



Welcome to *Sisters and Friends: Refresh Your Soul with Melanie Rigney*. Each month, I'll share something about a woman living today and a Catholic saint who will inspire you, spiritual resources, and a brief note of where I'll be in the coming month. In between newsletters, I hope you'll check out my [Web site](#) for my blog and other updates.

"My policy is love" --St. Ursula Ledochowska

Once when I was speaking about the female saints and blessed, someone in the audience challenged me: Didn't John Paul II focus on Eastern Europe in his record-setting canonizations and beatifications? It is true that a number--far from all or most--of those elevated during his papacy were from that part of the world. It is also true that their stories have relevance to our lives today.



Consider Mother Ursula Ledochowska, born in Austria on April 17, 1865. She spent about ten years in tsarist-controlled Russia and Finland educating and supporting young Catholics there at a time Church-related facilities were illegal. She couldn't even wear her habit. She was expelled in 1914, then lived in Sweden and Denmark for six years, assisting young people in those areas. Ursula then went to Poland, where she had spent her early years as a sister, and founded the Ursulines of the Sacred Agonizing Heart of Jesus. It was during a visit to Rome seventy-six years ago this month that she died. We remember her on May 29.

I think of St. Ursula Ledochowska as we see Christians persecuted today in so many places in the world. She didn't let politics or civil authorities get in the way of serving God's people. May we do the same today.

Being Christ in Our Lives: Monica McBrady

"Never see a need without doing something about it," Australia's first saint, Mary of the Cross MacKillop liked to say. Mary would have loved Monica McBrady. Monica made her Cursillo Weekend in New Jersey, and when she and her husband moved to



Northern Virginia, they were both struck by just how much the Cursillo teams had to do to prepare for Weekends beyond the most important thing: getting to know each other so they could reflect Christ to the candidates.

Thanks to Monica and Mike, Cursillo in the Diocese of Arlington now has a pilot going in which Cursillistas beyond the team are responsible for buttons, room signs, snack tables, and the like.

Monica lives St. Mary of the Cross's axiom: It's not enough to see there's a problem and complain about it. Talk is cheap. Monica teaches me the importance of acting in the Lord's name.

Who reflects Christ to you?

On the Nightstand: Still Life

A novel is on my nightstand again this month, and I can't wait to dig in. It's *Still Life* by [Christa Parrish](#). It's the story of two very different women--one raised in a fringe religious sect, one who's wandering through an unhappy marriage. They encounter each other when the second woman gives up her seat on a plane to the first woman's husband (who took her out of the sect)... and the plane crashes, leaving no survivors.

I've never met Christa in person, but we have a mutual friend in [Virelle Kidder](#), and for a time we were all in the same online writing critique group. Christa's won a Christy award for her writing, and one of her earlier books, *Watch Over Me* (set in the county where my father grew up and including a passing reference to my family's name), was named the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association's 2009 book of the year. Christa's style and tone set her apart from other Christian novelists; her characters have real flaws as they struggle toward wholeness in the Lord. If you haven't read one of her novels, give her a try. You'll be glad you did.



[What's on your nightstand?](#)

Catch Me if You Can--and a New Web Feature!

May brings reunions with longtime and newer friends. The evening of May 12, I'll be speaking about the women saints at [Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church](#) in Potomac, MD. Anna LaNave, who was instrumental in my return to faith, is responsible for adult faith formation and evangelization at OLOM, and I'm really looking forward to seeing her in her new vocation.

Then the following weekend, May 15-17, I'll be among the special witness speakers at the [St. Francis of Assisi Emmaus Catholic women's retreat](#) in Blowing Rock, NC. I was privileged to speak to folks at St. Francis last fall, and I'm humbled to be going back so soon.

That new saints database isn't totally ready for prime time yet, but if you go to my [home page](#), you'll get an idea of where it's going. Each day, a different woman will

appear (based on feast day, other important date in her life, or randomization). In June, when you click on the link, you'll not only be able to see the particulars of her life and a place to find additional resources, you'll also be able to search for the women by name or other factors. Right now, we have about 380 women loaded, and since there are thousands of women to choose from, there's plenty of room for growth!

That's where you come in. Please [email me](#) with the names of any must-have women, great links to more information about them, or a feature you'd like to have added (such as a quote from their work or scripture, or a brief prayer). From all those who help out in this way, I'll select one name at random to receive a \$25 Amazon gift card. The winner will be announced in next month's newsletter.

Also next month--lots of news about my next book, [*Blessed Are You: Finding Inspiration from Our Sisters in Faith*](#), which will be available in July. (Gulp!)

May God bless you exceedingly! Melanie

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