

September 1

BLESSED JOAN OF FLORENCE

For Nuns and Sisters: Memorial

Joan was born in Florence. She lived during the first century of the Order. When she received the habit of the Third Order of the Servants, she pledged herself to the Virgin Mary. She lived a life of chastity and penance. Several ancient images represent Joan as one of the more distinguished blessed of the Order. Pope Leo XII confirmed the devotion to her in 1828.

From the common of saints and blessed of our Order, or from the common of virgins.

Office of Readings

SECOND READING

Choose one of the following readings.

From the Spiritual Writings of the servant of God, Maria Maddalena Starace, sister of our Order.
(Scritti, Roma, 1966, vol. I, p. 55, 73, 75-79)

Common life is the staircase of heaven

Common life is the pivot, bulwark, substance, essence and soul of religious families. The harmony of all their elements can be maintained only by the practice of the common life.

It had its origin in heaven from the Holy Trinity, God one and three; it was perfectly lived in the holy family of Nazareth, model for all Christian families; then Jesus himself organized a special form of common life when he chose the twelve apostles to announce the gospel of love. Throughout the centuries, common life has been perpetuated in the religious communities who use this term to describe the common purpose and life-style of their members.

The Catholic Church would no longer be catholic if the faithful were not united in Jesus, our head, in such a way as to create that mutual sharing of joy, prayer, merit and divine life which unites earth, purgatory, heaven and souls in every corner of the world. This unity we call the Communion of Saints. Religious life is called "heaven on earth" and it is in fact beautiful and pleasant when its demands are perfectly fulfilled; but it becomes an insupportable burden when its obligations are neglected. The spirit of common life is not acquired in a day; it is the result of determined effort and constant denial of selfishness in order to allow the triumph of God's love. He can triumph in us only after the destruction of our selfishness. It is to this end that we must always direct our efforts. To have the spirit of common life it is necessary, above all, to act with determination and repeat with sincerity in especially difficult moments and in the adversities of daily life and work: " God wills it! God is calling me! God is sending me! " In this way, rather than leaving room for human fickleness, the soul becomes more virtuous in matters both small and great. The foundation of a religious community is precisely common life, which is essentially the sharing of spiritual and material goods. Without this it has no reason to exist. Common life is the staircase that leads to heaven for those religious who observe it. How unhappy the religious who wants to leave the path of common life!

Love the life 'm common; it preserves charity, allows the divine spirit to operate, detaches us from ourselves, and unites us to God. But in order to love common life it is necessary to appreciate it for what it is, "a gift of God." To the impulse of love with which God gives us this gift, we must respond with a love which offers ourselves totally to him. From that moment we exist, live and move in God since we are one in him and united to him as closely as rays of light to their source. My dear daughters, ask of the Virgin, our Mother, an understanding of this extraordinary and most excellent gift of God and the ability to respond to it. Pray to her to obtain the true spirit of common life.

RESPONSORY See Acts 4:32; 2:46-47

V. The community of believers were of one heart and one mind; none of them ever claimed anything personally.

R. Everything was held in common.

V. They went to the temple area together every day, while in their homes they broke bread. With exultant and sincere hearts they took their meals in common, praising God and winning the approval of all the people.

R. Everything was held in common.

Alternative.

From a treatise on the instruction of virgins and disdain of the world by Saint Leander, bishop (Cap. 11-12, 15, 21, 23: BAC 321, pp. 49-50, 53-54, 59, 62-64)

Follow the path taken by the Bridegroom

Be humble as your Spouse instructs you: while being equal to the Father *he appeared in human form and humbled himself accepting even death*. He had no need to die, but in order to participate in the human condition he humbled himself accepting even death. What an extraordinary proof of humility! True God became truly human. If you truly love your Bridegroom, live as he lived and keep the example of his humility fixed in your mind.

Bear offences with patience and accept them with humility: *By patient endurance you will save your lives*, says the Lord. Rejoice when persons advance in the spiritual life and grieve for those who regress. Imitate those who advance. Help the lazy with your prayers so that they, too, can advance. Encourage them with your love in seeking and living a good life. Do not be wise in word but false in action; let your words follow your good works so that you demonstrate in fact what you teach. Be faithful to study and to prayer. Organize your time and responsibilities so that after your study you pray, and when you have prayed you can study. Alternating these two activities you will not waste your time. Study teaches you what you should ask for in prayer; after you have prayed, search again through study for what you should ask.

May you find a deep and peaceful joy of heart in God, as the Apostle says: *Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again, rejoice!* In another place he says: *The fruit of the Spirit is joy*. This joy is not mere laughter that disturbs the spirit; rather, it gives rise to the desire of heavenly quiet where you can hear the words, *Come, share your master's joy*.

I exhort you always to maintain a spiritual equilibrium. Do not become dismayed in adversity. you know well the misfortunes and the patience of job. Do not become proud in prosperity; you have read of the patriarchs who had so many riches and remained humble. You will be blessed if you give thanks always in good times as in bad and look upon both adversity and prosperity as so much passing smoke. As did your heavenly Bridegroom, avoid the honours of this world. Do not seek to appear or to be more important than others for you have read: *Anyone among you who aspires to greatness must serve the rest*. The Saviour hid himself when the crowd wanted to make him king. How could he have accepted a human kingdom when he was destined to reign forever with the Father? Because he had come to teach humility, he refused human honours. He whom heavenly and earthly beings serve made himself poor for mortals so that he could enrich them with his poverty. You, then, must follow the path taken by your Spouse and tirelessly follow your heavenly Guide.

What more can I say when you already have a rule which you follow? Reflect on the virginity and the poverty of Mary who was so rich in the Lord that she was worthy to become his Mother; but she was so poor in material goods that at the moment of giving birth she was left without assistance and her lodgings were so miserable that a manger had to serve as a cradle. Joseph her spouse was a just and poor man; he earned his food and clothing through his own work as a carpenter as is read in the Gospel. You have examples to follow. Do not expose yourself to the dangers of riches: *Those*

who want to be rich are falling into temptation and a trap. They are letting themselves be captured by foolish and harmful desires which drag them down to ruin and destruction. Whoever loves God will keep far away from these things.

In the end, riches will come to those who reject them rather than those who seek them. Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be given to you besides.

RESPONSORY

V. May the virgin be holy.

R. Let truth be in her heart.

V. May her union with God be nourished with fasting, reading, prayer and work.

R. Let truth be in her heart.

PRAYER

O God, by your grace and the austerity of her life, Joan remained faithful to her consecrated love for Jesus. Grant that we, by her prayer and example, may experience conversion of heart so that we may love and serve you above all things. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.