

Francis of Paola

Name: St. Francis of Paola

Dates: March 27, 1416 – April 2, 1507

Location: Kingdom of Naples

Feast Day: April 2

Francis of Paola, was born March 27, 1416 in the southern Italian Province of Cosenza, Calabria. His parents, Vienna da Fuscaldo and Giacomo d'Alessio were poor but virtuous people. They tried for many years to bear children; they prayed for the intercession of St. Francis of Assisi. After many years they finally bore a child and named him in honor of St. Francis of Assisi. As a baby, Francis suffered from an infection in one of his eyes which endangered his sight. Again, his parents prayed to St. Francis of Assisi to help their son. They made a vow that if their son should wear the "little habit" (a tradition to assist in the healing process) of St Francis of Assisi he would be sent to the friaries for a year. Francis recovered and at the age of 13 he entered a friary of the Franciscan Order. Two years later he became a hermit near a secluded cave on the sea coast. Here he remained alone in prayer and solitude for six years. In 1436, two others joined him in his retreat. Nearby neighbors built them three cells and a chapel and a priest from the parish church would come by to say Mass; thus, the beginning of a community that is considered the foundation of the Hermits of St. Francis of Assisi, later renamed the Minim Frairs. The Minim Frairs vow poverty, chastity, obedience and abstinence from meat and other animal products. Francis and his Frairs observed this strenuous diet year-round with hope to revive the Lentin tradition of fasting that so many Roman Catholics ceased to practice by the 15th century. During the next fifteen years the number of hermits grew; so, with the permission of the Archbishop of Cosenza, Francis built his first monastery and church. Francis founded several new monasteries in Southern Italy and Sicily. At the request of dying King Luis XI of France, Pope Sixtus II ordered Francis to France. On his way there, Francis cured many sick people but was unable to cure the king. Nevertheless, he stayed by his side until the king's death. So moved by Francis kindness, Luis' son and successor befriended Francis and endowed several monasteries for the Minims. Francis spent the rest of his life at the monastery of Plessis, France, which Charles built for him. On Holy Thursday, 1507, Francis gathered his hermits around him and asked that they remain true to themselves. The next day, Good Friday, he called them together once again and appointed a Vicar General; then he received last rites and asked to have the Passion according to St. John read aloud to him. He died during the reading on April 2, 1507 at 91 years of age. Francis, unlike most founders of men's religious orders, was never ordained a priest.



Saint Francis of Paola was canonized 1519 by Pope Leo X. He is the patron saint of boatmen, mariners, and naval officers. His feast day is celebrated April 2.