



**St. Katharine  
Drexel**  
March 3

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# St. Katharine Drexel

1858–1955 • United States of America

Katharine Drexel was the daughter of a wealthy banker in Philadelphia. Her mother had died soon after her birth, and her father remarried a few years later. Her father and stepmother were strong in their Catholic Faith and believed that they should use their great wealth to care for those in need. Katharine would watch her father pray for half an hour every day, and her stepmother would open their house a few times a week to distribute food and clothing to the poor.

Raised as a young heiress, Katharine received her education from private tutors, toured Europe, and entered into high society. But when she nursed her stepmother for three years through terminal cancer, Katharine realized that money could not protect her from pain and suffering. She grew close to Jesus in the Eucharist. He gave her a deep love for the poor and oppressed. Katharine's father took her on trips through the western states, and she saw firsthand the suffering and poverty of the Native Americans. Katharine knew she had to do something to help.

She went to visit Pope Leo XIII in Rome and asked that he send missionaries to help the Native Americans. She was surprised when the pope told her that she should become a missionary herself! Katharine listened to the pope and joined the Sisters of Mercy in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia society was shocked! The newspapers ran the headline, "Miss Drexel Enters a Catholic Convent—Gives Up Seven Million." People couldn't believe that Katharine would give up her wealth to serve the poor.

But Katharine was now able to serve the people she knew God was calling her to help. She founded the Blessed Sacrament Sisters and used her fortune to fund its work. The nuns opened schools for Native American and African American children. Katharine paid for the printing of a catechism for the Navaho children. But not everyone liked how Katharine served these neglected people in the community. A member of an evil, racist organization threatened Katharine and her sister's lives, but God protected them. Only a few days later, the headquarters of the man's organization were struck by lightning and burned to the ground.

Later in life, Katharine suffered a heart attack, so she had to give up the leadership of her order. For her last eighteen years she could barely move because of a serious illness. She spent the rest of her life in deep prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament and died a holy death. St. Katharine Drexel, help me to serve the poor and oppressed!