Anyone of merit wants their children to grow up to be good and virtuous persons—intelligent without arrogance, strong but gracious and kind, beautiful without vanity, courageous to do what’s right, charitable to those in need, thoughtful, etc. Most parents, remembering their own faults and failures, weaknesses and regrets, long for their children to be improved (sometimes much improved) versions of themselves or of family members/mentors whom they themselves admire.

This is why many Christians celebrate various saints throughout the year: to provide examples for their children and themselves. Just as a young athlete might have posters of sports heroes on the wall or computer/phone wallpaper/lock screen to help motivate them to higher performance, Christians often have depictions of favorite saints on pictures, medals, etc.—Jesus’ mother Mary usually the favorite among favorites because of her single-minded dedication to her Son and the will of God which Christians long to emulate: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it to me according to thy Word.” (Luke 1:38)

Because of such imagery, many mistake that Christians “worship” saints, but that is absolutely incorrect; saints are simply remembered and venerated for their virtues and fidelity in following their Christian faith. But medals and the like are not magic talismans or “tickets to Heaven.” Christians are availed nothing if they do not at least try to live a good life according to the will and teaching of God; indeed, is this not why they are called “Christian”?

Now, we know that wealth and power can be corruptive influences unless those who have them are determined to do what is right and strong-willed to not abuse others simply because their possession makes them shareholders in wealth’s power. The wealthy and powerful thus have temptations no other of us do not. We remember: “…give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full, and deny thee …” (Proverbs 30:8-9)

Such came to mind recently when the Catholic Church remembered St. Louis, king of France in the 1200s. He was a product/monarch of his time, so you’ll find wars and crusades in his biography, but nonetheless had a sincere love for God and the Church. His letter to his son, too long to reproduce here, is filled with good and fatherly advice, such as: “… dear son, the first thing I advise is that you fix your whole heart upon God, and love Him with all your strength, for love is the root of all virtue and of all in the world that is good and true.” (Ibid, Vol. IV, p. 1567-S)

One of the most beloved royal saints is St. Elizabeth of Hungary (her niece was St. Elizabeth of Portugal), notable for her great charity toward the poor. Married at age 14 and widowed at 20, she gave away all she had to succor the sick and the needy. Her biographer relates, “Twice a day Elizabeth went to visit the sick. She personally cared for those who were particularly repulsive … she built a hospice where she gathered together the weak and the feeble … before her death … she asked me to distribute everything except a worn out dress in which she wished to be buried.” (Ibid, Vol. IV, p. 1567-S)

These few hardly exhaust the list of royal saints, and such are by far the minority among the saints. Yet by them, we are heartened that any and all are called to lives of virtue no matter their station in life … to give of whatever we have been blessed with. Few of us are royalty or rich, but ALL of us can do good works stemming from true virtue and faith. Even the bedridden do good by their prayers and being present for those needing a comforting word … a reassuring touch.

Yes, Christians honor and venerate saints but worship only God; we admire saints insomuch as they reflect Christ’s goodness. Yet Jesus is highest of all royalty—literally infinitely more so—not only as being God, but by the total self-sacrifice He demonstrated to, and for, the world. Thus, He gives us the ultimate example of true and absolute royal virtue. Is it not wise, then, for we who wish to enter His Heavenly kingdom to emulate and follow Him with whole heart?

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses (of angels and saints), let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)