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The patron saints of lawyers

May 19 is the feast day of St. Ives, one of the two patron saints of the legal profession in the Roman Catholic Church. The other patron saint is the better-known St. Sir Thomas More. We lawyers should know more about them, for their lives are certainly worth emulating.

St. Ivo Helory of Kermartin was born in Brittany, northern France, on May 19, 1253. Because his family was well-off, he was able to study law. He earned the reputation of "the poor man's advocate" because he upheld the rights of the poor as carefully as he upheld the rights of the rich. Moreover, when he became a judge in Treguier, he refused to take bribes.

When he also became a priest, his oral advocacy skills made him a famous preacher. About 1297 he resigned his clerical offices to live as a simple Franciscan and to practice law. Although he earned a good living, at least at first, he frequently gave away his clothing to the poor, represented poor clients without a fee, and routinely tried to settle disputes that might otherwise have engendered protracted and expensive litigation. He founded legal fraternities designed to provide legal assistance to the poor. Perhaps these were the first legal aid societies.

Even in the 13th century, Ivo/Ives/Yves was considered an exception in the legal profession. As the folk verse went,

Santus Yvo erat Brito
Advocatus it no latro,
Res meranda populo.

You can guess the translation: St. Ives was a Breton and a lawyer, but not a thief, a remarkable thing in the people's eyes.

St. Sir Thomas More was much better known in his time and since. Most of us learned of him while watching the 1967 film "A Man for all Seasons." One of the great humanists of 16th-century England and a lawyer and judge known for his brilliance and rectitude, he became Henry VIII's lord chancellor.

When the king asked each adult male in England to subscribe to an oath agreeing that the king was "Supreme Head of the Church in England," only More and a few monks dared to refuse. More resigned his office and, as the film shows, "stood upon his silence."

His conscience forbade his *affirming* the king's presumed title, but neither did he *deny* the king's assumption of that title. He simply remained silent, but that silence was deafeningly eloquent. The film's trial scene, which is based upon the record, is stirring, dramatic, and magnificent. Of course, the result of the trial was More's execution.

I teach part of the colloquy from the trial scene in my course on sales transactions. Part of the homework is to look up Sir Thomas's last words from the scaffold. Thanks to the Internet, most have found these words: "The king has commanded me to be brief, and brief I shall be: I die the king's good servant, but God's first." I ask the students to remember that phrase in their legal careers.

The homework also includes a short reading on lawyer-saints. The Roman Catholic church recognizes about six of



Law and Public Issues

By Ann Lousin

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them. As my students of the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition remind me, there are also some lawyer-saints in their church, although not many.

Some of my students, at least those who are Roman Catholic, have adopted St. Joseph of Cupertino, the patron saint of exam-takers, as their favorite saint during law school and through the bar exam.

The result of my little "homily" on St. Sir Thomas More, St. Ives, and lawyer-saints has been heart-warming. Alumni visiting Europe send me photos of statues of both St. Thomas and St. Ives.

The occasional dialogues in class are also precious. This spring a student asked if I thought that most of us would have had the courage St. Sir Thomas More displayed. He added that he doubted that he would have. I conceded that I would not have gone to the scaffold for my views about the king's title. Nobody in the room said that he or she would have followed St. Thomas example.

Maybe it's tough to be a saint and practice law. There is a story that when St. Ives reached heaven, several nuns arrived the same day. St. Peter said that the nuns couldn't enter just then "because we have many nuns in heaven." But when Ivo Helory, lawyer and judge, presented himself, St. Peter said, "you may enter; we don't have a single lawyer here now." Ouch!

May 19, 2010, is not only St. Ives Day on my calendar. It is also the 40th anniversary of my admission to the Illinois bar, the day I stood in the Springfield armory, raised my right hand, and took the oath. On May 19, 1995, I wrote the students in my class a note saying that it was the silver anniversary of my admission and added, "I have always been proud to be a member of the legal profession and hope you will be, too."

St. Ives and St. Sir Thomas More are two reasons I am proud to be a member of the bar. It's not because they were perfect, but because they tried to be decent and honest people in their professional lives. Saints are people "whose lives are worth emulating." As the prayer for St. Sir Thomas More says, "grant that lawyers and judges may imitate you and achieve true justice for all people."