

August 25

FOR THE FEAST OF SAINT LOUIS, KING OF FRANCE

160.1 First Point

Saint Louis, King of France, whom the Church honors today, was as eminent in virtue as in dignity. First of all, he had an extreme horror for sin, which his mother, a very virtuous princess, had instilled in him from the time he reached the use of reason. He always had held this sentiment so deeply in his heart that he often said he would prefer to lose his kingdom rather than commit a single mortal sin.

He even had such a great spirit of religion that, mindful of the honor he had received by being baptized at Poissy, he often called himself Louis of Poissy and signed his name that way out of esteem and respect for that sacrament.

He also heard two Masses on his knees every day, deeply penetrated by the spirit of faith. So great was this virtue in him that one day, when someone came to tell him that a child was appearing in the host at the Sainte Chapelle, he did not take a single step, saying that he did not need to see the miracle in order to believe in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, since faith alone made him believe this.

He recognized and adored Jesus Christ in the poor, and invited three of them to dine with him every day besides feeding 120 others with the same food given to his servants.

Do you have as much horror for sin and as much of the spirit of religion as this holy king? Examine yourself often on these two points, and be convinced that you will preserve your piety and procure it for your students only in so far as you fully possess these two things. Without them your soul will be like a city without walls and without fortifications, always open to the attacks of your enemies.

160.2 Second Point

Since it is mortification that supports piety, this saint's practice of it was unusual. His austerities were very extraordinary for a person of his rank. He fasted every Friday of the year, ate no meat on Wednesdays, nor often on Mondays as well. When fasting he ordinarily ate but one meal, which often consisted only of some bread and water. Every Friday, after going to confession, he took the discipline of little iron chains from the hands of his confessor.

It was in a spirit of humility and mortification that every Saturday he washed the feet of the three poor people who had eaten with him, and did this on his knees. Also one of the practices of mortification of this prince, who was so filled with the Christian spirit, was to wear clothes made of ordinary and rough material, such as coarse wool or similar cloth, in order to be able to give to the poor the money he would have spent on costly attire.

What was even more mortifying for such a great king was the patience he always had suffering everything said against him, without ever complaining or letting it disturb him, for he was mindful of what Jesus Christ had suffered for him.

The more you accept mortification, whether external or internal, especially the latter, the more you will possess the spirit of Christianity and of your state. Hence, make the practice of mortifications something usual and ordinary in your life, and spend no day without training yourselves in one mortification that you prefer and which you put into practice.

160.3 Third Point

This saint's zeal for the good of the Church and of his country was so admirable that it is difficult to be able to describe it. It was this holy zeal that led him to undertake the war against the infidels to destroy the empire of the devil in their country and to establish there the reign of Jesus Christ.

In the first journey he made to recover the Holy Land, he was made prisoner, and during the second he died of the plague. When the Saracen deputies came to Paris, he declared to them that his only desire was for them to profess the Christian religion. He built a great number of churches and monasteries, and he loved religious very much because of their piety and because they are the ones who do much to strengthen the Church.

He brought back to France a great number of relics, among others the crown of thorns of Our Lord and a large portion of the Holy Cross. He loved his subjects tenderly and after he had worked with wonderful care to procure for them peace and tranquillity, he gave them good laws and regulations to guide them to God. Before dying he gave his son instructions which are so wise and so Christian that they are able to teach kings how to govern their kingdoms in a very saintly manner.

In your work you should unite zeal for the good of the Church with zeal for the good of the state of which your disciples are beginning to be, and one day should be, perfect members. You will procure the good of the Church by making them true Christians and docile to the truths of faith and the maxims of the holy Gospel. You will procure the good of the state by teaching them how to read and write and everything else that pertains to your ministry with regard to exterior things. But piety should be joined to exterior things, otherwise your work would be of little use.

Louis (1214 - 1270) was born at Poissy and became heir to the throne of France at the age of 12 under the regency of his devout mother, Queen Blanche of Castille. At the age of 19, he married Marguerite of Provence and had numerous children by her. He was a wise ruler of his kingdom, an example of justice, mercy, simplicity, and peace. He was, however, luckless in the Crusades, defeated in the first (1250), and dying of illness in the second on August 25, 1270. His devotion to the Passion has been enshrined in the beautiful Sainte Chapelle, which he caused to be built to house the relics of the Crown of Thorns and of the True Cross.