wounds of the crucified Christ—in the history of the church, Pio was the only priest. His reputed miraculous signs included prophecy, the power of conversion, and the ability to read hearts. But to Pio himself, his dearest accomplishment was establishing a hospital for the relief of suffering.

READINGS: Proverbs 3:27-34; Luke 8:16-18 (449 <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/092324.cfm>). “For there is nothing hidden that will not become visible.”

FAITH IN ACTION

Looking like a saint may be appealing. Acting like a saint is better!