



Feast Day: January 22

Deacon and martyr. Born at Huesca, Spain, he became a deacon and served St. Valerius at Saragossa until their martyrdom at Valencia during the persecutions under Emperor Diocletian (r. 284-305). St. Valerius was exiled, but Vincent was cruelly tortured because he would not surrender the holy books. He converted the warden of the prison and then died. He was honored by Sts. Augustine, Pope Leo I, and Prudentius, and is considered the patron saint of vinedressers in some regions of Spain.

St. Francis deSales was born to a noble family at Chateau de Sales in the Kingdom of Savoy near Geneva, Switzerland on August 21, 1567. He was a Bishop and Doctor of the Church.



Francis was both intelligent and gentle. From a very early age, he desired to serve God. He knew for years he had a vocation to the priesthood, but kept it from his family. His father wanted him to enter a career in law and politics.

In 1580, Francis attended the University of Paris, and at 24-years-old, he received his doctorate in law at the University of Padua.

All the time, he never lost his passion for God. He studied theology and practiced mental prayers, but kept quiet about his devotion. To please his father, he also studied fencing and riding.

God made his will clear to Francis one day while he was riding. Francis fell from his horse three times that day. Every time he fell, the sword came out of the scabbard, and every time it came out, the sword and scabbard came to rest on the ground in the shape of the Christian cross.

After much discussion and disagreement from his father, Francis was ordained to the priesthood and elected provost of the Diocese of Geneva, in 1593, by the Bishop of Geneva.

During the time of the Protestant reformation, Francis lived close to Calvinist territory. He decided he should lead an expedition to bring the 60,000 Calvinists back to the Catholic Church.

For three years, he trudged through the countryside, had doors slammed in his face and rocks thrown at him. In the bitter winters, his feet froze so badly they bled as he tramped through the snow.

Francis' unusual patience kept him working. No one would listen to him, no one would even open their door. So, Francis found a way to get under the door. He wrote out little pamphlets to explain true Catholic doctrine and slipped them under the doors. This is one of the first records we have of religious tracts being used to communicate the true Catholic faith to people who had fallen away from the Church.

The parents wouldn't come to him, so Francis went to the children. When the parents saw how kind he was as he played with the children, they began to talk to him.

By the time Francis returned home, it is believed he brought 40,000 people to the Catholic Church. He forged wonderful alliances with Pope Clement VIII and Henry IV of France, and in 1601 Francis joined Henry IV on a diplomatic mission. He was to give Lenten sermons at the Chapel Royal. Henry grew attached to Francis and saw him as a "rare bird" who was devout, knowledgeable and a gentleman.

In 1602, Bishop Granier died and Francis was consecrated Bishop of Geneva, although he continued to reside in Annecy. He only set foot in the city of Geneva twice -- once when the Pope sent him to try to convert Calvin's successor, Beza, and another when he traveled through it.

In 1604, Francis took one of the most important steps in his life -- the step toward extraordinary holiness and mystical union with God.

In Dijon, Francis saw a widow listening closely to his sermon -- a woman he had seen already in a dream. Jane de Chantal was a dedicated Catholic Christian on her own, as Francis was, but it was only when they became friends they began to become saints.

Jane wanted him to take over her spiritual direction, but, not surprisingly, Francis wanted to wait. "I had to know fully what God himself wanted. I had to be sure that everything in this should be done as though his hand had done it." Jane was on a path to mystical union with God and, in directing her, Francis was compelled to follow her and become a mystic himself.

Years after working with Jane, he made up his mind to form a new religious community. In 1610, he founded The Order of Visitation.

Francis was overworked and often ill because of his constant load of preaching, visiting, and instruction -- even catechizing a deaf man so he could take first Communion. He believed the first duty of a bishop was spiritual direction and wrote to Jane, "So many have come to me that I might serve them, leaving me no time to think of myself. However, I assure you that I do feel deep-down-within-me, God be praised. For the truth is that this kind of work is infinitely profitable to me." For him active work did not weaken his spiritual inner peace but strengthened it.

He gave spiritual direction to most people through letters, which attested to his remarkable patience. "I have more than fifty letters to answer. If I tried to hurry over it all, I would be lost. So, I intend neither to hurry nor to worry. This evening, I shall answer as many as I can. Tomorrow I shall do the same and so I shall go on until I have finished."

During this time, it was wrongly thought that achieving real holiness of life was a task reserved for only for the clergy and those in religious life, and not for lay men and women. In addition, that only contemplatives, people who withdraw from active participation in the world, could really achieve holiness.

Francis insisted that every Christian was called to holiness and sanctity, lived within their own state in life. In holding that belief, he reflected the teaching of Jesus and the early Church Fathers. Francis laid the groundwork for the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on what is now called the universal call to holiness. It reaffirms the teaching of Jesus and the early Church that every Baptized Christian is called to sanctity, no matter what their career or state in life. In every career and state in life, Christians can become more and more like Jesus Christ. That is, after all, what holiness really means.

Francis gave spiritual direction to lay people who were living real lives in the real world. He had proven with his own life that people could grow in holiness while involved in a very active occupation. He also recognized that Christian marriage and family life is itself a call to holiness. His most famous book, INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE, was written for ordinary lay people in 1608, not just the clergy and religious. Written originally as letters, it became an instant success all over Europe -- though some clergy rejected the notion that lay men and women could achieve holiness in the experience of their daily life. Some tore it up because Francis encouraged dancing and jokes!

For Francis, the love of God was like romantic love. He said, "The thoughts of those moved by natural human love are almost completely fastened on the beloved, their hearts are filled with passion for it, and their mouths full of its praises. When it is gone, they express their feelings in letters, and can't pass by a tree without carving the name of their beloved in its bark. Thus, to those who love God can never stop thinking about him, longing for him, aspiring to him, and speaking about him. If they could, they would engrave the name of Jesus on the hearts of all humankind."

The key to love of God was prayer.

"By turning your eyes on God in meditation, your whole soul will be filled with God. Begin all your prayers in the presence of God."

For busy people living in the world, he advised, "Retire at various times into the solitude of your own heart, even while outwardly engaged in discussions or transactions with others and talk to God."

The test of prayer was a person's actions.

"To be an angel in prayer and a beast in one's relations with people is to go lame on both legs." He believed the worst sin was to judge someone or to gossip about them. Even if we say we do it out of love we're still doing it to look better ourselves. We should be as gentle and forgiving with ourselves as we should be with others.

As he became older and more ill he said, "I have to drive myself but the more I try the slower I go." He wanted to be a hermit but he was more in demand than ever. The Pope needed him, then a

princess, then Louis XIII. "Now I really feel that I am only attached to the earth by one foot..." He died on December 28, 1622, after giving a nun his last word of advice: "Humility."

St. Francis de Sales was beatified on January 8, 1661 and canonized on April 19, 1665 by Pope Alexander VII.

He is often featured with the Heart of Jesus and a Crown of Thorns.

In 1923, Pope Pius XI named St. Francis de Sales the patron saint of Catholic writers and the Catholic press because of the tracts and books he wrote. He is also the patron saint of the deaf, journalists, adult education, and the Sisters of St. Joseph. His feast day is celebrated on **January 24.**

Saints Timothy and Titus were two of St. Paul's favorite and most trusted disciples.

Timothy had a Greek father and a Jewish mother named Eunice. His grandmother, Lois, was the first to become Christian in the family. Timothy was a convert of St. Paul around the year 47 and later joined his apostolic work. He is the recipient of St. Paul's Epistles to Timothy in the Gospel. He was with the great Apostle when the church of Corinth was founded and worked with him for fifteen years.

St. Paul sent Timothy on difficult missions, often to face disturbances at churches he had just established, and was installed by Paul as his representative to the church of Ephesus.

Timothy was relatively young for the work he was doing as we read in Tim. 4:12, "Let no one have contempt for your youth," and that he suffered with his health when we read in Tim. 5:23 "Stop drinking only water, but have a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent illnesses."

Timothy was with St. Paul in Rome during his house arrest, and at some point was in prison himself. Around the age of eighty he tried to halt a pagan procession and was beaten and stoned to death.



Titus was Greek and a convert from paganism; he is mentioned in several of the Pauline epistles.

He is seen as a peacemaker, administrator and great friend of the Apostle Paul. When St. Paul was having trouble with the community at Corinth, Titus was the bearer of his severe letter and with tact, firmness and charity succeeded in smoothing things out, which gave St. Paul great joy.

St. Paul charged Titus with the administration of the Christian community in the Isle of Crete and instructed him to organize the faithful, correct abuses and appoint presbyter-bishops. There is no record of his death.



St. Angela Merici was an Italian religious educator and founder of the Ursulines whose deep prayer life and relationship with the Lord bore the fruit of mystical encounters with God. She was born on March 21, 1474 in Desenzano, a small town on the shore of Lake Garda in Lombardy.

At just 10-years-old, Angela and her older sister became orphans and went to live with their uncle in Salo. There they led a quiet and devout Catholic Christian life. After the untimely death of her sister, Angela was saddened by the fact that she had not had the opportunity to receive her last

Sacraments and was concerned for her sister's eternal salvation.

Angela was inspired by the Holy Spirit to dedicate herself to the Lord and to give her life in service to the Church to help everyone grow closer to the Lord. Still filled with grief, she prayed for God to reveal the condition of her deceased sister's soul. In a vision, she learned her sister was in Heaven with the company of saints. She became increasingly more devout and joined the Third Order of St. Francis where she also pledged to remain a consecrated virgin, forsaking marriage to one man to be married to the Lord and His Church.

When Angela was 20-years-old, her uncle died and she returned to Desenzano. She found that around her hometown there were many young girls who had no education and no hope. Her heart was moved. She also became distressed by their ignorance and upset at the parents who had not educated them.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Angela became convinced there was great need for a better way of teaching these young girls. So, she opened her own home to them and began to teach them herself. She devotedly taught them the Catholic Christian faith. By her example and instruction, she taught them to how to pray and participate in the sacramental life of the Church. She evangelized and catechized these young girls, opening them up to the life of grace.

Another vision from the Lord revealed to Angela that she was to found an institution with other consecrated virgins to further devote their lives toward the religious training of young girls. These women had little money and no power, but were bound together by their dedication to education and commitment to Jesus Christ and service to His Church.

Living in their own homes, the girls met for prayer and classes where Angela reminded them, "Reflect that in reality you have a greater need to serve [the poor] than they have of your service."

Angela's charming nature and natural leadership qualities made this a successful endeavor. She was so successful she accepted an invitation from the neighboring town, Brescia, to establish a similar school there.

In 1524, she eagerly took on the opportunity to travel to the Holy Land. During the journey, she was suddenly struck with blindness while on the island of Crete. This didn't stop her though; she continued the journey with as much enthusiasm as she would have if she had her vision. She made the entire pilgrimage and visited the sacred shrines. On the journey back home, her sight was miraculously restored while she was praying before a crucifix in the same place where she had become blind. The Lord showed Angela through this experience that she must never shut her eyes to the needs she saw around her ? to not shut her heart to God's call.

During the Jubilee year in 1525, Angela traveled to Rome to gain the special grace of the plenary indulgence offered to all Christian pilgrims. Pope Clement VII had heard of Angela and her great holiness. He noted her wonderful success as a religious teacher for young girls and invited her to stay in Rome. Angela was humble, disliked publicity and kindly declined the generous offer.

Though she turned him down, perhaps the pope's request gave her the inspiration or the push to make her little group more formal. Although it was never recognized formally as a religious order in her lifetime, Angela's Company of Saint Ursula, or the Ursulines, was the first group of women

religious to work outside of the cloister and became the first teaching order of women in the Catholic Church.

On November 25, 1535, Angela gathered together 12 young virgins and laid down the foundation for the Order of the Ursulines at a small house near the Church of St. Afra in Brescia with Angela's Company of Saint Ursula, under the patronage of St. Ursula.

Angela's goal was to elevate family life through Christian education for women, the future wives and mothers. The community she founded was different than many of the religious orders of women which existed in her day. She believed it was important to teach the girls in their own homes with their own families. One of her favorite sayings was, "Disorder in society is the result of disorder in the family."

Though the women in the community wore no special religious habit and took no formal vows, Angela wrote a Rule of Life for those who lived and served in the community of women. They did pledge to live a life of consecrated celibacy, poverty and obedience. They lived this Rule of Life within their own homes.

This was the first group of consecrated women to work outside of a formal cloister or convent in her day and became the first teaching order of women in the Catholic Church. The community existed as what is called a "secular institute" until years after Angela's death.

The Ursulines opened both schools and orphanages and in 1537, Angela was elected "Mother and Mistress" of the group. Her Rule was officially approved by Pope Paul III in 1544 and the Ursulines became a recognized religious community of women with a teaching ministry.

Before her death, Angela reassured her Sisters who were afraid to lose her in death: "I shall continue to be more alive than I was in this life, and I shall see you better and shall love more the good deeds which I shall see you doing continually, and I shall be able to help you more."

St. Angela Merici died on January 27, 1540. Clothed in the habit of a Franciscan tertiary, Angela was buried in the Church of St. Afra in Brescia.

St. Angela Merici was beatified on April 30, 1768 by Pope Clement XIII and canonized May 24, 1807 by Pope Pius VII.

Angela is often attributed with a cloak and ladder.

She is the patron saint of sickness, disabled and physically challenged people, and those grieving the loss of parents. Her feast day is celebrated on January 27.

In Her Footsteps:

Take a look around you. Instead of just driving or walking without paying attention today, open your eyes to the needs you see along the way. What people do you notice who need help but who are not being helped? What are their true needs? Make a commitment to help them in some way.

Prayer:

Saint Angela, you were not afraid of change. You did not let stereotypes keep you from serving. Help us to overcome our fear of change in order to follow God's call and allow others to follow theirs.
Amen