

Redemptorist Saints

St. Alphonsus Ligouri, Founder of the Redemptorists

St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori Saint, Doctor of the Church, Moral Theologian



Feast Day: August 1

Alphonsus Maria de Liguori was born in 1696 near Naples, Italy, the son of a captain in the Royal Navy and a very devoted mother from a noble family in the city. His parents provided him with an exceptional education in philosophy, literature, and the arts. He was 16 when he was awarded doctorates of civil and canon law. When he was 18, like many nobles, he joined the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mercy with whom he cared for the sick at the hospital for “incurables,” washing afflicted bodies, feeding the helpless, changing bedclothes and devoting himself to works of mercy and compassion. Following his father’s will he became a lawyer and before he was 20, he was regarded as one of the most gifted lawyers working in the kingdom of Naples. This work, however, despite its success, did not satisfy him at the deepest levels of his

heart and soul. After losing what was the most important court case he had ever taken on, Alphonsus left the legal profession to enter the priesthood, much to the disappointment of his father. He was ordained in 1726. Christ’s claim on the heart of Alphonsus was absolute and irresistible. As a young priest he worked himself to the point of exhaustion. Caring for the poor, wherever his journey took him, was the hallmark of his calling. In 1732, Alphonsus realized he could no longer be comfortable in his role of popular preacher living apart from the poor. So, leaving his family and his dearest friends, 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 Redemptorists. During a mission, a band of Redemptorist priests and brothers would come to an area to preach and conduct religious activities. They saturated the people with the sense of God. They lived in community in houses in the countryside so that the mission revivals could be repeated regularly, which gave the poor the assurance they would not be abandoned by Alphonsus and his brothers. REACHING THE PEOPLE St. Alphonsus was a brilliant, articulate, pragmatic preacher. He knew how to reach ordinary people who had limited education and very real needs. They followed this gifted preacher from church to church and town to town to hear him preach the message of hope in Christ for all people. Three great images, basic to the Christian faith, formed the heart of Alphonsus’ preaching and teaching – Jesus an infant in the crib, Jesus crucified on the Cross, and Jesus vibrantly alive and filled with love for all in the Eucharist. To this he added the image of Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer. When other theologians were opposed to devotion to Mary, Alphonsus invoked her: “Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our

life, our sweetness, and our hope.” Alphonsus appreciated how the poor and working class people expressed their realities through song. A gifted musician and composer, he wrote many popular hymns and taught them to the people in parish missions. His compositions continue to be sung around the world and have never lost their charm and popularity. Redemptorists today still follow the cue of their founder. Their message, announcing the abundance of God’s love, is enriched by the spiritual songs they sing in their community and with the people of God. (Click on the links in the box to the right to listen to samples of some of Alphonsus’ music.) Alphonsus wrote for the people. Many turned to his spiritual writing, for he wrote in a way that was understandable to anyone with a basic education. On 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. Alphonsus’ works were frequent choices. THE ARTIST AND THINKER Alphonsus’ art was influenced by what he saw around him. When he was 23, he painted his own “Christ on the Cross.” His painting depicted the death of Love itself. Around that same time he also painted a picture of the Madonna as a woman of peaceful, gentle features — a woman who won his heart. Surrounded by 12 stars she is the portrait of divine beauty in human form. His art, like his music, was a way to lead the men and women of his day, rich and poor, to know the surpassing riches of the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ and his mother Mary. In his writings for other religious, Alphonsus emphasized practical approaches to reach those who were neglected or alienated from the Church. On a scientific level, he gave new life and direction to moral theology. He found many prominent moral theologians of his time either too rigid or too lax. It was Alphonsus who preached the redeeming love of God. He believed that law and the threat of punishment were not foremost in God’s plan. In God the Creator, love and freedom coincide. The individual was called to love God out of an overwhelming sense of gratitude for what God had done for him in Christ. It was not fear but love that was to characterize the Christian way of life. Ultimately, he wrote his most influential work, Moral Theology, to correct what he saw as errors that could hurt people struggling to live good and moral lives. In the course of his long life, Alphonsus authored more than 100 books, including his most beloved: Visits to the Blessed Sacrament, The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ, and The Glories of Mary. Alphonsus would eventually be given the title “Doctor of Prayer” by the Catholic Church. His book, Prayer, the Great Means of Salvation, sets out his teaching on the subject. “Having observed,” Alphonsus writes, “that so many passages of both the Old and New Testaments assert the absolute necessity of prayer, I have made it a rule to introduce into all our missions ... a sermon on prayer; and I say, and repeat, and will keep on saying as long as I live, that our whole salvation depends on prayer ... For if you pray, your salvation will be secure.” SON OF MARY Like many of his countrymen, Alphonsus was a man of passion and volatility. He found his balance and security in his devotion to the Blessed Mother. His appeals to Mary were impassioned, like those of a distressed child calling for his or her mother. He was confident Mary would hear his prayers, and she was a great spiritual wellspring of his life. He never wrote a single

letter — and his personal correspondence ran into the tens of thousands — without beginning or ending it with the words, “Long live Jesus and Mary.” He strongly encouraged his fellow Redemptorists and others to pray the rosary daily, and to visit Marian shrines to foster their love for the mother of God. For him she was a constant helper and guide in all matters concerning his congregation. Although he was sickly for much of his life, Alphonsus’ final years were marked by very serious and debilitating physical ailments, especially arthritis, which caused him great pain and confined him to a wheelchair. He also was plagued with spiritual afflictions, scrupulously fearing he hadn’t done enough to serve the God he loved so much. To help him through these times, his confreres gathered with him to pray. They always included the Litany of Our Lady, usually followed by the rosary. They read to him from his own writings about the glory of Mary and how, as heaven’s queen, she welcomed all her true and faithful servants at the hour of their death. Early in the evening on July 31, 1787, Alphonsus made one final request. “Give me my lady,” he whispered. They placed a picture of Mary in his hands. He spent the night in prayer with the Blessed Mother. The next day at the stroke of the noon Angelus, Alphonsus died at the age of 91. St. 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 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 be of benefit to people.”

St. John Neumann, C.Ss.R.



VENERABLE JOHN NEPOMUCENE NEUMANN, C.SS.R.
Fourth Bishop of Philadelphia, 1852-1860

John Neumann was born in Bohemia on March 28, 1811. He entered the seminary in 1831. Two years later he entered the university in Prague, where he studied theology. His preparations for the priesthood were completed in 1835, but he could not be ordained in his own diocese because a limit had been placed on the number of priests. So he offered to do missionary work in a “mission country,” the United States. Arriving penniless in New York, he was accepted into the diocese and ordained a priest in June of 1836. He was assigned to

mission churches near Buffalo, where he labored zealously for four years. Feeling the need for spiritual support, he applied to the Redemptorists. He became the first priest to enter the Congregation in America when he took his vows in Baltimore in January of 1842. From the beginning he was highly regarded for his evident holiness, for his zeal and affability. His knowledge of six languages made him particularly apt for work in the multilingual society of 19th century America. In 1847, he was appointed superior of the Redemptorists in the United States. During his term as superior, the Congregation

was passing through a trying period of adjustment from its European background. In 1850, the Redemptorists of the United States became an autonomous province. Father Neumann was named bishop of Philadelphia and consecrated in Baltimore at St. Alphonsus Church in March of 1852. He organized a diocesan education system of parish schools, staffing it with religious sisters and brothers to teach in it. One source of teachers for him came from the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, which he founded. The Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul was one of 80 churches built during his episcopate. Nicknamed the “Little Bishop” because of his height (he stood roughly five feet four inches), St. John Neumann was never robust in health, but in his short lifetime he kept up with his pastoral duties while publishing numerous articles and authoring two catechisms. On January 5, 1860 he collapsed and died on a Philadelphia street. He is buried in St. Peter the Apostle Church in Philadelphia. He became the first American male to be declared a saint when he was canonized in June of 1977.

St. Clement Hofbauer, C.Ss.R.



Clement Hofbauer was born in Moravia (the present Czech Republic) on December 26, 1751. In baptism he was given the name John. He later changed his name to Clement. The death of his father in 1757 reduced the family to such poverty that Clement had little time for schooling. He became a servant in a monastery and learned the trade of baker. He used much of his free time for study with a view to becoming a priest. In 1784, he made a journey to Rome, Italy accompanied by a fellow student, Thaddeus Hübl. The two pilgrims were attracted to the Redemptorists, a newly established religious community. After a shortened novitiate, they were professed in March 1785 and 10 days later they were ordained priests. With Father Hübl, Clement returned to

Austria, hoping to establish the Redemptorist Congregation in Vienna. When that proved impossible under Josephist laws, he went to Warsaw, where in 1787 he was given charge of the German church of St. Benno’s. There he inaugurated a vigorous pastoral activity and drew a rapid increase of candidates to join himself and Father Hübl. The church of St. Benno’s became the scene of a “perpetual mission” with each day a busy program of preaching, instruction, confessions, and devotions. There were also orphanages and schools for both boys and girls. This activity continued until 1808, when at the order of Napoleon, St. Benno’s was closed and its community dispersed. With one companion, Clement established himself in Vienna, where he remained until his death. As chaplain to the Ursuline convent and church he exercised an extraordinary influence throughout the city. In particular, he was able to advise and encourage some of the most important personages of the new Romantic Movement as

well as others who were working for the Catholic revival in German-speaking lands. His ceaseless activity attracted the attention of the police. From the time he came to Warsaw, he repeatedly attempted to extend the Congregation, especially in South Germany and Switzerland. But he did not live to see this. His prayers were answered only a few weeks after his death when the Redemptorists received permission to begin a community. From this community, the Redemptorists spread throughout northern Europe and into North and South America. St. Clement Hofbauer died in Vienna on March 15, 1820. When Pope Pius VII heard the news, he declared: "Religion in Austria has lost its chief support." Redemptorists venerate him as a great – indeed their second founder – for spreading their apostolate throughout the world.

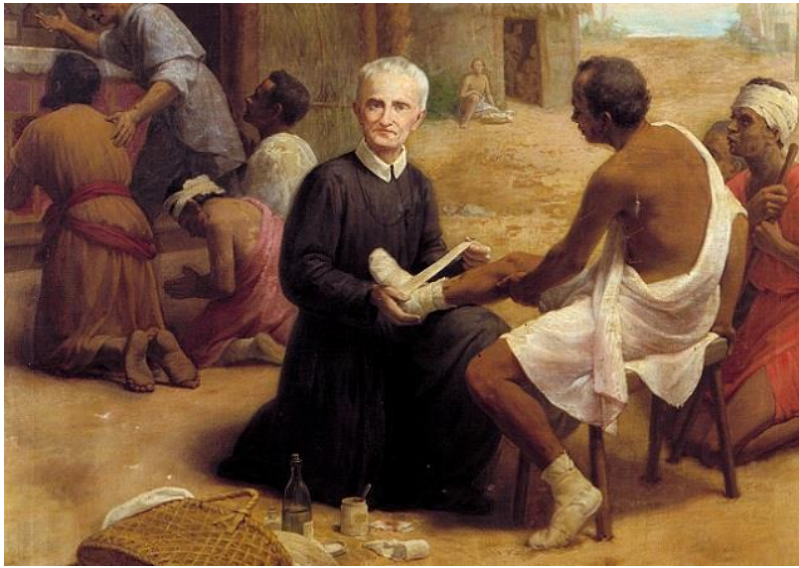
St. Gerard Majella, C.Ss.R.



St. Gerard Majella was born in Muro Lucano, Italy, on April 6, 1726, into a family of humble circumstances. From his parents Gerard learned the love of prayer and sacrifice. When his father died, Gerard, being the only son, had to provide for his family by working as a tailor. At the age of 14 he sought to enter the Capuchin friary but was rejected because of his poor health. After a short time as the domestic servant of the bishop of Lacedonia, he returned to tailoring but earned a minimal income. In April 1749 after attending a Redemptorist mission in Muro, Gerard succeeded in getting himself accepted by the congregation. Following a trial period and a year of novitiate in the house at Deliceto, he professed religious vows on July 16, 1752. Gerard was noted for his observance of the Redemptorist rule, and collecting

money for the material needs of the community. His presence to people who were weighed down by poverty and illiteracy was a sign of hope to them. Gerard had great empathy and testified to trust in the love and the compassion of God. During his five years as a lay brother in the congregation, Gerard was remarkable for his apostolic zeal, patience in sickness, love for the poor, deep humility in the face of false accusation, heroic obedience, spirit of penance and constancy in prayer. He wrote numerous letters of spiritual direction. The Lord favored him with many spiritual gifts, including prophecy, the reading of people's hearts, and the gifts of miracles. He died at Materdomini on October 16, 1755. Gerard was beatified by Leo XII on January 29, 1893, and canonized by St. Pius X on December 11, 1904. He is invoked as patron of mothers, especially in time of pregnancy. Couples hoping to conceive a child also seek St. Gerard's intercession. The shrine of St. Gerard Majella is at the basilica in Materdomini, Italy. Source: Living Redemptorist Spirituality: Prayers, Devotions and Reflections (North American Commission for Partnership in Mission, 2009)

SAINTS IN THE MAKING

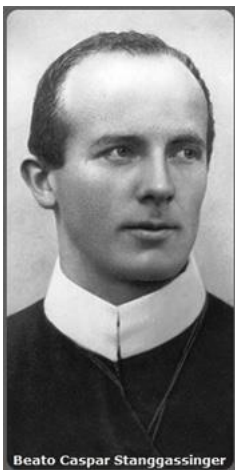


Blessed Peter Donders, C.Ss.R.

Feast Day: January 14 Peter Donders was born in Tilburg, Holland, on October 27, 1809, and as a boy he felt called to the priesthood. His family was poor, and his schooling was cut short so that he could learn weaving, which was his father's trade. At the age of 22, he entered St. Michael-Gestel Seminary. Ordained a

priest on June 5, 1841, Donders set out for Paramaribo, Surinam, a Dutch colony. For 14 years he ministered to the city's 2,000 Catholics, and regularly visited the plantation slaves, the military garrisons, and the indigenous people who lived along the rivers. In 1856, he volunteered to minister to people with leprosy at Batavia, where he remained for the next 28 years. In 1866, he joined the Redemptorists, professing his vows on June 24, 1867. These vows gave him a more vivid sense of the apostolic missionary community, and he left Batavia more often to minister to other pastoral needs. Donders died among his lepers on January 14, 1887. He was mourned as their benefactor and invoked as a saint. Pope John Paul II beatified Donders on May 23, 1982. Blessed Peter Donders is buried in Batavia, Surinam.

Blessed Kaspar Stanggassinger



Beato Kaspar Stanggassinger

Feast Day: September 26

Kaspar Stanggassinger entered the Congregation with the intention of preaching the Gospel to the most abandoned. Instead, his superiors appointed him to form future missionaries. In addition to teaching, he gave pastoral assistance at churches in neighboring villages, especially by preaching. He was deeply devoted to the Eucharist, and in his preaching he invited all to have recourse to the Blessed Sacrament in times of need and

anxiety. He was 28 when he arrived at the seminary in Gars, Bavaria, in 1899. He preached the opening retreat of the year to the students, but he soon fell victim to a fatal case of peritonitis. Kaspar used to say, "The saints have a special intuition. For me, who am not a saint, what is important are the simple eternal truths: the Incarnation, the Redemption and the Holy Eucharist." He was declared blessed by John Paul II on April 24, 1988. Source: Sacramentary and Lectionary Supplement, The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. (North American Redemptorist Spirituality Commission, 2007)

Blessed Gennaro Maria Sarnelli

Feast Day: June 30



Gennaro Sarnelli was born in Naples, Italy, on September 12, 1702. Son of the Baron of Ciorani, he had a solid cultural and spiritual formation. Dedicating himself to the study of jurisprudence, he gained a doctorate in civil and canon law at age 20. Caring for the sick in the Hospital for the Incurables, he felt the call to the priesthood. During this time he also came to know Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, who was his first biographer. Ordained a priest in 1732, he dedicated himself especially to the catechesis of young boys and to the rehabilitation of girls at risk of becoming prostitutes. In June of the following year, he entered the Redemptorists. He

dedicated himself to the preaching of the Word of God to those who were most destitute of spiritual help. For reasons of health, in 1736, he returned to Naples, where, while continuing the missionary activity of the Redemptorists Congregation, he resumed his previous pastoral and charitable activities, especially among the sick, the old, those in prison and the young boys forced to work as dock-laborers. He also initiated a fervent movement against the spread of prostitution. A prodigious writer, he published more than 30 books on a wide range of subjects, including socio-juridical studies, moral issues, mysticism, pedagogy, pastoral practice, Mariology, and ascetical theology. In 1741, he organized and took part in the great mission among the spiritually abandoned areas in the outskirts of Naples. Spent by his burning zeal, he died in Naples June 30, 1744, at the age of 42. John Paul II beatified him on May 12, 1996. Source: Sacramentary and Lectionary Supplement, The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, Raymond Corriveau, C.Ss.R., editor. (Liguori, Missouri: North American Redemptorist Spirituality Commission, 2007.)

Blessed Nicholas Charnetsky and Companions (Four Redemptorist Martyrs of Ukraine)



Bishop Nicholas Charnetsky (1884-1959) Bishop Vasyl Velychkovsky (1903-73) Father Zenon Kovalyk (1903-41) Father Ivan Ziatyk (1899-1952) Feast Day: June 28

Nicholas Charnetsky was born in Semakivci in Halychyna, Western Ukraine, in 1884. He completed his theological studies in Rome and was ordained a diocesan priest in 1909. After obtaining his doctorate in theology, he was spiritual director and professor of theology at the major seminary in Stanislaviv. He entered the

Redemptorist novitiate in Zboisk in 1919 and was professed in 1920. During his early years he was assigned to teach in the minor seminary and subsequently to the giving of popular missions. He was ordained bishop in 1931 and appointed the Apostolic Visitor to the Ukrainian Catholics of Volyn. From 1931-39, he ministered to the people of Volyn, Polisia, Pidlissia, and Belorussia. During World War II he was in Lviv, ministering pastorally and teaching at the theological academy. From 1945-56, he was imprisoned in about 30 Soviet labor camps and prisons. Following his release in 1956, he returned to Lviv and acted as bishop of the suppressed Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine. He died in 1959. Vasyl (Basil) Velychkovsky was born in Stanislaviv, Western Ukraine, in 1903. He studied at the Major Seminary in Lviv and was ordained a deacon in 1923. He entered the Redemptorists as a deacon, professed vows in 1925, and was ordained a priest shortly after. After teaching at the minor seminary in Zboisk, Vasyl worked as a missionary for the next 20 years in rural Ukraine. He was arrested in 1945 and was condemned to death, but the death sentence was commuted to 10 years imprisonment. He was released in 1955. He was consecrated bishop by Metropolitan Slipyj in a hotel room in Moscow in 1963. He became the head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Ukraine. Arrested once more in 1969, he spent three years in prison. In the spring of 1972, near death, he was exiled from Ukraine. He died in Winnipeg, Canada, in 1973. It is believed that his death was caused by a slow-acting poison administered prior to his release from prison. Zenon Kovalyk was born in 1903 in Ivachiv Horishniy near Ternopil in 1903. He joined the Redemptorists and professed vows in 1926. He studied philosophy and theology in Belgium and was ordained in 1932. He went with Bishop Charnetsky to Volyn as a parish missionary and subsequently to Stanislaviv where he also conducted missions. Zenon was a fearless preacher of God's Word and love of the Mother of God. He was arrested by the Soviets in 1940. While in prison he continued his pastoral ministry among the prisoners. When the Soviet prisons were opened on the arrival of the invading German army, Father Zenon's body was found crucified to a wall of the prison of Zamartynivska in 1941. Ivan Ziatyk was born in 1899 in Odrekhova, southwest of Sanok (now part of Poland). He entered the Ukrainian Catholic Seminary in Peremyshl in 1919 and was ordained in 1923. He became prefect of the seminarians and taught theology and catechetics. He

joined the Redemptorists in 1935, professing vows in 1936. He taught Scripture and dogmatic theology at the Redemptorist seminary in Holosko (near Lviv). Subsequent assignments were to the monastery in Ternopil as well as to the minor seminary in Zboisk (near Lviv) where he was superior of the community. The difficult situation in which the Ukrainian Catholic Church found itself (with all its bishops arrested and with the Belgian Provincial expelled), resulted in Father Ivan holding the posts of the Provincial of the Redemptorists and the Vicar General of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. He was arrested in 1950 and condemned to 10 years imprisonment, but died of a savage beating in 1952. The four Redemptorists were among 25 Ukrainian martyrs beatified during the papal visit to Lviv in 2001. Source: Sacramentary and Lectionary Supplement, The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, Raymond Corriveau, C.Ss.R., editor. (Liguori, Missouri: North American Redemptorist Spirituality Commission, 2007.)

Blessed Francis



Seelos

Feast Day: October 5 Francis Xavier Seelos was born in Fussen, Bavaria, on January 11, 1819. He studied philosophy at the University of Munich and began theology as a diocesan seminarian. After visiting the Redemptorists in Altötting, where he heard of their missionary work in North America, he decided to join them.

With their approval, he set off for the United States in 1843 where he made his novitiate. He made his profession in Baltimore in May 1844 and was ordained a priest there in December. His first assignment was to St. Philomena's in Pittsburgh where he served for six years as assistant under

the leadership of John Neumann, who was pastor and superior of the community. Father Seelos went on to serve as superior of the community and novice master for three more years.

He was appointed pastor of St. Alphonsus in Baltimore, 1854; pastor and prefect of students at Sts. Peter and Paul in Cumberland, MD, 1857; and pastor and prefect of students at St. Mary's in Annapolis, MD, 1862.

Replaced as prefect of students, he preached missions in German and English throughout the Northeast and Midwest. Father Seelos was always an active and highly successful missionary. He was particularly devoted to the confessional, and was revered as an exceptional confessor and spiritual director. After a year as assistant pastor of St. Mary's in Detroit, MI, in 1866, he was assigned as pastor of Assumption Parish in New Orleans, LA. There he made a great effort to care for the poor, sick, and neglected.

While caring for victims of yellow fever, he contracted the disease himself. Only a year after being assigned, he died in New Orleans on October 4, 1867. He was beatified in 2000.

The [National Shrine of Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos](#) is in New Orleans.

(From Sacred Heart Parish Website, New Smyrna Beach, FL)

