

FRANCIS OF THE CHILD JESUS (1544-1604) Venerable (D)

Known in the world as Francis Pascual Sanchez, Francis was born at Villapalacios (Albacete,, Spain) in 1544. His youth, marked by privations, was spent as a shepherd. When he was twenty years old he moved to Alcalá de Henares, where he found work in the hospital of Antezana. Here he performed wonders of charity, confirmed at times by miracles, especially by means of his devotion to the Child Jesus, Whom he had chosen as his procurator and in Whose name he begged for alms and help. This extraordinary intimacy with the Holy Child won for him the name of Francis of the Child Jesus, which he kept as his religious name. It was the name, too, by which the kings and the nobles of Spain, who loved and venerated him, knew him. He was divinely inspired to become a Discalced Carmelite, but had to overcome the repeated opposition of the city of Alcalá and of Philip II himself, who twice obtained for him from Rome a dispensation from his vow to become a religious. On April 12, 1598, at Madrid, he received the habit as a lay brother and made his profession on April 13 of the following year.

At the request of the court, he was sent to Valenza, where he was able to found — as he had done at Alcalá — with the help of the municipal authorities, the house of St. Gregory for repentant women (1600). In this venture he was supported by the archbishop, St. John de Ribera, who had know him earlier at Madrid and who venerated him as a saint. The archbishop brought Francis along on his pastoral visits, during which Francis taught catechism and worked wonders. He saved Valenza from pestilence, he supported many pious works and set up a «customs-house of the Child Jesus», that is, a wardrobe and storehouse in which he collected necessities for the poor. In Dec. of 1603 he was called back to Madrid by obedience; but because

of the continual affluence of people he was shortly thereafter transferred by his superiors to the secluded novitiate of Pastrana (Guadalajara), from which he was transferred to the «desert» of Bolarque for the same reason. His superiors did not look favorably on his popularity and on his reputation for holiness and miracles. But here too he was besieged by crowds of people, go that he had to return to Pastrana and, eventually, to Madrid, followed everywhere by the throngs. In obedience to his superiors, he sought to free himself from the faithful, and prepared himself for death by prayer and penance. He died in saintly fashion on Dec. 26, 1604, during the feast days of the Child Jesus.

His exequies in Madrid, Valenza and Alcalá were distinguished by graces and miracles, which induced St. John de Ribera to insist upon the initiation of the cause of beatification. The saint himself testified at the informative process, at which he revealed the intimacy of ideals that bound him in holiness to Francis. The virtues of the humble lay brother, who always opposed the desires of de Ribera who wanted him to become a priest, were recognized by Pope Clement XIII on Jan. 1, 1769 (see *Analecta Juris Pontificii*, ser. XX, col. 11-12).

Venerable Francis shone above all in his humility and charity; there was no work of mercy to which he did not dedicate himself, and sometimes with advanced intuitions and methods that could in his time seem bold, and were therefore attacked. However, his humility was joined with a fortitude and constancy that were born of an unshakeable faith and hope in God, Who multiplied miracles at his hands. His spirituality, based on prayer and confidence, is wholly enlivened by this spirit of charity, which, just as it made him zealous for the salvation of souls, made him tireless in seeking methods and forms of charity and social help. His characteristic is his extraordinary devotion to the Child Jesus, of Whom Francis remains one of the greatest clients and one of the most convinced and enthusiastic apostles.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Jose de Jesus Maria, *Historia de la vida y virtudes del ven. fray F. del Niño Jesus*, Uclés 1624: altre edd.: Segovia 1638; Madrid 1670; Ital. vers. *Vita del ven. fr. F del Bambino. Gesù* Brescia 1629; Genova 1634; other versions: French, Paris, 1627; Lille, 1630 Paris 1647; Latin, Cologne, 1628; Flemish, Brussels, 1674. Eustachio di S. Maria Breve *notizia della vita, virtu e doni soprannatura. It del ven. Servo di Dio il fratello fr. F. del Bambino Gesù. . raccolta da pocessi autentici*, Rome 1717; *Positio... de virtutibus* Rome 1730; Ignacio del Niño Jesús, *Compendio historico de la vida del ven. Fray F.*, Valencia 1806 Albert de l'Enfant Jesus, *Un pauvre, ami des pauvres et des riches, le ven. fr. F.*, Bruges 1908; Silverio, *Historia VIII*, pp. 365-:99; *Heliodoro del Niño Jesus, Apostol y limosnero, ven. hermano Francisco del Niño Jesús*, Avila 1969.

Valentine Macca