

FROM THE PASTOR
OCTOBER 22, 2023
TWENTY NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

SAINT OF THE MONTH - ST. FRANCIS BORGIA

As we know, each day we keep the commemorations (Solemnities, Feasts, or Memorials) of the saints. For example, most people know that March 17th is the memorial St. Patrick's Day, and that March 19th is the Solemnity of St. Joseph. Many know that February 3rd is St. Blaise Day. On October 10th we keep the memorial of St. Francis Borgia. Although many may be familiar with his family name, most are unaware who this great saint was. He was the third Father General of the Jesuit Order, after St. Ignatius himself (the founder of the Jesuits) and the saintly Father Diego Laynez. And yet he is largely unknown. Who was this great saint?

St. Francis Borgia was a son of the well-known Borgia family. We know the name in its Italian form, but they were originally Spanish, and the name was *Borja*. We know that the Jesuits have been great educators since their founding. Frequently their schools are named after the saints of the order. Thus, we know many schools' names *Loyola, Canisius, Xavier, Regis, Gonzaga, etc.* But we will never hear of a Borgia Prep. It is probably because the family, like every family, had good and bad members. But the Borgias had either saints or criminals!

St. Francis Borgia was the Duke of Gandia. In Spain, this is the third highest ranking member of the Court, after the King and the heir who is styled the Prince of the Asturias. In fact, even in modern Spanish, should someone act like a *big shot*, others will tease them and say, *Who do you think you are, the Duke of Gandia?*

Because St. Francis was so highly placed it was he who accompanied the body of the Empress Isabel, the wife of Charles V, from Madrid to the royal vault in Granada. The Empress was known as the most beautiful woman in Europe. But upon the arrival of the funeral cortege in Granada two weeks later, the coffin was opened so Francis could identify the body. As he looked at the body of the most beautiful woman in Europe, and saw its wretched decay, he immediately was converted from his wealth and attachment to earthly things. He renounced his title as Duke of Gandia, giving it to his oldest son, and sought entrance into the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). There he was forced to practice humility, by begging for bread in the Plaza Mayor in Madrid. His Jesuit superiors were trying to detach him from the honors of the world which he had so enjoyed. There people saw the once mighty Duke of Gandia begging for bread. Some refused to believe that it was really him.

As the third Father General of the Jesuits he established the Roman College in Rome (now the Gregorian University) and sent missionaries to Poland, Mexico, Peru, and the Indies. He established the Spanish mission to England by which priests would go to that country and secretly administer the sacraments. Many were martyred, like St. Edmund Campion.

O Blessed Francis, obtain for us humility. Instill in us a sense of the vanity of the honors and the false pleasures of this world!

***In Jesus and Mary,
Monsignor James F. Pereda***