

HOW ST. LOUIS BECAME MY PATRON... AND NOT JUST THE CITY WHERE I LIVE

By Jan Parker

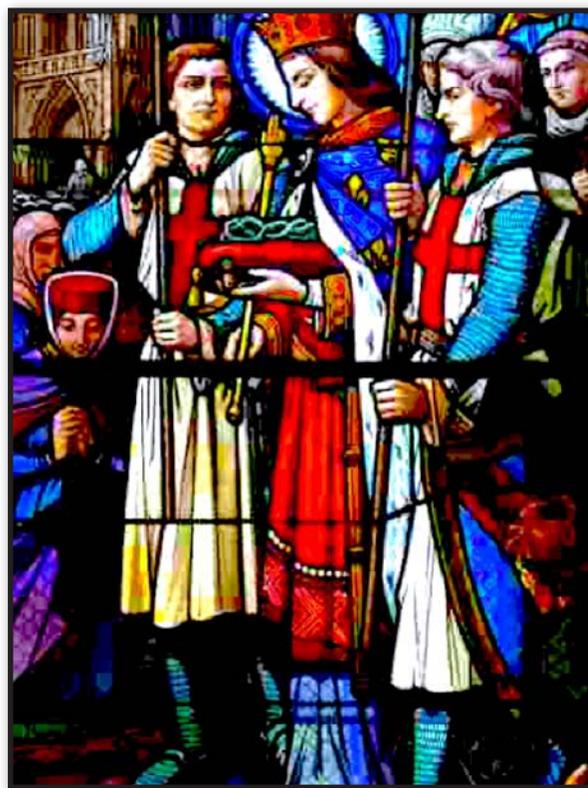
I am blessed to live in a city named for a saint, and yet for most of my adult life I tended to think of St. Louis only as a place, not as a person. I gave little thought to the man St. Louis, Missouri, was named for. As I began my Franciscan journey, it was interesting to learn that St. Louis IX, King of France, was the patron of the Secular Franciscan Order, but this made no immediate impact on me. I did not see, or feel, any Franciscan connection with St. Louis, certainly not in the way I felt connected to Francis, Clare and many other Franciscan saints. As I learned of other secular saints and blessed, Luchesius and Buonadonna, for example, the first tertiaries were close to my heart. They were laypersons I could relate to. But St. Louis? A king and crusader? The little I knew of him made me wonder how he even became our patron.

This year St. Louis IX is being celebrated in St. Louis, Mo., in a big way. The year 2014 not only marks the 800th anniversary of the birth of St. Louis IX, King of France, it is also the 250th anniversary of the founding of St. Louis, Mo., a city with deep Catholic roots. To honor these anniversaries, both the Archdiocese of St. Louis and the city of St. Louis are offering a variety of historical, educational and liturgical events. Opportunities to learn about St. Louis abound! My heart told me to give our patron a chance. If ever in my lifetime St. Louis IX was to become more meaningful to me, this was the year! I made a commitment to learn more about him.

This spring I attended a lecture on St. Louis IX given by Dr. Thomas Madden, Director of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Saint Louis University. Dr. Madden's talk was fascinating. His presentation included slides of beautiful artwork depicting Louis IX, his family, his surroundings and events in his life. As the months went on, I continued to learn, listening to local radio discussions and reading various articles about the man our city and archdiocese were named for. I began to connect with St. Louis as someone very real as I learned the details of his life.

The celebration of the 8th centennial of the birth of St. Louis IX is far from just a local "St. Louis" event — he is being celebrated around the world, most

notably by our Franciscan family. In a letter this past May, Encarnación del Pozo, Minister General of the OFS, announced various international gatherings in his honor. She presented a specially written prayer and a newly composed "Hymn to St. Louis." Her letter continued with a beautifully written section describing the spirituality of St. Louis and directed us to the CIOFS website for a series of eight monthly lessons on the life of St. Louis. She concluded by asking that we "immerse ourselves enthusiastically" in these formation topics.



At this point I needed little encouragement — I was captivated. I reread the section of her letter describing St. Louis' spirituality and was totally inspired. I then went directly to the CIOFS website, found the formation lessons on the life of St. Louis and studied the first two — "The Spirituality of St. Louis" and "St. Louis and Christian Public Commitment." These excellent resources helped me to see St. Louis — *the Franciscan*.



There is so much now that I would like to share with you about our patron St. Louis! Here was a man who did what he was called to do — and he always put first things first. He accepted his vocation as king, not questioning how he could acquire holiness in his state in life. He remained humble and teachable. He sought out the company of men such as St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure and Brother Giles to help him learn more about God, and he put what he learned into practice in his life.

Louis rejoiced in his baptism, and once said, "I think more of the place where I was baptized than of Rheims Cathedral where I was crowned." Though king, his signature was always "Louis of Poissy," not Louis IX, King of France, explaining, "Poissy is the place where I was baptized." He attended daily Mass and spent much time in prayer, often going to monasteries to attend liturgical ceremonies. He was a faithful husband and a dedicated father. He gave alms and cared for the poor, serving them personally at his table. He was a benevolent ruler, often sitting on the floor to listen carefully to those who came to him seeking justice. He wrote letters to other monarchs to build relationships and maintain peace. He trusted completely in God's providence as he dealt with difficult choices and made great sacrifices.

St. Louis treasured holy places, making numerous pilgrimages, and especially valued the shrines of the Holy Land. He built the magnificent Sainte-Chapelle with its famous stained glass windows within the royal palace complex. This chapel was erected as a shrine for the Crown of Thorns and a fragment of the True Cross, precious relics of the Passion of Jesus. He had a strong devotion to Christ's Passion. (I can just imagine Louis, guardian of the Crown of Thorns,

meditating upon this crown worn by Jesus and considering his own royal crown.)

His love of God overflowed into his life. He could say with all sincerity, "My God and my all!" as he lived in his own way the Gospel values of St. Francis.

Yes, amazingly, this saint has come alive for me. His Franciscan spirituality touches my heart and challenges me personally. Now when I hear the words "St. Louis" I no longer think first of my hometown — I think immediately of my Franciscan brother and a saint. St. Louis has truly become a companion, intercessor and patron whose life inspires me to deepen my own commitment to live the Gospel in the manner of St. Francis.



A note from Jan: I would be happy to send you a copy of our Minister General's inspiring letter regarding the celebration of the 8th Centenary of St. Louis IX, which was distributed this past May to the National Fraternity. Send your request by email to jansfo@yahoo.com. Please also visit the CIOFS website during this centennial year and take advantage of the wonderful formation material on St. Louis, offered once each month, on the following eight themes. (A sample lesson is included on pages 5 and 6 of this issue of the *TAU-USA*.)

1. The Spirituality of St. Louis
2. St. Louis and Christian Public Commitment
3. St. Louis and Marriage
4. St. Louis, the Educator
5. St. Louis, Social Justice and Evangelization
6. St. Louis and the Poor
7. St. Louis and the Interfaith Dialogue
8. St. Louis and Sister Death

2104 CIOFS ONGOING FORMATION PROGRAM

Theme II: St. Louis and His Public Commitment as a Christian

Editor's Note: Our International Council (CIOFS) is offering a new ongoing formation program on the spirituality of St. Louis. We have reproduced below the second theme in this eight part series. This entire series along with other ongoing formation topics and resources can be found and easily downloaded from the CIOFS website. We encourage you to use these excellent materials in your fraternity or on your own.

“How great was his justice! One could touch it with one’s finger. He would sit almost continuously on the floor or on a rug to listen to judicial matters, especially those that had to do with the poor or orphans. He would make sure they had justice.” (*Pope Boniface VIII*)



“If it pleased Our Lord that you received the anointing with which the French Kings are consecrated as such, be mindful to have the qualities that belong to Kings, that is, that you never separate yourself from justice (...) Sustain more voluntarily the poor against the rich until the truth is known and when you know it, do Justice.” (*St. Louis to his son Philip*)

HISTORICAL VISION: “ST. LOUIS CONFORMS TO THE MODEL OF THE CHRISTIAN KING”

St. Louis endeavored to complete as well as possible all the responsibilities of a Christian King. He considered himself responsible, not only for the material well-being, but also for the spiritual well-being of his people. He repressed the abuses of the Royal Administration and the demands of nobility, seeking to enforce and make justice accessible to all and equal for all. He particularly showed great concern for the poor. (*GC 22*).

St. Louis was “peacemaker” within the French Kingdom. Acting various times as mediator in conflicts among foreign sovereigns, he was the messenger of peace outside his reign as well. (*Rule 19, GC 23*).

In order to improve the customs of his citizens, he strongly sanctioned blasphemy; he prohibited gambling and prostitution in the center of the city.

PASTORAL VISION: “DARE TO MAKE A PUBLIC COMMITMENT”

St. Louis is a model for contemporary politicians. (*GC 20.2*) Because of his example, many Secular Franciscans have become involved in politics, like Thomas More, Garcia Moreno, Giorgio La Pira, Frank Nosek, Konrad Adenaver, Alcides de Gasperi, etc. Christians sometimes show a resistance to becoming involved in politics, and Christian politicians venture little into defending Church positions. What do our Rule and Constitutions say about this?

FROM ST. LOUIS TO TODAY...

Following Christ

Throughout his public life, Jesus was committed, exposed himself even risking not being understood by the people or his own disciples. What Gospel passages make us think about the “commitment of Jesus”?

Spiritual Life

We Christians have received from God the mission of participating in the coming of His Kingdom of Justice and Peace. Does this mission mobilize us? What are our real commitments, in this regard, today? Shall we reread together Rule 15 (*GC 12.2; GC 22.23*)?

Which of our commitments (in associations, professionally, in politics, interest groups) have transformed us up to the present?

How do our diverse commitments (associations, professional, political, etc.) nourish our spiritual life and, vice-versa, how does our spiritual life push us to make a commitment?



Being in the world

What is mobilizing us to make a commitment on a timely basis or particularly in our contemporary

society? Where would we like to invest our energy primarily and why?

Do we really know the conditions of those who live marginalized in society...at the periphery? What is our capacity for outrage and resistance in the face of the unacceptable? (GC 19.2)

What criteria do we use when we vote in elections? Moreover, how do we scrutinize those men and women on the ballots?

Formation

An involved Christian is invited to know the Social Doctrine of the Church in depth and to form himself/herself in order to take positions in complex debates (bioethical, etc.) Is this our situation? Through which means are we driving our thinking: Reading (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, etc.)? Participating in conferences or sessions? On the CIOFS website <http://www.ciofs.org> portal?

Questioning

On Friday, June 7, 2013, Pope Francis exhorted Christians to make a commitment to politics. "Involvement in politics is an obligation for a Christian. We Christians cannot "play the role of Pilate", washing our hands of it; we cannot. We must be involved in politics because politics is one of the highest forms of charity for it seeks the common good". He added, following St. Thomas Aquinas: "Christian lay people must work in politics [...] politics has become too dirty: but I ask myself: Why has it become dirty? Why aren't Christians involved in politics with an evangelical spirit?"¹ How does this make me react?



LIVING THE VATICAN COUNCIL II

Coming down to practical and particularly urgent consequences, this council lays stress on reverence for man; everyone must consider his every neighbor without exception as another self, taking into account first of all His life and the means necessary to living it with dignity, so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus.

¹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/june/documents/papa-francesco_20130607_scuole-gesuiti.html

² *Constitution on the Church in the Present World "Gaudium et spes", § 27.*

In our times a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of every person without exception and of actively helping him when he comes across our path, whether he be an old person abandoned by all, a foreign laborer unjustly looked down upon, a refugee, a child born of an unlawful union and wrongly suffering for a sin he did not commit, or a hungry person who disturbs our conscience by recalling the voice of the Lord, "As long as you did it for one of these the least of my brethren, you did it for me" (Matt. 25:40).

Furthermore, whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are supreme dishonor to the Creator.²



LIVING THE GOSPEL (Mt 5, 1-2, 13-16)

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: [...] "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."