St. John of God

Feast Day: March 8th
The Patron Saint of hospitals and booksellers

St. John of God, born as João Duarte Cidade, in Portugal. His whole life he was known as someone who followed every impulse of his heart. He became a Portuguese soldier and later became a health-care worker in Spain.

When John was 8 years old, he ran away to travel with a priest and never saw his parents again. He had to beg in every village as a homeless orphan while traveling in Spain.

He was taken in by a farmer named Francisco Mayoral and became a shepherd caring for sheep in the countryside.

In his twenties the farmer wanted John to marry his daughter. Not wanting to marry, John left and joined the Spanish army as a foot-soldier in the war against France.

As a soldier, St. John of God's life became anything but a model of holiness. One day, after experiencing a frightening wakeup call, he vowed to make big changes in how he was living. He returned to the farmer's house and worked again as a shepherd for 4 more years.

John once again became restless and enlisted with troops to fight against the Turks, where he served as a trooper travelling Europe for the next 18 years.

Now 38 years old, St. John of God decided to go to Africa to help ransom Christian captives. While waiting for a ship, he befriended a Portuguese knight and family who were exiled to Africa. John volunteered to be their servant and he cared for them when they were sick.

St. John of God later returned to Spain and started living a spiritual life. He unloaded cargo ships during the day and spent his nights visiting churches and reading spiritual books. He became a book peddler and went town to town selling religious books and holy cards.

MAJOR SHRINE

Basilica of St. John of God, Granada, Spain

- Born March 8, 1495

- Died March 8, 1550 (aged 55)

- Beatified September 21, 1630, by Pope Urban VIII

- Canonized October 16, 1690, by Pope Alexander VIII

At 41 years old, John had a vision of the infant Jesus who bestowed the name John of God on him. He was told to go to Granada, where he sold books from a shop.

John heard a sermon from John of Avila on repentance and was overcome with thoughts of all his sins. St. John of God's resulting behavior had the whole town thinking he had lost his mind.

He was taken to the Royal Hospital for the mentally ill and received the treatment of the day; segregation, chained, flogged, and starved.

John of Avila visited John of God and told him his penance was enough, and he should serve the needs of others instead. So, he served as a volunteer nurse within the hospital for a time and was dismissed and free to live his life.

He made a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Extremadura where he had a vision of Mary, who encouraged him to work with the poor.

St. John of God listened and began caring for the neediest people. He opened a house where he tended to the sick and poor. Given his mental reputation he found it difficult to raise support for his mission. He eventually received help from charitable priests and physicians.

St. John of God organized his followers into the Order of Hospitallers, who were approved by the Holy See in 1572 as the "Brothers Hospitallers of Saint John of God." Today, the group cares for the sick in 53 countries, with more than 300 hospitals, services, and centers to serve medical and mental health needs. St. John of God's Order has even been entrusted with the medical care of the pope.

St. John of God died on March 8, 1550, of pneumonia after saving a young man from drowning in a river. He was canonized by Pope Alexander VIII in October 1690 and became the patron saint of hospitals and the sick. St. John of God's feast day is celebrated on March 8th.