Saints are figures venerated in Catholic tradition and can maintain a number of origin stories with roots in either history or folklore. Especially popular as subjects during the Renaissance, a number of different saints can be found in our current “Religion, Ritual, and Performance” shows.

“Saint Francis”
St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata (ca. 1400-10) (Stern Gallery)

Born in Assisi to a wealthy family, Francis delivered sermons in the streets and as his following grew, he sought permission from Pope Innocent III to found the Franciscan Order in 1209. He is often shown wearing a monk’s robe with a waist rope which bears three knots (signifying the Order’s vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience). He is regularly depicted receiving the Stigmata, the five wounds which correspond to Christ’s after the Crucifixion.

“Saint Sebastian”
St. Sebastian (1993) (Ellen Johnson Gallery)

This is a modern reinterpretation of visual elements of the story of St. Sebastian, who is depicted in a number of other works on view at the AMAM. These images all express different aspects of Sebastian’s martyrdom—from the tender and personal to the ecstatic promise of his eternal reward. Here, the artist Ellen Garven uses twisted and bound copper tubes to evoke the Saint’s tortured body, pierced with numerous arrows.

“Saint Michael”
St. Michael in Combat with the Devil (ca. 1500) (Stern Court)

St. Michael, or the Archangel Michael was mentioned in several books of the Bible, where he defeats the Devil in the Book of Revelation (12: 7-9): “Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.” He is winged and often depicted in battle with the Devil, while wearing a chainmail coat and armed with a shield, sword, or spear.
“Saint Paul”  
Viring and Child Enthroned with Saints (1420)  
*(Stern Gallery)*

Paul is first mentioned in the New Testament and described as a balding, short, and ungainly man, and was often illustrated with these features, including a long dark beard, in Medieval and Renaissance art. He fell out of favor with the Papacy after the Counter-Reformation, as the Lutherans had adopted many of his teachings, and is seldom seen in art from Catholic countries. Paul’s attributes include a sword—said to be the weapon which ended his life—and a book or scroll, since he is noted as the author of the Epistles.

“Saint Nicholas”  
A Scene from the Legend of St. Nicholas of Bari  
*(ca 1460-70)*  
*(Stern Gallery)*

Nicholas is the Patron Saint of children, sailors, and travelers. Though from Myra (part of modern-day Turkey), he is known as Saint Nicholas of Bari, a city in Southern Italy where his remains were moved in the 11th century. Three bags of gold, which are often depicted as his attributes, were secretly given by him to a poor man who could not afford dowries for his daughters. Though Nicholas has unknown historical origins, he is now widely accepted as the prototype for Santa Claus.

“Saint Catherine”  
The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine (1502-3)  
*(Stern Gallery)*

Catherine was the youngest born to a large family of tradesmen and notaries in Siena, Italy. From a very early age she began experiencing mystical visions, during which she claimed to be in direct communication with God. It is believed that during the carnival of 1366 she experienced *mystical espousal*, or “marital union,” with Christ while undergoing one of her visions. Following this event, Catherine began working with the sick and is revered for tending to cases of extreme illness.