

SAINTS AND PRAYERS

St Francis of Assisi, Feast day: October 4

St. Francis is the founder of the Franciscan Order and he was born in Assisi, Italy 1181. As he grew up, Francis became the leader of a crowd of young people who spent their nights in wild parties. Thomas of Celano, his biographer who knew him well, said, "In other respects an exquisite youth, he attracted to himself a whole retinue of young people addicted to evil and accustomed to vice." Francis himself said, "I lived in sin" during that time.

Francis' conversion did not happen overnight. God had waited for him for twenty-five years and now it was Francis' turn to wait. Francis started to spend more time in prayer. He went off to a cave and wept for his sins. Sometimes God's grace overwhelmed him with joy. But life couldn't just stop for God. There was a business to run, customers to wait on.

His search for conversion led him to the ancient church at San Damiano. While he was praying there, he heard Christ on the crucifix speak to him, "Francis, repair my church." Francis assumed this meant church with a small c -- the crumbling building he was in. Acting again in his impetuous way, he took fabric from his father's shop and sold it to get money to repair the church. His father saw this as an act of theft -- and put together with Francis' cowardice, waste of money, and his growing disinterest in money made Francis seem more like a madman than his son. Pietro dragged Francis before the bishop and in front of the whole town demanded that Francis return the money and renounce all rights as his heir.

Francis went back to what he considered God's call. He begged for stones and rebuilt the San Damiano church with his own hands, not realizing that it was the Church with a capital C that God wanted repaired. Scandal and avarice were working on the Church from the inside while outside heresies flourished by appealing to those longing for something different or adventurous.

St. Robert Bellarmine (patron saint of canon lawyers) Feast day: September 17

Born at Montepulciano, Italy, October 4, 1542, St. Robert Bellarmine was the third of ten children. His mother, Cinzia Cervini, a niece of Pope Marcellus II, was dedicated to almsgiving, prayer, meditation, fasting, and mortification of the body.

Robert entered the newly formed Society of Jesus in 1560 and after his ordination went on to teach at Louvain (1570-1576) where he became famous for his Latin sermons. In 1576, he was appointed to the chair of controversial theology at the Roman College, becoming Rector in 1592; he went on to become Provincial of Naples in 1594 and Cardinal in 1598. This outstanding scholar and devoted servant of God defended the Apostolic See against the anti-clericals in Venice and against the political tenets of James I of England. He composed an exhaustive apologetic work against the prevailing heretics of his day. In the field of church-state relations, he took a position based on principles now regarded as fundamentally democratic - authority originates with God, but is vested in the people, who entrust it to fit rulers.

This saint was the spiritual father of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, helped St. Francis de Sales obtain formal approval of the Visitation Order, and in his prudence opposed severe action in the case of Galileo. He has left us a host of important writings, including works of devotion and instruction, as well as controversy. He died in 1621.



SAINTS AND PRAYERS

Prayer of Pope John Paul II for the World Day of Peace (Jan. 1, 2002)

"Salve, Madre santa!"

Virgin Daughter of Zion, how deeply must your Mother's heart suffer for this bloodshed!

The child you embrace has a name that is dear to the peoples of biblical religion: "Jesus," which means "God saves." So the Archangel named him before he was conceived in your womb (cf. Lk 2,21). In the face of the newborn Messiah, we recognize the face of all your children, who suffer from being despised and exploited. We recognize especially the faces of your children, to whatever race, nation or culture they may belong.

For them, O Mary, for their future, we ask you to move hearts hardened by hatred so that they may open to love and so that revenge may finally give way to forgiveness.

Obtain for us, O Mother, that the truth of this affirmation -- No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness -- be engraved on every heart. Thus the human family will be able to find the true peace, that flows from the union of justice and mercy.

Holy Mother, Mother of the Prince of Peace, help us!

Mother of Humanity and Queen of Peace, pray for us!