

A STUDY OF “THE SAINTS THROUGH THE CENTURIES”

By Richard Thornton

SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI (1696-1787) – EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Saint Alphonsus vowed early to never waste a moment of his life, and he lived that way for over 91 years. Declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius IX in 1871.

At the age of 16, Saint Alphonsus graduated from the University of Naples with Doctorate Degrees in Civil and Canon Law. Following his father’s will he became a lawyer and before he was 20, he was regarded as one of the most gifted lawyers in the Kingdom of Naples.

On August 28, 1723, Saint Alphonsus went to an act of charity by visiting the sick in the hospital for incurables. Suddenly he found himself surrounded by a mysterious light; the building seemed to rock, and an interior voice said: “Leave the world and give thyself to Me”. Saint Alphonsus left the hospital and went to the Church of the Redemption of Captives. Here before the statue of our Lady, he made a solemn vow to consecrate his life solely to God.

His work as a lawyer, despite its success, did not satisfy him at the deepest levels of his heart and soul. Saint Alphonsus left the legal profession to enter the Priesthood. He was ordained in 1726 and he set out to dedicate himself completely to the service of the poor and most abandoned. He sought others who were called as he was, and adopted a style of ministry to “mission among the people” – and so began the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, commonly known as the Redemptorist.

Saint Alphonsus appreciated how people were to express their feelings through song. He became a gifted musician and composer. He wrote many popular hymns and shared them with people in Parish Missions. Redemptorists today still follow the example of their founder. Their message, announcing the abundance of God's love, is enriched by the spiritual songs they sing. He was a popular preacher and well received. His sermons were so simple so everyone including children could understand what he said.

Saint Alphonsus was a prolific writer. He wrote for the people and many turned to his spiritual writing for he wrote in a way that was understandable to anyone with a basic education. Especially on cold winter evenings in his time, the people in the villages often gathered around a fire in someone's home. Someone read stories about the Gospels or the lives of the saints, things that nourished their faith and helped them to pray. Saint Alphonsus' works were frequently their choices.

In the course of his long life, Saint Alphonsus authored more than 100 books, including his most beloved: VISITS TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT, THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF GOD, and THE GLORIES OF MARY.

Saint Alphonsus was canonized in 1839 and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1871. He was recognized as a Patron of Confessors and Moral Theologians in 1950. He is the only moral theologian whose opinion the Roman Catholic Church has said we can follow on moral issues.

Pope John Paul II described Saint Alphonsus as a "close friend of the people...a missionary who went in search of the most abandoned souls...a founder who wanted a group which would make a radical option in favor of the lowly...a Bishop whose house was open to all...a writer who focused on what would truly be of benefit to people".