



abilities are the common denominator that links them with people today suffering from a variety of illnesses and handicaps.

McGrane has skillfully unmasked hidden virtues in this great company of witnesses. As one who has lived and suffered with rheumatoid arthritis for many years, she has explored those pieces of their faith stories where physical illness or disability is perceived as a blessing and not a woe. Through this lens she offers them as spiritual companions for anyone trying to find symbolic meaning in illness rather than trying to medically explain it. The former centers the suffering in the heart where meaning comes through contemplation and surrender. The latter centers it in the head where brain cells work overtime trying to explain mystery.

The richness of her insights no doubt are based upon the ways she has leaned on these witnesses for courage through her own suffering. The fruit of this faith/prayer connection is two-fold: first, a breadth

of sensitivity that includes a wide spectrum of saints as caregivers, to saints with addictions, to saints with cancer; and second, a deep spirituality that de-



mythologizes a notion of sainthood based on false piety and roots it in an ordinary humanity redeemed by extraordinary grace. As the suffering is not of them, neither are the ways God will use it to surprise, convert, and expand hearts.

Some of the saints in the book are officially canonized by the Church. But the saints in Sr. Janice's book are not identified by

their link with a specific group, but by their universal experience of human suffering. So, St. Catherine of Genoa is a companion for caregivers, Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha with people suffering physical disfigurements, St. Thérèse of Lisieux is a companion with those suffering terminal illness, and Venerable Matt Talbot is a companion with people suffering alcoholism.

Others on the list are recognized as saints by public acclamation, like Caryll Houselander, a companion in mental illness; Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, a companion in cancer; Sister Thea Bowman, a companion in joy-filled suffering; and Father Pedro Arrupe, a companion with those suffering from strokes. For the author the bond that glues them all together is not a prefix before their name, but how they filtered their physical sufferings through the witness and life-saving deeds of Jesus Christ. He was no stranger to suffering. How he leaned on his Father as caregiver, made all the difference in turning a story of physical suffering into a new story of redemptive suffering. As it was for him, so it was for them. McGrane's ownership of this story in her life portrays someone who transcends suffering by drinking from a deep well of hope and courage that is not of her doing.

In this respect she is a witness who testifies to the power of the Jesus story. It included suffering and death, but ended in resurrection. The saints in her book keep alive the living tradition of the church that the paschal mystery of life, death, and Resurrection ends in "hello." That path is paved with suffering, and this book is an addition to the sacred literature that offers insight, challenge and hope to those with physical illness and those with spiritual disabilities.

**SAINTS TO LEAN ON**  
**Spiritual Companions for Illness and Disability**

*Janice McGrane*

(Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006, 167 pages, paper, \$13.95)

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The late rabbinical scholar Abraham Heschel once said, "There are no proofs for the existence of God. There are only witnesses." Sister Janice McGrane has validated that insight with her reflections on the lives of eleven saints. Their physical dis-