



# FAITH – SHARING

## Saint John Francis Regis

*“An example for the Church in the modern world”*

(Pope John Paul II)

### Introduction

Saint John Francis Regis was born in Fontcouverte (Aude, France) on 31 January, 1597. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1616 and was ordained in 1630. He was one of the great popular preachers of the seventeenth century.

During the last decade of his short life, he worked in the Southern Region of France doing immense good in areas that had been devastated by religious wars. His dedication and love for the poor made him very popular.

He died, exhausted, on 31 December, 1640, in La Louvesc (Ardèche), where he is buried. He was canonised by Pope Clement XII in 1737.

St John Francis Regis was clearly beloved by the Founders and was especially chosen by them to be the special protector of the Secular Branch. In the Generalate in Rome there is some material on this great zealot which, as far as one knows, has not been circulated in English speaking circles. One such work is a reflection – in French - on the relationship that the Founders had with St. John Francis Regis. Another work – originally in French and subsequently translated into Spanish is a short biography of the saint. Finally, an online search reveals a more thorough biography of the life of John Francis Regis that was written in English and published in 1922. The latter is available in pdf, online and in Amazon. These three documents can be found on the following links:

1. St. John Francis Regis, *Contemplation and Action*  
Click on this link: <https://bit.ly/2ZqvTYP>
2. Fanch Morvannou, *St. John Francis Regis, A Short Biography*  
Click on this link: <https://bit.ly/36kp4cK>
3. Robert E. Holland (1922), *Life of Saint John Francis Regis*  
Click on this link: <https://bit.ly/2WRRtnq>

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CHARACTERISTICS  
OF THE  
SPIRITUALITY OF  
SAINT JOHN  
FRANCIS REGIS

A zealous worker

One like Us

Someone on the  
move

Called to holiness

Contemplative in  
action

A fool for Christ

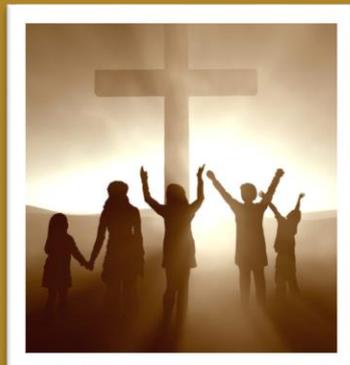
*“We also recommend great devotion to Saint Francis Regis, Apostle of Vivarais, whom we have given as Patron to the exterior Association of the faithful”.*

Pierre Coudrin  
(14 April 1817)



## Six characteristics of the spirituality of Saint John Francis Regis

- 1. A zealous worker:** St. John Francis Regis was indefatigable in his efforts to work for God which he understood as the physical and spiritual salvation of souls. His dream was to join his fellow Jesuits in their mission to the Hurons in Canada and like many of them become a martyr. This was not to be. Instead, his missionary life was carried out in French soil and - combined with many lasting charity works - consisted in encouraging people in the faith, calling them back to the faith or bringing them to the faith.
- 2. One like us:** In giving an account to his Superior General of the lasting changes that God's grace had worked through him among the country people of Sommières, France, St. John Francis Regis wrote". "God is surely great, and I am at a loss to explain how it has all come about." In response to one of quite a number of occasions of outright hostility and threats of violence he commented: "Ah, perhaps you do not understand that the ministers of the Gospel should be ready to take insults as compliments, bear them with patience and forgive them with charity".
- 3. Someone on the move:** St. John Francis Regis longed to travel to the New World and become a missionary to the Native Americans, but he was called instead to work among his own compatriots. In over 50 districts of France (some quite mountainous) - reached either on foot or very occasionally by horse - he preached the Gospel to children, the poor, prisoners, and others forgotten, neglected or rejected by society. Unlike many famous preachers, he isn't remembered for his golden-tongued oratory. What people who listened to him heard was his own fervent faith, and it had a powerful effect on them. His faith and goodness touched them and brought them to deeper faith.
- 4. Called to Holiness:** The holiness of St. John Francis Regis consisted in zealously seeking the glory of God in all things and especially by serving the poor.



**CALLED TO HOLINESS:** "... all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord – each in his or her own way – to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect" (*Lumen Gentium* 11)

In the words of Pope Francis - "The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence". (*Gaudete et Exsultate* 1).

"We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves." (*Gaudete et Exsultate* 14).

**5. Contemplative in action:** From start to finish the life and ministry of St. John Francis Regis was shaped and made effective through prayer and adoration and love of the sacraments. "It was thus that the man's faith shone out as a bright star from dark clouds of foreboding. For while difficulties multiplied and multiplied again, Regis never hesitated a moment, nor doubted but what God in whom he put all his trust, would see him through to a happy end. Human aids, to be sure, he must make use of - and he sought them - but in God alone he placed full confidence. This was the secret of his success." (*Life of Saint John Francis Regis*, Robert E Holland)

**6. A fool for Christ:** St. John Francis Regis' successes everywhere were wonderful, but, as in the life St. Damien of Molokai and indeed every saint, God permitted him to be misunderstood, slandered and persecuted on account of his work. Opposition came not only from those opposed to his work but also from some members of his own community. In the words of the Gospel of John, "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him." (John 1:11)

## For reflection

The Founders were clearly inspired by the life of St. John Francis Regis and gifted him to the Secular Branch. St. Marcelino Champagnat (founder of the Marist Brothers) and St. John Vianney (Curé d'Ars) both attributed their overcoming difficulties in studies for the priesthood to the intercession of St. John Francis Regis. Indeed John Vianney, on his deathbed (1859) stated: "Everything good, that I have done, I owe to him."

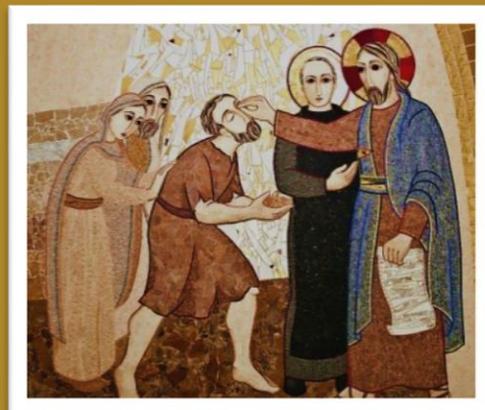
1. To which saint, if any, are you personally drawn to and what is it about that saint that attracts you?
2. Which of the six characteristics of St. John Francis can you identify more with?
3. What in this reflection sheet has caused you to pause for thought?

### MOVED WITH COMPASSION

Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and curing every disease and illness.

At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with compassion for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the labourers are few; so, ask the master of the harvest to send out labourers for his harvest." (Matt. 9:35-38)



## Closing prayer

### OUR FATHER

*O God, who sent Saint John Francis Regis,  
that through villages and cities he might proclaim peace,  
call workers who will also join in the works of your Son today.  
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen*