

March 8

John of God (1495-1550) witness

The discernment of a vocation is not always a direct and linear journey. John of God, whose feast falls today in the Roman calendar, knew this well.

Born in 1495 in Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal, John Ciudad had a traumatic childhood. At the age of nine, he was separated mysteriously from his family, whom he never saw again, and taken to Oropesa, Spain to work as a shepherd. He later enrolled in the Spanish army, but experienced one mishap after another. Eventually deciding that a military career was not for him, he became a bookseller on the streets of Granada. According to his biographer, this was when John encountered the preaching of John of Avila, and was so struck by what he heard that he decided to become a sort of fool-for-Christ. Before long he found himself in a mental hospital. By the time he was released, he had only one plan for his life: to assist the ill and the abandoned poor of Granada.

The city's marginalized residents came to rely on John, who at this time added the words "of God" to his name. Gradually, other men who wanted to serve Christ in the poor and the sick began to join him.

John of God died on March 8, 1550. He had never attempted to found a religious order, but after his death some of his followers, moved by his example, formed the Fate Bene Fratelli. The name came from the words of greeting John and his disciples had used whenever they went begging for money in the streets of Granada, to help the sick who relied on their care.

BIBLICAL READINGS

Jas 2:14-17; Mt 25:31-45

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

Edward King (b. 1910), bishop of Lincoln

Felix (d. 647), bishop, apostle to the East Angles

Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy (d. 1929), priest, poet

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

John of God, religious (Roman calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (29 amsir/yakkatit):

Polycarp (d. ca. 167), bishop of Smyrna, martyr (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:

Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), doctor of the church in Italy

MARONITES:

Francesca Romana (d. 1440), nun; *John of God*

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Theophylaktos (d. 842), bishop of Nicomedeia and confessor