

**April 2**

**ON SAINT FRANCIS OF PAOLA**

**113.1 First Point**

Saint Francis of Paola had an altogether extraordinary humility, which was the reason why he never took holy orders, judging himself entirely unworthy. He also gave the name Minims to the religious of his order, wanting them to consider themselves as the least of all, with no one below them. He knew how to practice this very well himself, for he served his brothers at table and washed their feet, including even the novices. But as God usually raises up those who humble themselves,<sup>605</sup> God honored him with the gifts of miracles and of prophecy, which spread his reputation everywhere.

You have the happiness to labor for the instruction of the poor and to be engaged in a work which is esteemed and honored only by those who have a truly Christian spirit. Thank God for having placed you in so sanctifying a state, and one providing for the sanctification of others, which nevertheless has nothing attractive to others, and even gives those who labor in it frequent occasions to be humiliated.

**113.2 Second Point**

This saint had a very tender love for all his brothers and greatly encouraged them to practice this virtue because he wished charity to be the characteristic of his order and wanted very much that his religious be taught to do everything out of charity. How happy are those who apply themselves to this virtue with all possible care!

Outside of obedience, the virtue which should stand out most in community is charity and union of hearts. Since we should not be here except to bring one another to God, we should especially strive to be united in God, and to have but one and the same heart, and one and the same mind. What should incite us most to achieve this is that, as Saint John says, those who live in love live in God and God lives in them.<sup>606</sup>

Do you make yourself one with your Brothers? Do you speak to them and treat them with love? Do you not pay too much attention to your dislikes and antipathies? Deepen within yourself the spirit that in community you should live anew the spirit of the first Christians, who were all of one heart and one soul.<sup>607</sup>

**113.3 Third Point**

This saint, if one may say so, brought the practice of austerity in his order to excess. When he was thirteen, he withdrew to a deserted place where he gave himself over to fasting, to spend whole days and nights in prayer, and for a space of six years in privations that are hardly believable. As a rule he walked barefoot, slept on the ground in all kinds of weather, ate only a little bread, and drank only a little water once a day after sunset. He obliged his religious by vow never to eat anything except Lenten fare, except when ill. One must feel real hatred for one's body to treat it with so much rigor.

Shall we then complain if we live a poor life, after Jesus Christ has given us the example of such a life and after so many great saints have practiced such extreme austerities? The austerities which we read about in their lives, and which we see practiced by those whom they have left after them, should encourage us to imitate them according to the spirit of our Institute.

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Francis (1416-1507) was born at Paola in Calabria and became a hermit at a very early age, maybe as young as 15. Eventually, as a result of his reputation for holiness and wisdom, he attracted others to his way of life and founded the Minims of Saint Francis of Assisi. Minimi in Latin means the least members (of God's household). Pope Sixtus IV sent him to France at the request of King Louis XI to assist the king on his deathbed.

A Minim who had considerable influence on De La Salle was Father Barré of Rouen. The Founder consulted him on the decision to give up his patrimony. Father Barré had organized a community of women, the *Maîtresses des écoles chrétiennes et charitables du Saint-Enfant Jésus*; he also encouraged Adrien Nyel to organize a similar group of men, and sent two of his women teachers to Reims in response to a request from Canon Roland, so that Roland could start a community of women in Reims. It was this community, the Sisters of the Infant Jesus, that Roland asked De La Salle to care for as the executor of his will, thus beginning De La Salle's involvement with Adrien Nyel and the work of the Christian Schools.