

1st November 2021

Saints

“Saints, and saints, and again saints!”

Robert Browning, Fra Lippo Lippi

Fra Lippo Lippi was a renowned 15th century Florentine artist who lived a tumultuous and somewhat scandalous existence. Robert Browning, in his epic poem *Fra Lippo Lippi*, offers us his interpretation of the artist's life, including an incident in which Lippi is accosted in the street by policemen. Lippi claims to be on his way home and not, as the policemen might think, stopping to visit a house-of-ill-repute. He mocks them for their mistake and reveals that he is, in truth, a monk employed by the powerful Cosimo Medici. The officers are taken aback and release him.

But Lippi feels the need to justify himself further, and launches into the story of how he ended up in the street that night. He was painting in his studio, “saints, and saints, and again saints,” he explains, and was bored. He heard music in the street, climbed through a window and joined the procession. And, as a clincher, he tells them about his childhood, how he grew up on the street, was taken into a monastery and learned to paint. Though he's fallen out with the Church, he plans to paint a large painting which will include God, and the Madonna and child. This, he affirms, will earn him redemption from any past or future errors in his life.

A great story – though perhaps the product of much poetic-license. But Fra Lippo Lippi *did* complete the paintings of his choice, such as the amazing *Madonna and Child with Two Angels*, in the Galleria degli Uffizi, in Florence. I wonder, however, if he ever stopped being bored painting “saints, and saints, and again saints” as Browning suggests.

I'm not an artist, but I do paint pictures in my mind of the “saints” I've known through the years. I'm *never* bored with them, and wander often through the galleries of those saints, gazing at their pictures and recalling the stories they tell. I'm always inspired by their lives, the memories they've given me and their influence on me that will never fade.

On this All Saints' Day, why not walk through your own galleries and spend time with images of the “saints” you've known. Bored with “saints, and saints, and again saints”? I hope that's not your experience, not when there may be many rooms in your galleries of saints yet to explore.

A prayer for today

Lord, thank you for my saints and your saints, and their influence on me today. Amen