

The Saints of Lima: St. Rose

St. Rose of Lima is proof of the truth that the saints are God's most joyous and winsome friends. The love that they have for God fills their souls and brims over in love, so that they find joy even in their suffering. Such was St. Rose, who might be described as a "Little Flower" of the New World.

Rose was the seventh of eleven children born to Oliva and Gaspar Flores, a member of the viceroy's guard in Lima. Her parents had social prestige but little money, a lack often felt in their household.

Oliva loved to adorn her daughter with wreaths of her most beautiful roses. The little girl was so pretty and precocious that her mother had high hopes for her, but like St. Catherine of Siena in a previous century, Rose was already showing signs that the hand of God was on her as His choice. At age five, when she made her first confession, she obtained permission from her confessor to make a vow of virginity. About this time she cut her hair off, trying to disguise the lack under her veil. When her mother discovered the catastrophe, she expressed her displeasure with great vehemence. At first Rose tried to resist wearing party clothes. Then she discovered that she could conceal thorns on the underside of the rose wreath around her head, making the wreath into her own "crown of thorns."



St. Rose is most famous for her penances, done not for their own sake, but as pure expressions of her love for Jesus and vicarious satisfaction for souls dear to Him.

Her love found other means of expression. Rose prayed long hours for her beloved Archbishop Turibius, himself a saint, in his trials, and beseeched God for the conversion of the Peruvian Indians, who were still practicing pagan religions. She was taught to make herbal medicines and took great delight in distributing these remedies to long lines of the sick poor of Lima.

It is natural that one with Rose's pure love of God seek a religious vocation, but for a time even this good desire seemed to be frustrated. She discerned that it was not God's will that she enter a cloister. A short time later she received a sign in answer to prayer that she was to be a Dominican tertiary and live at home, like St. Catherine of Siena. At age 20 she made her profession in the Third Order of St. Dominic.

It was at this time that perhaps the most spectacular of Rose's miracles occurred when Dutch pirates invaded Lima's harbor and defeated the Peruvian fleet. Due to the

Reformation, they intended not only to loot the city but also to desecrate the churches. The women, children and religious of Lima took refuge in the churches. In the church of Santo Domingo, Rose stirred them all to prayer. It is said that as pirates burst into the church, they were confronted with the terrifying spectacle of a young girl ablaze with light, holding a monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament. They turned away and fled to their ships, which sailed away.

As she continued her prayer, penance and good works, Rose underwent a new season of suffering. In spite of her prayers, ruthless Spanish landlords oppressed and exploited her beloved Indians. Rose came down simultaneously with asthma and arthritis. On top of this, she began to have dreams which caused her soul great disturbance. Her only support came from the Dominican saint, Brother Martin de Porres, who assured her that her visions and spiritual aridity were signs of the highest friendship with God. Other religious, through jealousy, had Rose examined by the Inquisition. The inquisitors found her to be enjoying God's highest favor in the midst of her suffering and desolation. During this time, Rose received the grace of mystical marriage with Christ and had a ring engraved with the words He spoke to her: "Rose of My Heart, be My spouse." Not long after, she died of a terrible fever and paralysis at age 31.

Rose stands out among Dominican saints in her understanding of the immeasurable value of redemptive suffering. Speaking of the power that directed her life, she wrote, "That same force strongly urged me to proclaim the beauty of Divine Grace."

Feast: August 22
