

SAINTS ALIVE! AUGUST 7: St. CAJETAN, PATRON SAINT OF THE UNEMPLOYED



Exercising the ministry of charity is a foundational leg of being Catholic. The church defines charity as encountering the neighbor directly *and* striving to secure a common good through the institutional – political – path. Charitable works *and* justice. Instead of embracing both, most of us chose between the two.

Saint Cajetan embraced both, whether in personal encounters or in founding institutions such as a hospital for those with incurable diseases. He even founded a bank.

At the age of 60, Cajetan founded a bank to help the poor and offer a charitable, nonprofit alternative to loan sharks. It was one of the first charitable institutions to go into banking whose philanthropic purpose was to provide interest-free loans on pawned goods to help the poor and protect them against usurers.

It later became the Bank of Naples.

He was born in 1480 to parents of nobility. At age 24, he received his degree in civil and canon law. He was headed for a life as a lawyer.

A higher calling interrupted his path and Cajetan was ordained a priest at age 36, joining a religious order devoted to piety and charity.

Whether his concern for the poor always was a strong presence in his life or whether he grew into this understanding of his Catholic faith, he is known for his charity, which includes those unfortunates who could not find a job.

Saint Cajetan is the patron saint of the unemployed and job seekers.

He sought out the sick and poor of the town and served them and worked in the hospitals of the incurables. He used his inheritance to cover expenses. He joined a “disreputable” religious order that consisted only of men of the lowest stations of life (thus the poor reputation).

He founded a hospital for incurables at the age of 42.

A rare few of us can establish a hospital or a bank. We can, however, encounter the neighbor directly by volunteering our time and money to food pantries and meeting the faces of the jobless as they come for food.

We can strive to secure a common good through the institutional – political – path and stand with the U.S. Bishops to support policies that form a “Circle of Protection” around programs that serve poor and vulnerable and jobless people in our communities, that avoid placing additional burdens on people and families struggling to live in dignity, and that build public/private partnerships to overcome poverty.

We can pray to Saint Cajetan for those who are unemployed and those who seek work.



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