

Reflection for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The name Nicholas has been a very popular name since ancient times. There are over 50 saints known to be named Nicholas. The most popular St. Nicholas would be the Bishop of Myra who lived from the 280 to 350, in what is modern day Turkey. St. Nicholas of Myra used the great wealth he inherited to help the poor. Tradition holds the St. Nicholas helped the three daughters of a bankrupt father. The three daughters each needed a dowry for marriage and St. Nicholas under the cover of darkness delivered on three different occasions a bag of money to their home. But this is not the St. Nicholas that I was planning to write about, rather I wanted to share about St. Nicholas of Flueli, this Saint is the Patron Saint of Switzerland, and many consider him the Father of Switzerland.

St. Nicholas of Flueli, was born in 1417 to well off farmers near Sachsein in Unterwalden, Switzerland on an estate called Flueli. St. Nicholas from an early age began to seek God, after his mother introduced him to a lay movement call "*Friends of God.*" The movement that was founded between the years 1339 and 1343 in Basel, Switzerland. The movement spread throughout Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands. The movement was primarily a lay movement but a number of clergy were a part of the Friends of God. The focus of the movement was espousing a Christian life of love, piety, devotion, and holiness, with the special devotion to the passion of Christ. Being a member of the Friends of God would have a profound impact of St. Nicholas' life, until his death in 1487.

At the age of 25, St. Nicholas married Dorothy Wissling and they had five sons and five daughters. Even with the responsibility of his farm and family St. Nicholas always found time for his fasting and meditations on the Passion of Christ. In time St. Nicholas was elected a local judge and a councilor of Unterwalden. After 25 years of a happy marriage, Nicholas felt a deep call for solitude. With the blessing of his wife St. Nicholas spent the next 20 years of his life as a hermit in a lonely cottage, situated above a narrow gorge within earshot of a mountain stream. He spent the hours from midnight to midday in prayer and contemplation. In time many visitors would come seeking his advice on religious and secular matters.

After the Cantons of Switzerland had obtained their freedom from Charles and Bold of Burgundy it was advice that St. Nicolas provided through a priest sent by the Deputies of the Cantons that enable Switzerland to be formed. Because of the advice that St. Nicolas shared with the Cantons of Switzerland, he is the patron Saint, and also considered the father of Switzerland. In Switzerland the Feast Day for St. Nicolas of Flueli is on September 25 but in the rest of the world his Feast Day is March 21.

At this point that you have read about 500 words about St. Nicolas of Myra and St. Nicolas of Flueli, it would be natural for you to wonder what do these two Saints have to do with the readings for the 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time. Directly, these two Saints do not have anything to do with the readings for this Sunday. But in looking at the readings for this Sunday there appears to be a message that God has an expectation of how we should live our lives in this world. In our first reading this Sunday taken from the Book of Genesis, we hear of God creating the perfect partner and helpmate for man. In fact, the last sentence of our first reading this Sunday states, "*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh.*" It is clear that God has a plan us in this world and for many of us marriage is a part of God's plan. Our Gospel reading this Sunday continues the message of the importance of marriage and that this union is meant to be permanent for the couple. Our readings this Sunday are reminding us that God has a plan for us in this world. St. Nicolas of Myra and St. Nicolas of Flueli both are a good example of how to live a life in this world focused on God, but at the same time helping others. St. Nicolas of Myra, focused on serving the poor and St. Nicolas of Flueli focused on serving his family and his nation. It was when St. Nicolas was hermit that he found the time and words to help form the country of Switzerland.