

Biography of St. Rose of Lima

St. Rose of Lima was born Isabella Flores de Oliva on April 20, 1586 to a family of educated, but impoverished Spanish immigrants in Lima, Peru. At her confirmation, she took the name of Rose, because as an infant, her face had been seen as transformed into a mystical rose.

She was pious from an early age. At age five, she built a small chapel for herself in the family garden. When she made her first Confession, she obtained permission from her confessor to make a vow of virginity.

Rose had a strong devotion for Jesus and His Holy Mother and spent many hours praying before the Blessed Sacrament. With St. Catherine of Siena as her model, Rose fasted three times a week, offered up penances, cut off her beautiful hair, and wore coarse clothing. She frequently deprived herself of food, water, and sleep. As a result of her exterior mortification, she had interior mystical experiences as well as long periods of darkness and desolation. For fifteen years, she went through the "dark night of the soul."

Rose worked hard to support her poor parents and she humbly obeyed them, except when they tried to get her to marry. For ten years she fought them on this issue as she had secretly taken a vow of virginity at the age of five.

At age 20, Rose joined the Third Order of St. Dominic and thereafter increased her penances as well as her good works. She moved into a small hut in her parents' garden and served the poor and the sick in a makeshift infirmary. Our Lord frequently manifested Himself to her, filling her heart with peace and joy, leaving her in ecstasy for hours. In her last long, painful sickness, this heroic young woman prayed: "Lord, increase my sufferings, and with them increase Your love in my heart."

Exhausted from her many penances, Rose died of a fever and paralysis at age 31. She was canonized in 1671 by Pope Clement X and became the first American saint. Her feast day is August 23, although some countries, like Peru, celebrate her on August 30. St. Rose is the patroness of embroiderers, gardeners, florists, those who suffer ridicule for their piety, and people who suffer family problems.

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