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Saint Francis De Geronimo

SAINT OF THE DAY	11_05_2024
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“Return to Christ!”, Saint Francis De Geronimo (1642-1716) admonished during his missions in the streets of Naples. This famous preacher had the gift of prophecy and several miracles were attributed to him during his lifetime.

The first-born of 11 children, four of whom became religious, Francis was born into a wealthy family in the region of Apulia, in southern Italy. From his childhood he showed great Christian piety. His biographers report a prodigy performed at an early age and known as the “miracle of the bread”. One day he had been given money to buy bread but he gave it to the poor instead. On his return home, his mother reproached him. He answered calmly: “Mother, look in the pantry and you will see whether the Lord will let us lack what we need today”. The woman opened the pantry and noticed that there was an abundance of fresh, fragrant bread.

At the age of ten he obtained permission from his parents to join the community of the Theatine Fathers

, where he was nicknamed “angel” for his purity and charity. In 1665 he moved to Naples. Here he obtained a degree in canon and civil law, deepened his theological studies, received priestly ordination and became a Jesuit. Apart from some short missions and a period of three years in Lecce, Apulia, he spent the rest of his life in Naples. In the heart of the Kingdom of Naples the contrast between the splendour of the noble palaces and the degradation of the slums was striking. Therefore, when in 1675 Francis completed his studies and asked his superiors to send him off as a missionary to the Indies, he was told: “Your Indies will be Naples”.

The saint carried out his apostolate by preaching in the squares and in the streets, trying to communicate his love for Jesus and Mary. He devoted himself to converting prostitutes, visiting prisoners, and alleviating the sufferings of the poor and the sick. He encouraged devotion among the Neapolitans to Saint Cyrus, the ancient Egyptian martyr, carrying with him some relics of the saint, with which he would bless the sick. Healings were numerous and many thought that Francis used the relics of Saint Cyrus to humbly hide his own gifts as a miracle worker. He was very attentive to the Sacraments and for every third Sunday of the month he multiplied his efforts for general Communion: he would prepare people's hearts during his open-air sermons, and exhort them to go to a church called *Chiesa del Gesù*, where many other priests were ready to hear confessions.

Prophecy was another of the graces with which the Lord blessed him. One day a married couple, friends of his, asked him to bless their son. Francis took the child in his arms and exclaimed, “This child will live to a very old age; he won’t die before his nineties. He will be a bishop and a saint and will do great things for Jesus Christ”. The little one he had blessed was Alfonso Maria de' Liguori (1696-1787). It was the mother of the latter, Anna Cavalieri, who told the story of this prophecy to Father Antonio Maria Tannoia, the first great biographer of Saint Alphonsus. Saint Alphonsus died at the age of ninety years and ten months, was bishop of Sant'Agata de' Goti, founded the congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer and for his theological science is venerated as a Doctor of the Church. Thus, Saint Francis De Geronimo's prophecy was manifested.