

Saint Katharine Mary Drexel

Born: 26 November 1858, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Died: 3 March 1955, Cornwell Heights, Pennsylvania

Katharine Drexel was a Philadelphia debutante from a wealthy family and her decision to become a nun made national news. Born shortly before the Civil War, she came of age during Reconstruction. Her mother died when she was an infant, but Katharine's father and her beloved stepmother brought up Katharine and her two sisters with a strong social conscience. The family often visited reservations and missions in the western states, where she saw firsthand the suffering of displaced Native Americans and former slaves.

In 1887, after the death of her parents, Katharine and her sisters traveled to Europe. They were granted a private audience with Pope Leo XIII, who shared Katharine's interest in social issues. She told him about America's need for missionaries and he asked, "Why don't you become a missionary yourself?" That question haunted her when she returned to Philadelphia. Katharine came to consider it an invitation from God to devote herself to the Indians and African Americans. She founded the order now known as the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, and during the fifty years until her death Katharine established nearly sixty schools for Native Americans and African Americans. One of her greatest achievements was the founding of Xavier University in New Orleans, which today sends more African American graduates to medical schools than any other university in the country.

The Genius of Katharine Drexel:

She advises: *"Manifest yourself. You have no time to occupy your thoughts with that complacency or consideration of what others will think. Your business is simple, 'What will my Father in heaven think?'"*

Reflection:

"If anyone says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

1 John 4.20-21

Gallick, Sarah: [The Big Book of Women Saints](#), p. 73