

Saint of the Month for March 2013

(A monthly series compiled by Tom Quinlan)

Saint Frances of Rome, Religious Saturday, March 9

Saint Frances is a saint who had several major roles in life, including wife, mother, and founder of a religious order. She was born in Rome in 1384 at the beginning of the Great Schism of the West, which caused her great grief and adversely affected the fortunes of her family. (This was not the Schism of 1054, which yielded the Orthodox Churches, which are not in communion with the pope, but rather the period when there were two (and for a time, three) contenders for the chair of St. Peter.) Her parents were of noble birth and ample means, and the child was brought up in the midst of luxury but in a pious family. At eleven years of age this precocious girl asked her parents to become a nun, but she was told no in unambiguous terms. A suitable match was arranged, and she was married at thirteen, somewhat less unusual then than now!

She found married life rather difficult, but she did her best to please her husband and her parents-in-law. She found a surprising friendship in her new sister-in-law, Vannoza, who confided that she also would have preferred a life of retirement and prayer, but who had become the wife of Frances's husband's brother. This friendship was very close, and lasted until Frances died. The two young wives moved to live a perfect life under a common rule. Plainly dressed, they visited the poor of Rome and ministered to their wants. The two husbands, being devoted to them, raised no objections to their charities. Frances possessed to an extraordinary degree the power of attracting the love and admiration of those who came in contact with her.

Frances gave birth to three children, two of whom died before her. She used her considerable energy to care for them along with her husband and the poor. She was zealous in the performance of every household duty, and said "A married woman must often leave God at the altar to find Him in her household care."

Civil war convulsed Italy, and Frances spent much effort trying to assist those suffering from the plague and starvation. When much of the family wealth was spent, she and Vannoza began to beg for food for the poor; Frances then got permission from her father-in-law to sell her jewels, and she wore only very plain clothes.

The family lost much property and suffered greatly as the forces of the antipope struggled against those loyal to the legitimate pope, and they suffered banishment.

Eventually the political tide shifted, and the family fortunes recovered a bit.

Late in life Frances was able to form a group of women living in the world and who were not bound by any vows but promised to care for the poor. This group was initially called the Oblates of Mary, but was later called the Oblates of Tor de' Specchi (a place name).

Frances died in 1440, and was canonized in 1608.

Her commemoration is given the rank of Optional Memorial. (**Magnificat**, March 2013; **Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition** (Scepter Publishers); Butler's **Lives of the Saints**, 2nd edition (Ave Maria Press))

Collect from the Mass of St. Frances of Rome:

O God, who have given us in Saint Frances of Rome
a singular model of both married and monastic life,
grant us perseverance in your service,
that in every circumstance of life we may see and follow you.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. (**Roman Missal, Third Edition**)

Not all of us have so many roles in life, but we are called to be open to the will of God, to try to understand what that will is at various times in life, and to carry it out as best we can. Saint Frances of Rome, pray for us!