

Alphonsus Liguori was born near Naples in 1696. He was raised in a religious family. His brother Anthony became a Benedictine priest. His brother Cajetan became a diocesan priest and his sisters Mary Louise and Mary Ann became nuns.

Alphonsus was the oldest boy in the family and his father wanted him to become a lawyer and serve honorably in government. Alphonsus had a brilliant mind and easily obtained a civil law degree at the young age of 16. At the same time, he was also awarded a degree in church Canon law. “Lord, teach me your statutes” (Ps 119:12). At the age of 18 he began to practice law two years before most individuals earned their degrees.

He attended a Vincentian retreat at the age of 26 that had a profound effect on his own spiritual life. As a result, each day he spent time in silent prayer before the Blessed Sacrament listening to God for direction. 17 months after the retreat, he gave up his promising law career, and began studies for the priesthood. Following some years of practical experience as a young priest, he went on to help found both the Redemptorist Religious Order for men and an order for women.

Redemptorists follow as closely as possible the footsteps and the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus lead a life of detachment, full of sacrifice, and suffering that set the model for the religious order. A unique feature of the community is to practice a special virtue each month of the year in order to imprint the image of Christ on the man. The 12 virtues are: “Faith, Hope, Charity, Love of Neighbor, Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, Humility, Mortification, Recollection, Prayer, and Self-denial and Love of the Cross” (Rengers 45).

In preaching missions, Alphonsus found that hearts and minds were very moved by his teaching on Mary and her desire for sinners to seek the infinite mercy of her son, Jesus. He wrote the *Glories of Mary* to help others better understand her. Since Mary is the Mother of Jesus, the Redeemer, we may humbly approach her as the Mother of Mercy. Alphonsus also spread devotion to Mary as the Mother of Perpetual Help.

Like their founder Alphonsus Liguori, Redemptorists are known for giving parish missions. Through a series of religious talks held over several days in conjunction with confession and spiritual exercises, the order works to enkindle the hearts of the faithful. Through missions, the Redemptorists help people to see their call to holiness and to live it out. “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Mt 5:16).

Pope Clement XIII asked Alphonsus to be the Bishop of the Diocese of Agatha in 1762. Citing old age, he was 66 at the time, and a variety of ailments from being partially blind and deaf to being asthmatic and lame, Alphonsus tried to refuse the responsibility. The Pope insisted and despite continuing ill health, Alphonsus served the spiritual needs of his diocese for the next 13 years helping to renew the practice of the faith throughout the diocese and to improve the education and holiness of those serving as priests.

Alphonsus is best known for his writings in moral theology. Jesus taught, “Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law” (Mt 5:18). Sometimes this is misunderstood and leads to a very narrow view of God’s mercy. Alphonsus fought against rigid thinking in the moral life and encouraged very concrete and pastoral approaches so that priests would better serve the people as confessors and pastors.

Sources:

franciscanmedia.org/saint-alphonsus-liguori/

Rengers, Christopher. *The 35 Doctors of the Church*, pages 639-674.