

# Ablaze

STORIES OF  
DARING  
TEEN SAINTS

*Colleen Swaim*



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## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

**You'll notice when you start to turn these pages** that *Ablaze* isn't your ordinary stories-of-the-saints book. I've filled these pages with tons of extras that will bring these eight zealous young Christians to life and will inspire you to live out your faith with their same fire. The main focus of each chapter is the story of the particular saint, but as you'll see, there is so much more.

**Since our Catholic faith has been practiced** in so many different ways, and because the teens featured here come from a variety of times and places, you'll find info and important definitions in the boxes scattered throughout the text. Read up—you just might learn something!

**To help you apply what you're reading to your own life**, I've included reflection questions throughout each story to think and journal about. Journaling pages can be found at the end of each chapter.

**You will also find Scripture verses, pictures, quotes**, and other fun tidbits scattered throughout the stories. Take them in, write them down, think about them for awhile—they are all meant to bring the saint to life and inspire you with their holiness!

**At the end of each story is a prayer**, usually one that the person you've just read about said or wrote. Take a moment while you're in a thoughtful mode and inspired by these saintly stories to pray. We know that these men and women are powerful intercessors with God.

**Finally, you'll find "Saintly Challenges"** at the end of each chapter. These are ideas of things you can do to connect even deeper with the life of the person you've just read about. I've included everything from movie nights to journaling questions to recipes—there really is something for everyone, so dig in.

**At the end of the book are some additional materials** that can help you delve into the teachings from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that connect to the stories in this book. Remember to check them out!

# SAINT DOMINIC SAVIO



MISSIONARY OF  
GOOD EXAMPLE,  
GOOD WORDS,  
AND GOOD ACTION



“Like Saint Dominic Savio,  
be missionaries of good example, good words,  
good action at home, with neighbors,  
and colleagues at work. At every age we can and  
we must bear witness to Christ! Commitment to  
bear witness is permanent and daily.”

POPE JOHN PAUL II, DECEMBER 7, 1997, HOMILY

**FEAST DAY: MARCH 9**

**PATRONAGES: THOSE FALSELY ACCUSED, CHOIRBOYS**

**D**ominic was born on April 2, 1842, to Charles and Brigid Savio, growing up outside of Turin, Italy. Dominic's father was a blacksmith, and with ten children, they didn't have a lot of money. According to his parents, Dominic was a loving and obedient son from his early years. In fact, by age four, he was even saying his morning and bedtime prayers himself. This young child, who attended and served daily Mass by the age of five, prayed the Angelus and would even remind his family to say grace before meals. If the door to church was locked when he got there, he knelt on the ground until it was opened, even if it was snowy or dirty, and would cheerfully wave at the priest when they would meet on the street. When he was a little older, he would go out of his way to help his father with chores.

**Angelus:** A prayer said in celebration of God being made flesh in the person of Christ Jesus, including Mary's role in the event through her "Yes" to becoming his mother.

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*As a little kid, how did you live out your faith? How has that changed as you've grown older?*

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As Dominic grew, so did his strong faith. He consistently went to confession, even as a young child, and was permitted to receive his first Communion early, because he understood the Real Presence of the Eucharist ahead of the other children. In order to prepare himself for the sacrament, the night before his first Communion Dominic asked his mother for forgiveness for anything he had done to disappoint or hurt her, and promised not to do so again. He was genuinely sorry, cried, and was first to arrive at the church the next morning. When he made his first Communion in 1849, he made several promises, such as, "I will go to confession, and I will go to holy Communion as often as I am allowed, I will try to give Sundays

and holy days completely to God, my best friends will be Jesus and Mary, and Death, but not sin.” These would prove to be more than just words, but a living pledge that he kept until the end of his life.

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*Recount a special memory from your first reconciliation or first Communion.*

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At age ten, Dominic finished at the village school and started at the county school three miles away. Savio means “wise,” and Dominic did his best to live up to it at school. He was disciplined about working to do well at school and avoided trouble-makers’ attempts to get him to join them in their mischief. He even attempted to help those who were struggling and to reform those who misbehaved, sometimes earning him the disdain of his classmates.

Dominic was not a strong boy but was known by his teachers, schoolmates, and even his principal as a cheerful and pleasant young man. Even with his health problems, Dominic never missed a day of school. A hard worker, Dominic rose to the top of his class and was always ready to help those who weren’t as interested in their studies. His principal observed that Dominic excelled “not simply because he was clever but because he worked very hard and came to have a great love for his lessons. It was also because his studies were not simply for himself but for God.”

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*What motivates you to try to do well academically?*

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His life at school was not without challenges. One day his schoolmates blamed Dominic for cramming the classroom’s stove with trash and snow. Strangely, he did nothing to defend himself. It was not until the next day, when the truth was revealed, that the principal, Father Cugliero, realized Dominic had not been involved. When asked why he did not claim his innocence, Dominic explained that



he knew the boys who had done it would be expelled for what they had done, and he wanted to spare their punishment. “I remembered that Jesus had been blamed unjustly and had not said anything,” Dominic said, “and I thought I should do the same.” It was a truly selfless act that made a lasting impact on his principal, and would later make Dominic the patron saint of those falsely accused.

In 1854, Father Cugliero went to see Saint John Bosco about admitting Dominic to his school, the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales. Attesting to Dominic’s high standing in his school, both for his character and for his academics, Father Cugliero claimed, “You may have in your house boys equally good and clever, but there are none better than him.” When he introduced himself to Father Bosco, Dominic told him that he’d like to be a priest. As a test of his academic skill, Bosco had him read and memorize a page of the Mass readings, intending for him to work on it overnight. Don Bosco was astounded when Dominic had memorized and could explain it within ten minutes, and he immediately decided that Dominic would attend the oratory. Joyfully, Dominic promised Don Bosco “...always to act in such a way that you will never have reason to complain of me,” and accompanied him to Turin, where he would begin studies.

Dominic continued to follow the rules at school and was a good student in the classics. He sought the normal life of a student, even asking one of the teachers for guidance on how to make the best of his experience there. Others, whether they were devout or not, liked spending time with him, as he told amusing stories, enjoyed playing

**The classics:** The study of ancient Greek and Latin people and languages, as well their civilizations, was very popular when Saint Dominic was a teenager.

games, and avoided complaining and finding fault with things. He especially sought out boys who had no one else to be their friend, as well as those who were sick. Dominic enjoyed the normal life of a student, with all of its ups and downs, if not with a few

saintly exceptions. In the midst of playing sports, he would sometimes ask his companions to come to confession with him later on. Occasionally Dominic would even withdraw from them to behold heavenly visions.

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*Would you have the courage to invite a friend to come along with you to church? Why or why not?*

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He hadn't been in the oratory long before Dominic decided that he wanted to become a saint. He wanted "...to give up everything to Jesus and for always. If I am not trying to be a saint, I am doing nothing at all. I will not have any peace if I don't keep on trying." He appealed to Father Bosco for guidance. It was suggested to Dominic that one key action of a saint might be to bring others to know God, which pleased him greatly as he thought of how thrilled he would be "...if only I could win all my companions for God."

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*Everyone is called to be a saint. Have you been living like it's only for a select, VIP crowd, or have you taken on the challenge as your own? How has this affected the way you live as a Catholic teenager?*

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Dominic's favorite saints were those who had worked in the missions, living for the purpose of winning souls for Christ. Had he known of him, he surely would have admired the efforts of Blessed Pedro Calungsod, who went so far as to give his life for the sake of missionary zeal, but as Dominic didn't have funds to send to the missions he instead kept them in prayer, offering his reception of Communion for them once a week. Volunteering as a religious educator, both in Sunday School and privately, Dominic brought his missionary spirit to the oratory, even though he sometimes was made fun of by other boys for his labors.

Even with his saintly character, Dominic faced the same chal-

lenges of peer pressure that many young people do today. One day Dominic almost skipped school with a group of other boys in order to go the fair. But before they missed any of their classes, Dominic came to his senses and decided to go to school. He even chastised the other boys, telling them, "If we stay away we are displeasing God and also our superiors." With that, Dominic had swayed the crowd, and the other boys were convinced that they should head to class, too.

On another occasion, Dominic heard there was to be a fight between two older students and tried to talk them down from violence. When they refused, Dominic asked the boys if he could set the conditions for their fight. The boys agreed they'd go along with Dominic's plan, just as long as he wouldn't keep them from fighting. He led them out and seemed to be setting up an arena as a site for their fight. Then Dominic stopped and pulled out the crucifix from around his neck, and, holding it up, said courageously, "I want each of you to look at this crucifix and throw a stone at me, saying clearly these words: 'Jesus Christ, who was innocent, died forgiving his enemies; I, a sinner, am going to offend him by this deliberate act of revenge.'" He then went to each boy, telling him to throw a stone at him. Neither boy did. Dominic had won: there would be no fight. It was the would-be stone throwers themselves who went and told others about Dominic's role in this incident.

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*Recall a time when you did your best to help a friend or friends avoid a bad call.*

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Dominic's faith grew while he was at the oratory. There, he was encouraged to go often to the sacraments of confession and holy Communion, and to choose a priestly confessor who could offer him consistent spiritual guidance. Dominic gradually began becoming more active in his already-flourishing sacramental life and would go to confession each week and would receive the Eucharist every

day. Dominic made sure he was spiritually prepared before receiving Communion and even dedicated his reception of Communion every day of the week to a different prayer intention. His attraction to the Eucharist was so strong that he could lose track of time when praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament and someone would have to go find him when he was needed elsewhere.

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*How do you prepare yourself to receive Jesus' body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist?*

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Through the struggles of his youth, Dominic gained a firm belief in the restorative power of confession. He approached his confessor as “the doctor of the soul,” and sought his advice—and the medicine of God’s grace—often. “I have full confidence in my confessor, who is so kind and helpful to me,” Dominic said, “and I don’t think I have

**Scruples:** An unfounded apprehension and consequently unwarranted fear that something is a sin when it is not.

any trouble that he cannot cure.” And Dominic was right—his confessor does seem to have guided the young man’s spirit toward Christ. Dominic tried to go to confession as much as three times a week, but his spiritual director wisely disagreed that this was a good idea, as he rightly believed the young man dealt with the spiritual struggle of scruples. Instead, he advised him to deal admirably with the little difficulties of life, rather than seeking out the more outwardly impressive penance of fasting, by offering to Jesus his daily struggles.

Dominic diligently followed his confessor’s advice to take up little, everyday crosses. Realizing that the tongue can do serious damage, he strove to not cut people off when they were speaking, or to take over conversations. He likewise did his best not to waste food, believing that, “Everything that we have is God’s precious gift.”

He also cheerfully did the most menial of tasks for the greater glory of God. In all of these seemingly small acts, Dominic continued his path to holiness.

Prayer played an important part in Dominic's life at the oratory. He tried to spend quiet time with spiritual readings or talking to God, and he had a special love for Mary. In 1854, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was defined, and on the feast's vigil, Dominic prayed with conviction, "Mary, I give you my heart, please keep it always as your own. Jesus and Mary, always be my friends." In honor of Mary, he prayed at the altar dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary; partook in May devotions dedicated to Our Lady, such as doing a special action in her recognition every day; and he even raffled off his own book in order to put in for the costs of a Marian altar for his dorm at school. He and his friends founded a Sodality of Mary Immaculate in her honor, and together promised to receive Communion regularly, follow the school's rules, and to help each other in their pursuits of holiness.

**Immaculate Conception:**

When you think of the phrase "Immaculate Conception," it's common to think of Jesus, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born to Mary, his mother, but actually it refers to Mary, who was herself conceived without sin in the womb of her mother and born to Anne and Joachim. The feast of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated on December 8.



**The Immaculate Heart of Mary**

Especially in light of his devotion to Mary, Dominic tried to be conscious of how he looked at girls. Dominic saw that his struggle to look at others purely was part of growing up, but he did not make excuses when it was difficult. "The eyes are two windows," he said, "Through these windows what you let pass, passes. You can let an angel in or you can let the devil in, and whichever

you let in can get possession of your heart.” To assume that guarding his heart was an easy task for such a holy teenager would be wrong, as Dominic himself admitted. Sometimes he would get a violent headache as he struggled to control his eyes and heart. The effort was good practice for when Dominic would have to put his morals into action in other situations. For instance, one day a boy brought a pornographic magazine to school. Dominic grabbed it from him and tore it up, reproaching his classmate. “God has given us our eyes to admire the wonders of creation,” Dominic reminded him. “You know well enough that one look is enough to stain your soul, and yet you go feasting your eyes on this.” This type of response would have been a lot more difficult for Dominic had he not been living chastely on a daily basis already.

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*Do you have the strength to do as Dominic did and stand up to classmates, teammates, or friends who are misusing the gifts of the senses? How can you live chastely in a world that makes it easy to do otherwise?*

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Dominic was always known to be weak of health. At the time, the doctors couldn't pinpoint exactly what was wrong with him and diagnosed no specific disease, instead only saying that he was of “delicate constitution.” The only way to preserve his life would have been to send him away from school to a quiet life at home, where he could do small tasks that would not tax his mind or his body. In fact, the doctor recommended that “...the best remedy would be to let him go to heaven: he seems to me to be very ready for it.” And so rather than taking to a sick bed, Dominic's life continued as usual.

So while his parents, doctors, and teachers would urge special care of him, Dominic would always push himself. He did not want to leave his friends and studies at the oratory. Even though he had long been sick at school, Dominic was so uncomplaining and typically in a good mood that his schoolmates assumed that he had been much

healthier than he actually was. As he didn't have to stay in bed, he went to class and enjoyed helping in the school's sick area.

Eventually, Dominic's weakening health led him to be sent home from the oratory, though he soon returned and was sent home once again. Don Bosco asked why he was unwilling to go home and stay there with his parents, and Dominic simply replied that he wanted to spend the rest of his life at the oratory. "I know that if I go home, I shall never come back," he said. All in all, Dominic had spent three years at the oratory, and so it was on March 1, 1857, at 2 p.m., that he left the oratory in Turin one last time.

His health seemed to improve back at home, until his family started to realize that a cough was getting worse and he wasn't eating enough. The doctor took Dominic's condition seriously, and he was ordered to stay in bed and rest. Later, the doctor believed that Dominic was suffering from inflammation and prescribed a course of ten bleedings. Dominic cheerfully responded to his illness and to the painful treatment, and he didn't whine over the bleedings or the nasty medicine, keeping it all in a prayerful perspective. "What is this," he said, "compared with the piercing of Jesus' hands and feet with the nails?"

**Bleedings:** A common medical practice during Dominic's time and long before. Bloodletting, many times achieved by attaching leeches to the skin, was thought by many doctors to be a practical cure-all.

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*Think back to the last time you were in physical pain. How did you react to it?*

---

While his doctor and parents were confident that he was improving, Dominic knew his illness was more serious and took time to prepare himself for death. He asked his dad to "give the heavenly doctor a chance," and asked to receive the sacraments of confession

and holy Communion. A priest came at once. “Now I am happy,” Dominic said. “I have a long journey to eternity, but with Jesus by my side I fear nothing. How I wish I could say it to the whole world, when Jesus is with us there is no fear of anything—not even of death itself.” It is plain that Dominic’s response to his illness wasn’t the average, as he faced his own death with courage.

By March 9, 1857, the doctor and Dominic’s family were again sure that he would get better. While he sounded strong, he was constantly indicating to his family and friends that he didn’t believe he had much time left. Dominic asked that the priest come and give him the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. Before the anointing, Dominic prayed, “Dear Jesus, I love you and I wish to love you for all eternity—forgive me my sins. Let this sacrament wipe out all the sins I have ever committed by my eyes, my ears, my lips, and my feet: may my soul and body be made holy by the merits of your sacred passion. Amen.”

The priest advised Dominic to think about Christ’s passion as he faced the last hours of his illness. The teenager slept for half an hour before waking to ask, “Dad, are you there?” His father stayed by his side, reading him prayers from the Exercise of a Happy Death. After responding to the prayers, Dominic fell in and out of sleep until finally saying, “Goodbye, Dad, goodbye...What was it the parish priest suggested to me...I don’t seem to remember...Oh, what wonderful things I see...”

He then died with a smile on his face and was so peaceful that his father thought that he was asleep; he was one month from turning fifteen. From the time Dominic died, his friends and family believed him to be a saint. A month after Dominic’s death, his father had a vision wherein Dominic consoled him, assuring, “...I really am in heaven.”



## PRAYER OF SAINT DOMINIC SAVIO

*O Jesus, my liberty I give completely to you:  
My body with all its powers I give completely to you.  
Everything I have is yours, O God,  
And I abandon myself completely to your holy will.  
Amen.*

### MEMORY VERSE



**ROMANS 6:9**



*We know that Christ, raised from the dead,  
dies no more; death no longer has power over him.*

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*Do you think death had power over Saint Dominic? Explain.*

*Do you have fears regarding death? If so, what are they?*

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## *Saintly Challenges*

- Dominic means “of the Lord” and Savio means “wise.” Do a little investigating to find out what your own name means.
- When he started at the oratory, Dominic conferred with a teacher with an aim at understanding everything that was expected of him at his new school. Review the general rules or student handbook of your own school. Which rules are you keeping? Which could you use a little brushing up on?
- We know from Saint John Bosco, Dominic’s teacher and mentor, that Dominic wore a crucifix. Make an effort to wear one in order to remind yourself of Christ’s victory over sin through his saving death on the cross.
- Today, do your best to, like Dominic, really listen to the other person in a conversation, striving to not cut him or her off or monopolize the discussion.

JOURNAL YOUR THOUGHTS

SAMPLE

JOURNAL YOUR THOUGHTS

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