



# **A Soldier Surrenders: The Conversion of Saint Camillus de Lellis**

*Susan Peek*

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## **A Soldier Surrenders: The Conversion of Saint Camillus de Lellis** Susan Peek

A dramatic and powerful story of a great sinner who became a great saint, similar to the famous conversion stories and lives of St. Augustine, St. Paul, and St. Mary Magdalene. St. Camillus is a man that anyone can relate to and be inspired by, a moving story that will appeal to people of all walks of life who recognize in themselves the need for an ongoing conversion and effort to serve others in a spirit of charity and kindness.

## **A Soldier Surrenders: The Conversion of Saint Camillus de Lellis Details**

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**Susan Peek**

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# From Reader Review A Soldier Surrenders: The Conversion of Saint Camillus de Lellis for online ebook

## Cynthia says

From teenage mercenary to saint, Camillus is engagingly portrayed by author Susan Peek. At 6-and-a-half-feet tall with a soldier's strength, he struck an imposing figure for his time (the mid to late 1500s) and lived larger-than-life for many years. He failed often until he heeded--first fell into--his calling to serve the sick, war-wounded, and dying. I recommend this account of the saint's life, filled with action and emotion, for young people and adults. If I were to request one thing, it would be a brief description of the soldiers' clothing in the beginning of the story. (I personally enjoy descriptions of apparel in any historical novel.)

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## booklady says

*The Conversion of St. Camillus de Lellis* by Susan Peek was one of those books I could not put down.

I read this young adult book in one day. The difficulty with biographies of saints is often distinguishing between the quality of the story and the character of the man himself. In this case, the author, Susan Peek's life of Camillus de Lellis is not only very accurate but also inspiring. Although similar to St. Francis and St. Ignatius in that de Lellis went from soldier to saint, his conversion was neither instantaneous nor without its complications. Rather Camillus's journey to God was an arduous process. He battled mightily (and failed often!), not making conversion in a day or a week, but rather day by day over the course of years, something I found to be a more helpful for my own spiritual struggles. He was a soldier, with a love of gambling, and fighting and reluctance to give up his vices and become humble. These negative 'attributes' somehow endeared him to me. He seemed more human and also made sanctity seem more accessible through the constant work required.

It's a fine line with saints. We want them to be holy—like Christ—but not too holy, not so far above the rest of us poor mortals that they make a life of holiness seem unattainable.

St. Camillus started out at the very bottom of the bottom. That he managed—through the Grace of God—to overcome his own monumental personal, spiritual and physical weaknesses and go on to found a religious order known as “Ministers of the Sick”, now called the “Hospitallers”—in spite of being so worldly becoming Patron of the Sick is testimony to his ultimate surrender to his Commander Christ.

Susan Peek's fascinating biography covers the portion of his life leading up to his ultimate conversion. I'd like to read a follow-on story telling of his tremendous life's work founding and building up the Hospitallers and inspiring so many others to join him in giving their lives tending the sick and dying. That would be a book worth reading as well.

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## Nicole says

How do I feel about this book? Well It was a very good book. I don't have the unsettled feeling that I did at

the end of Saint Magnus The Last Viking. The book didn't have as many modern phrases as Saint Magnus did, but it still had some that could have been eliminated. Somehow, I wasn't quite satisfied at the end of the book. I guess I would have liked to see the new order get off the ground before the end of the book. I think one reason why I wasn't as satisfied is because of a formatting problem. I read the ebook version of this book, and when I finished the book it still said I was only forty-seven percent done with it. Why? Because the Amazon ebook appears to have two copies of the book in the book. I finished it, and then it started over with a different font size. The ending took me completely by surprise, maybe if I'd been aware that the end of the book was coming, I would have found the end more satisfying, and that's really not fair because it's not the book's fault, or probably Susan Peek's, that there was a formatting error, but it affected my perception and enjoyment of the story. At any rate, this was still a very good book that I still recommend it very highly.

As with Saint Magnus The Last Viking and Brigid of Ireland I don't know whether to put this book on my Catholic fiction or non-fiction shelf, so it's going on both.

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### **Therese Heckenkamp says**

*A Soldier Surrenders* by Susan Peek is an incredible story about Saint Camillus de Lellis, a great sinner of the 1500s who became a great saint. He is entirely human, very flawed, and thus easy to empathize with. His story is sure to inspire anyone who struggles with temptation and sin--and who among us doesn't?!

With his pious mother dead, young Camillus follows in his soldier father's footsteps, making many bad choices and even, for a time, siding with the Turks against the Christians. A tall, formidable man, Camillus is brought low by bad habits such as drinking, gambling, and brawling--becoming, in fact, a slave to his vices.

Due to the profound impact of his father's death, Camillus attempts to change his life, but his hot temper and intense pride repeatedly thwart his efforts. Additionally, he is plagued by a mysterious ulcer that refuses to heal.

Beset by temptations and failures, Camillus is rejected and dismissed in shame from places where he attempts to build a life. A lesser man would give in to despair, but Camillus soldiers on and is shaped by the soul-shaking trials he endures.

At long last, after struggling to find his way alone in the world, Camillus realizes he's not alone. He discovers that it takes humility to have true courage--the courage to surrender to God's will.

As always, Peek knows how to keep readers hooked! She treats us to lively writing, entertaining situations, and crisp dialogue. *A Soldier Surrenders* is filled with action and drama and is perfect for ages fifteen and up. Peek's novels are among the most worthy and inspiring I've ever read. I fervently recommend all her books and eagerly anticipate her new ones!

Reviewed by:

Therese Heckenkamp

Catholic author of *Past Suspicion* and *Frozen Footprints*

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## **Sherry Smith says**

In another great addition from the God's Forgotten Friends Series, Susan Peek challenges us and her protagonist, Saint Camillus, to search in our hearts for the true meaning of courage. The book opens at the heart of the story, introducing us to the most important person for Camillus, his father, who is battle-tested and inspirational. The two have been on a journey as mercenary soldiers.

Interrupting his brawling ways, due to a wound that won't heal, Camillus becomes an orderly at a hospital in Rome. Here, another orderly, Curzio, challenges Camillus' soldierly definition of courage as strength and honor, instead pointing out that it is mastering oneself and following the call of God.

In summary, this beautiful novel left me with two images of courage: crescent-shaped swords clashing against men paid to fight and a man simply comforting another, a stranger, in his dying moment on a battlefield. As Camillus follows both paths, the reader does as well, a unique reading journey. Highly recommended.

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## **Anna Elizabeth says**

Really good book! This guy is definitely a saint for us sinners. He goes onto my list of saints that I can actually relate to like St. Paul and St. Augustine.

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## **Theresa Linden says**

Within the first few pages of this story, I knew that this was a much needed story for our age. Children are not always raised in ideal situations. A parent dies. Or parents divorce. One parent may have faith, but the lifestyle and ideals of the other may be more appealing to the child. The parent with faith worries about the effects of the culture on the child.

St. Camillus's mother was strong in her faith and tried to impart it to her son, but his father was a soldier and didn't have much time for that. As a boy and young man, Camillus found his father's ways more attractive. His mother died while he was young and as soon as he was able, he followed in his father's footsteps by becoming a soldier.

This is not the end of the story but only the beginning. This story makes so clear the powerful message that Our Lord is always there, with each one of us, calling us to Himself and to holiness. Our Lord never gives up on us.

Maybe more so than other saints, the story of St. Camillus's conversion gives hope to the person who struggles with weakness and sin. Camillus had a bad temper and a love of gambling. For the longest time, he did not see the value of faith or self-control. He may have recognized virtue in others but did not see it as a possibility for himself.

But God did not give up on him, just as He does not give up on any one of us. Like a good father, Our Lord allowed many sufferings to come to Camillus. And like so many of us, Camillus had to reach rock bottom

before he could look up in faith.

While I enjoy the stories of saints who responded to the call of God at a very young age, St. Camillus is not that saint. In many ways, he is more relatable. For those who struggle with sin or various addictions, who feel deeply the hardships of life, and who suffer from the consequences of their own actions, there is the story of St. Camillus de Lellis.

Peek's fast-paced writing style is perfect for this story. She brings the reader right into the conflict, struggles, and agony Camillus endures. As a writer, I particularly enjoyed the way she handled scenes with battles and sword fights. She weaves the action, thoughts, and emotions of characters together expertly. I also found myself deeply moved by the moments of grace and spiritual insight that came to him and the way his conversion unfolded.

I recommend this book to everyone who loves saint stories. You will not be able to put this book down. But I especially recommend it to the person who struggles or who feels he or she has fallen too far and is unable to reach that better way. There is hope for us all. Holiness is obtainable for anyone. God can do all things. St. Camillus de Lellis, pray for us.

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### **Leslea Wahl says**

I am a huge fan of Susan Peek's books. This is the third book of hers that I've read and once again I found the story extremely difficult to put down. This author has an uncanny knack for making little-known saints from previous centuries, relatable to modern teens. Her witty dialogue, fast-paced action, and compelling characters make these books perfect for teens and adults.

Camillus de Lellis may have been an unlikely candidate to become a priest and saint with his mercenary background full of gambling, drinking and fighting, but these characteristics make him a fantastic example that anyone can be called by God to do amazing things.

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### **Carolyn says**

I love how Susan Peek brings obscure saints to life. Rather than relegated to dusty tomes, Saint Camillus springs from the page - masculine, lively, and deeply flawed - but never out of God's reach.

Deeply affected by the bedside vigil at his father's deathbed, even when he's strayed from the practice of his faith or lapsed into habitual sins, Camillus is drawn to the sick and dying. Whatever his sins, he recognizes the dignity of the ill and injured and is rankled by the callous injustices they endure.

The story is well-written and fast-paced and appropriate for teens and older. The battle scenes include enough detail to intrigue without becoming gory. The relationships among the men depict authentic friendship and fraternal affection contrasted with selfish acquaintance. I think the story would be especially appealing to boys and young men.

I received a copy of *A Soldier Surrenders* from the author for my honest review. We are fellow members of

## **Rose says**

The title is rather self explanatory, but to add, this is a very good book, well worth reading. Camillus lived a very bad life before his conversion, and then became very holy. It shows us how we can emulate him, and try to do better, because it was so difficult for him. How can we do less?

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## **Mary Woods says**

In this brand-new edition of *A Soldier Surrenders* (previously published by Ignatius Press), Susan Peek takes us back in time to a lonely Italian road in the winter of 1570. It's here that we meet Camillus de Lellis--a giant of a young man devoted to drinking, gambling, and offering his sword as a mercenary to the highest bidder. This rough exterior conceals a soul of surprising compassion--he feels deep pity especially for the wounded and dying of the battlefield. But, as a "soldier of fortune", he carries his share of bad habits and hard luck. Despite his skill at the cards, his love of the tavern and the gaming table more often leave him penniless than not. And he bears a secret shame--a mysterious, painful wound on his leg which can't seem to be cured by ordinary doctors.

The quest for healing brings Camillus to the San Giacomo Hospital in Rome, where, empty-pocketed as usual, he reluctantly serves as a volunteer caretaker in exchange for receiving treatment of his wound. His hospital experiences increase his desire to aid the sick through personal love for each patient. Nevertheless, his raucous tavern habits and his tainted reputation as a mercenary leave him few friends among the hospital staff, with the exception of one kind-hearted fellow orderly, Curzio Lodi. But even Curzio's patience wears thin when Camillus persists in indulging his passions to drown his personal woes. At a crucial turning point of the story, Curzio berates his friend:

"You think you know so much about courage, Camillus? Well the truth is, courage comes in a lot of different forms, and God is only interested in one of them! You're not a soldier; you're not even a servant! You're nothing but a slave, Camillus! A slave to your own self-will!"

Camillus stubbornly tries to forget his best friend's chiding. Dismissed from the hospital for unruly conduct, he attempts to reenter his former life as a mercenary. But continued ill luck and the still-unhealed ulcer on his leg eventually reduce him to destitution and beggary. Finally, at the lowest point of pain and humiliation, he sees the light. He commits his noblest act as a soldier, gives up his own will, and surrenders to God's.

Having given his personal struggles into Divine hands, Camillus finds renewed direction in life. He returns to San Giacomo, where his vigor and commitment in serving the sick earn him the rank of hospital superintendent. But Camillus realizes his vocation does not end there. To fulfill his lifetime longing to minister to the dying souls of the battlefield, he enters the priesthood and founds the order of the Servants of the Sick. Their symbol: a red cross on a black cassock--the original Red Cross organization.

Mrs. Peek punctuates the spiritual drama of the plot with battles, duels, and lively dialogue. While I was a bit taken aback by the modern idiom of the narrative, her contemporary style offers a lively sketch of the boisterous, hot-tempered, and ultimately God-passionate Camillus de Lellis. He's a man we can all imagine

knowing--and loving. Applause and thanks to Susan Peek for rediscovering the life of this "saint for strugglers"!

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### **Virginia Lieto says**

Susan Peek has a knack for bringing the lives of obscure saints to the forefront. In this gem of a book, Peek enthralls us with *A Soldier Surrenders*, the Conversion of St. Camillus de Lellis. In this action-packed adventure, we follow the life of Camillus de Lellis, mercenary for the Turks, and a baptized Catholic! We see contradiction from the start. How can a Catholic fight Catholics on behalf of the Moslems? You can, if you are hungry and have no other means to support yourself.

Camillus de Lellis is a strong-willed, and stubborn young man, who thinks that all he can do is fight, gamble and drink excessively. Why would God want anything to do with the likes of Camillus de Lellis? Well, apparently, God has other designs. Things happen throughout Camillus' life, that we only come to understand why, when we reach the end of the story. Then it all comes together in an awesome way.

As I was reading the story, I kept asking myself why Camillus was so stubborn. You learn the answer, only if you read the entire book. I also could see some sense of God's calling throughout Camillus' life, and couldn't understand why he would not respond. You learn the answer, only if you read the entire book.

*A Soldier Surrenders*, the Conversion of St. Camillus de Lellis is one of the BEST conversion stories I have read. I am so glad that I got to learn about this saint. For anyone who struggles with their faith, I highly recommend reading this book. If you question your path in this life, then, by reading this book, you will learn that you are not alone. Thanks to Susan Peek, we now have a once obscure saint brought to the forefront, where he belongs. For those considering conversion to the Catholic faith, I suggest that you pray to St. Camillus de Lellis, asking him to pray for you.

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### **Steven R. McEvoy says**

This is the fourth book by Susan Peek that I have read. And in some ways it is the most powerful. I loved Saint Magnus The Last Viking, and found it very well written. And her handling of mental illness and especially PTSD in *The King's Prey: Saint Dymphna of Ireland* was incredible. And her handling of the crusades in *Crusader King: A Novel of Baldwin IV and the Crusades* was masterful. But this book really hit home for me. St. Camillus de Lellis was not a saint that I was familiar with prior to reading Peek's contribution in *Secrets: Visible & Invisible 7 Amazing Stories from Catholic Teen Books*. But the short story had a deep impact on me and this book even more so.

This book was hard to put down. But I needed to take a few breaks while reading it. As soon as I finished reading this I told my son about it and started rereading it with him. This saint messed up in nearly every way possible. Prior to his conversion if there was a top ten list of people likely not to become saints he would have been at the top of that list! He served in the Turks Army, He was in a dual and almost killed a man, he gambled away his last possessions, He was a brute, a brawler, a gambler, and more. And this story though Historical Fiction is an amazing read. It is a wonderful telling of a story of repentance and change. It is the story of friendship, repentance and change. As a man of Irish Catholic descent, I can really elate to Camillus, his struggle with his temper, and with learning to surrender to God. Temper and pride causes Camillus to



stumble and fall

This book serves to show that no matter how much a person struggles, if God is calling them, eventually they will yield and hear the call. It is well written, though aimed for a Young Adult market, it is very enjoyable to read as an adult. Over the past year I have read a few books about the history of the crusades. This book presents a very different side and is excellent for rounding out the historical picture. I can state emphatically that this book is an excellent read, and I look forward to more books in the God's Forgotten Friends Lives of Little-known Saints series by Susan Peek!

Read the review on my blog [Book Reviews and More](#) and reviews of other books by Susan Peek.

Note: This book is part of a series of reviews: 2018 Catholic Reading Plan!

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### **A.K. Frailey says**

*A Soldier Surrenders* tells the amazing tale of the conversion of Saint Camillus de Lellis. Inspiring and interesting, this book will not be easily forgotten by its readers. For my own experience, it was a wonderful opportunity to meet a great saint who, I must admit, I'd never heard of before.

The author did a laudable job of bringing Saint Camillus to life for the reader and his story to our hearts. The book centers on his conversion—one that I believe will inspire people in every walk of life. It was not a dramatic, lightning-from-heaven, instant conversion. It was a slow conversion, stretching across the length of years where God never gave up on the soul of an Italian mercenary soldier.

Camillus is far from sainthood in the beginning of the book. As a mercenary, he sells his services to the highest payer—who happens to be at one point, the Turkish sultan. The Moslem Turks were fighting the Catholic Italians and were enemies of pretty much all of Christendom. When Camillus joins the Sultan with his father, he was turning on Italy—and, in eyes of many, Christianity. He is soon forced to leave the Sultan's army, but guilt haunts him for what he's done. And the fact that he turned traitor haunts his life in many more tangible ways as well.

Camillus was a drinker, a gifted gambler who won, almost without fail, through either luck or cheating and had a temper. That was his bane throughout the years of his conversion. All in all, Camillus de Lellis, as we first meet him, is not exactly material for a saint. A stunningly beautiful thing expressed through this tale, however, is that God uses the most surprising people, the most unlikely individuals, to do his will. The tale is a transformation of a soul—from one that has stooped to the lowest form of humanity to one that achieves the highest goal, sanctity.

Even while Camillus de Lellis is a soul with numerous vices, the reader glimpses profound saving graces in this individual. His heart has infinite room for compassion, for those he sees dying about him on the battlefield, for those he meets in the squalid streets of Italy less fortunate than himself and for the sick, who perhaps first cultivate in him the inner virtues of compassion and love that Camillus finds within himself.

Repeatedly, in this slow conversion, Camillus realizes how wrong he is, but his pride and restless spirit and temper keep turning him from complete conversion of heart. He is repentant, he confesses his sins...and then somehow the world leads him away. As his friend warns him once, he has become a slave to his vices. These words from his friend, Curzio, haunt Camillus on the battle field and as he finds himself committing and

recommitting the old sins. These words are his nemesis, or rather, perhaps one of the greatest graces in his life.

Camillus must reach the end of his rope, desperation itself, before he can slowly start climbing back up toward sanctity and salvation. His pride has been taken from him. He suffers from a very painful ulcer on his leg that humiliates him. His friends turn on him. His luck at gambling seems to forsake him and he loses everything. He becomes nearly lame by the infection on his leg so he is unfit to join any army. His career as a soldier in the armies of Italy, are over. His career as a soldier for God, and a servant to the poor, especially the dying, begins.

Once his vices are stripped from him, he releases himself. He surrenders entirely to God. For the first time in his life, Camillus de Lellis truly finds joy and is finally able to uncover the potential holiness that is possible in every human heart.

One of the things I found most beautiful about this saint was his profound desire throughout his life, but especially after his conversion, to help the dying, to comfort them on their last journey. He started a religious order with the particular mission to help the poor and dying. They made the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, but also to find and care for the victims of the plague.

This book was a great read, one of the best young adult stories I've read in a long time. It drew me into the life of a very unique saint with vices that entirely fell short of his virtues. One thought I was particularly left with: God never gives up on a soul in this life. He never gave up on Saint Camillus; and he won't give up on you or me either or any soul on earth. Until the day a soul leaves this world the possibility for salvation exists.

Sanctity is a struggle—a struggle Saint Camillus had to fight for over and over and over again.

And Saint Camillus de Lellis won.

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