

God, Life, and Everything  
Saints Alive

I bet you were excited about Pope Francis coming to New York, weren't you? I was. If I hadn't been up at Syracuse visiting our sons, I might have been tempted to try to see him.

He's not the first rock star pope - John Paul II had a pretty big fan base - but he does seem to be among the saintliest we've seen in awhile. And what a perfect weekend to think of him in those terms because this Sunday is the Feast of Saint Francis. Yes, we will be having a Blessing of the Animals on Sunday afternoon to celebrate. 3:00 pm - you and your pets ARE invited! Just come to our meditation garden next door to the church.

But talk of saints brings to mind an even more important happening this weekend. We at St. James' begin our sixth season of the Historic Graveyard Tours! Yes, that celebration of all saints, great and small who "reside" in our graveyard and rise again to tell their stories, is coming now!

We began these tours as a way to observe our bicentennial in 2011 (we had two seasons that first year). Every Fall since then, we have introduced you to parishioners of days gone by. Some of them have been famous like the third governor of New York, the personal physician of George Washington (not to mention founder of New York Hospital, New York's first medical school, and St. James"), a suffragette, and members of the constitutional convention.

We've also helped you know the humble - a janitor, a former slave, a maid, and quite a few priests.

Our first characters were selected to tell the story of St. James' founding. We soon discovered, however, that there were many stories out there, and each one is connected to a common bond - the desire to live out their lives in accordance with the gospel. Each one had in some way chosen to live out their faith in actions, not just words. For the most part, they did good for the world around them, but there's no denying that even those ancestors we hold in high esteem had faults that would make us cringe today. Makes you wonder how we'll be viewed by the generations that come after us.... More importantly, by acknowledging not only the good but the bad, we highlight God's forgiveness and God's call for all humanity to reconcile with each other. For my money, if that message gets through even a little to the broader public, these Graveyard Tours have done a good thing.

In general, we try not to repeat folks too much - there are so many interesting people in our churchyard that there's no need. Besides, the research is fascinating. If you ever feel like you want to do some research for these tours, let me know. I love having collaborators!

This year, we will bring back a couple of folks from the very first season. It's not because we've run out of people or are too lazy to do the research. Rather, this year, our returning characters have a new story to tell. Or should I say a new aspect of the old, old story.

And no, I'm not going to tell you. You'll just have to buy your own tickets and find out. But I'll tell you this: one of our characters won a national championship. And one of them appeared in LIFE Magazine.

Then there's this: In the past, characters have surprised audience members by calling out to each other. Count on a little more interaction between characters this year! Count on a surprise at the beginning, too. Just to - how shall we say - keep you on your toes.

These tours have become a part of life in Hyde Park, and their appeal is growing beyond our town borders. We've had guests from around the country and across the ocean. I doubt they came to America just for our tours, but they saw fit to use some of their valuable time here with us, and I am honored by that.

If you want to get your tickets, do so quickly. Already, three tours are sold out. To buy tickets, go to the St. James' website: [www.stjameshydepark.org](http://www.stjameshydepark.org) There, you will see icons for the Graveyard tours. Click on the icon, and you can buy your ticket there. We take most major credit cards.

What we cannot do, however, is take many walk-ins. Painful experience has shown us that we need to control the number of people in each tour because too many make it a less enjoyable evening for the other guests.

So get your tickets now! You'll be glad you did.

It may not be Pope Francis. It may not be Saint Francis (that's this SUNDAY at 3:00 pm. No tickets for the Blessing of the Animals).

BUT, it is a celebration of the regular old saints who went before us, who share their stories, who inspire us to be the saints of the future. So come, meet the saints as they come alive.