

SAINTS ALIVE!
ST. JEROME EMILIANI
February 8

St. Jerome Emiliani is the patron saint of abandoned children and orphans.

He was born in 1481 in Italy. Later, as a soldier, Jerome was captured and imprisoned. While in prison, Jerome learned how to pray. When he escaped, he began his own studies for the priesthood.

When plague and famine swept northern Italy, Jerome began caring for the sick and feeding the hungry at his own expense. While serving the sick and the poor, he soon resolved to devote himself and his property solely to others, particularly to abandoned children. He founded orphanages in other cities, a hospital, and a shelter for prostitutes.

Jerome and two other priests established a congregation whose primary work was helping orphans.

If we stand upon the shoulders of our ancestors, the building blocks of civilization, then children are the structural reinforcements that allow civilizations to grow without crumbling.

The words of Pope Francis show a heart that children have touched: "Caring for our little one ... is a choice for civilization. And also for the future, because the little ones, the children, the young people will carry society forward by their strength, their youth."

"Wherever children are accepted, loved, cared for and protected, the family is healthy, society is more healthy and the world is more human." Pope Francis

In his 2015 State of the Union, President Obama said, "We've done more than ever before to combat climate change...and that's why I will not ... endanger the health of our children by turning back the clock on our efforts."

This echoes earlier statements from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: The regulations to reduce carbon pollution from existing power plants and all efforts to reduce the impact of climate change should respect human life and dignity, especially that of the poorest and most vulnerable, from children in the womb to the elderly.

Then we have the example of Jesus: "Taking a child he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it he said to them, 'Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me'" (Mark 9: 37-38)

In the admonition of Saint Jerome, "We should not forget the growing number of persons who are often abandoned by their families and by the community: the old, orphans, the sick and all kinds of people who are rejected."

We have sadly forgotten this advice and rejected those of little use to us as a society? "Today children are disposed of because there is no food or because they are killed before being born – children are discarded." Pope Francis

Children are not the dead flowers of a thriving society. Children are the gifts through which societies survive the winter of hopelessness to blossom in the gardens of future promise. A society that cherishes the past, cultivates the present and prepares for the future is one that loves and protects all children from conception through childhood.

Saint Jerome Emiliani, watch over all children who are abandoned or unloved. Give us the courage to show them God's love through our care. Help us to loosen the chains that keep us from living the life God intended for us. Amen

