

2 April: St Francis de Paola

This Francis was born of humble parents at Paola, a town in Calabria, about the year of our Lord 1416. His parents, who had long been childless, obtained him, after making a vow, by the prayers of blessed Francis. While he was yet a lad, the love of God moved him to withdraw into a desert place, where he lived for six years, hardly as to the body, but sumptuously in meditation on things heavenly. Nevertheless, when the fame of his holy life was noised abroad, and many betook themselves to him, that they might learn godliness, he was drawn out of the desert by love to his neighbour, and built a church near Paola, wherein he laid the first foundations of his Order.

In his words there was a wonderful charm he kept his virginity always inviolate he was so great a lover of lowliness that he used to call himself the last of all, and would that his disciples should be called the Minimi, which is, being interpreted, the Least of the brethren. His raiment was coarse; he went always bare-footed; and he slept on the ground. The extreme smallness of the amount of food which he took was extraordinary. He ate only once a day, and that after sunset. Then he took only bread and water, with scarcely any of such condiment as is allowed in Lent. He bound his disciples by a fourth vow, added to those of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, to observe the same rule of eating as himself.

It was the will of God to make the holiness of His servant manifest by many miracles. The most notorious of these is that on one occasion when some seamen refused to take him over the Straits of Messina, he spread his cloak upon the sea, and crossed over on it with his companion. In the spirit of prophecy he foretold many things to come. Louis XI, King of France, held him in great worship, and bade him to his court. At last, at Tours, in the ninety-first year of his age, and the 1507th of our salvation, he departed hence to be ever buried for eleven days after his death, but it not only showed no signs of corruption but even gave forth a sweet savour. Pope Leo X caused him to be numbered among the Saints.