

May 12

Blessed Francis of Siena

Francis was born in Siena in 1266. Because of his love for the Blessed Virgin he entered the Order of Servants of Mary when he was twenty-two years old, and shortly after was ordained to the priesthood.

He was noted for his charity, his preaching, and his good judgment in counselling those who came to him. He died in 1328 and his body is venerated in the Basilica of St. Mary of the Servants in Siena. Benedict XIV approved devotion to him in 1743.

From the Life of Blessed Francis of Siena by Fra Christopher of Parma (n. 6-9 14. 30: Monumenta OSM, V, pp. 24-25. 28.34)

He chose the glorious Virgin as his Mother and sole Lady



Francis chose the glorious Virgin as his special mother and Lady; he so revered her in his mind and heart that he never called her anything but Lady. He would genuflect before her image five hundred times a day. He recited the Hail! Mary and other praises of the glorious Virgin and prayed that the lily of his own virginity would never be uprooted. He fervently sought humility of heart, patience in adversity and strength to overcome the temptations of the devil. He made his flesh serve his spirit and, with plaintive cries, dashed the passions that allured him against the rock which is Christ and the glorious Virgin, his Lady. He washed away with tears and sighs those venial sins that sometimes crept into his mind. He wore a hair shirt and used the discipline.

When his mother died, he was free of worldly obligations and thought to carry out the plan in his heart. He would have retired to solitary life in service of the Creator and the glorious Virgin, his Lady, but they had determined otherwise. He had frequently pondered in his heart the words: "Flee worldly company," and the Holy Spirit gave him to understand that it was imitation of the vices of others, not contact with them, that was sinful. On the contrary, contact with people could be more meritorious if by his words and the example of his life he could save them from the wiles of the devil. Those who walked as wild beasts in the dangerous paths of the world, lost in vice through the devil's deceit, he would lead to the path of holiness.

Francis, the servant of God, like the prophets, understood that the Lord was speaking within him. Following this inspiration, he decided to enter religious life immediately. There, under obedience, with nothing of his own, he could imitate the poor Christ and the glorious Virgin. In the flower of his virginity and purity, his service to the Virgin Mother and her Son would be more pleasing. At the age of twenty-two Francis, already a servant of the Virgin, entered the Order of her Servants.

The outcome was to show how happy was his choice. Among his brothers in community there are many who bear witness to his perfection which found favor with the Lord of all virtue.

The servant of God rejoiced when he realized that Divine Grace shone forth in him. He became more fervent in serving God; he was the exclusive possession of the glorious Virgin; day and night he meditated on the law of the Lord and on how to improve in virtue. Never, except when seriously ill, would he lie down on a soft bed; even when half-dead he reclined on boards or on the

ground, placing a small cushion under his head. When sleep overcame him, day or night, he would rise immediately and run to the oratory he had erected in his cell with an image of the glorious Virgin. Over and above the required "Hours," he continually and devoutly repeated the Hail Mary and other praises of the Blessed Virgin.

After celebrating Mass (on Ascension Day, 1328), he was completely exhausted and could barely stand up. Nonetheless he had to go to preach in a town called Prisciano near Siena. He knelt before the prior and asked his blessing and the absolution of all his sins. He asked the prior to place the walking stick in his hand. The prior refused this act of profound reverence, for he knew not what had happened, and was unaware of the Lord's secret. Francis said, "Father, I do not know when I will ever again be able to ask your blessing." With his remaining strength he set out, sustained by the walking stick and a friar who accompanied him. When the servant of God had gone a stone's throw from the city gate, his strength abandoned him and he fell to his knees and said, "I love you, O Lord my strength, O God my firmaments, my refuge and my liberator". Since the Hail Mary was always on his lips he added: "Hail Mary, full of grace the Lord is with you." Then with the help of his companion, he tried to continue, obedient even unto death.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, instill in us the gifts of piety and gentleness like those of your servant, Francis. These qualities of heart made him remarkable in his devotion to the Mother of Jesus and gave him the ability to lead others to holiness. We ask through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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