

More calamities faced Frances. While Lorenzo was out of Rome to avoid capture, the home was invaded, the servants were tortured and killed and the palace totally demolished. This time God did not intervene. Battista was kidnapped and taken to Naples. A plague soon hit Rome and many people lost their lives including Frances' nine-year-old son Evangelista. A year after his death she had a vision that told her that her daughter Agnes was going to die soon. In return God was granting her a special grace by sending an archangel to be her guardian angel for the rest of her life.

Finally the wars ended and Battista and Lorenzo returned home. Battista came back as a charming young man who married a woman named Mabilia. Lorenzo came home a man broken in mind and body. Frances nursed Lorenzo until he died. His last words to her were, "I feel as if my whole life has been one beautiful dream of purest happiness. God has given me so much in your love."

*(excerpted from: www.catholic.org)

******Meanwhile, Frances had turned part of the family's country estate into a hospital. On 15 August 1425, the feast of the Assumption she founded the Olivetan Oblates of Mary, a confraternity of pious women, attached to the church of Santa Maria Nova in Rome. The women were not cloistered nor bound by formal vows. In March 1433, she founded a convent for common life by the members of the group at Tor de' Specchi, which remains the only house of the Order. On 4 July 1433, they received the approval of Pope Eugene IV as a religious congregation of nuns. The community thus also became known as the Oblates of Saint Frances of Rome. When her husband died in 1436, she became the group's superior. She died in 1440 and was buried in that church.

***(excerpted from://en.wikipedia.org)

IN HER FOOTSTEPS:

Do you have a spiritual friend who helps you on your journey, someone to pray with and serve with? If you don't have one now, ask God to send you such a companion. Then look around you. This friend, like Frances' Vannoza, may be near you already. Try sharing some of your spiritual hopes and desires with those closest to you. You may be surprised at their reaction. (But don't force your opinions on others or get discouraged by lack of interest. Just keep asking God to lead you.)

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Saint Frances of Rome

Feast Day: March 9



Prayer

Saint Frances of Rome, help us to see the difference between what we want to do and what God wants us to do.

Help us to discern what comes from our will and what comes from God's desire.

Amen.

Saint Frances of Rome

*Frances was born in the city of Rome in 1384 to a wealthy, noble family. From the mother she inherited a quiet manner and a pious devotion to God. From her father, she inherited a strong will. She decided at eleven that she knew what God wanted for her— she was going to be a nun. That is when her will ran right up against her father's. He told Frances she was too young to know her mind - but not too young to be married. He had already promised her in marriage to the son of another wealthy family. In Rome at that time a father's word was law; a father could even sell his children into slavery or order them killed.

Frances stubbornly prayed to God to prevent the marriage until her confessor pointed out, "Are you crying because you want to do God's will or because you want God to do your will?" She reluctantly gave in to the marriage. It was difficult for people to understand her objection. Her future husband Lorenzo Ponziani was noble, wealthy, and a good person who really cared for her. It was an ideal match - except for someone determined to be a bride of Christ. Her mother-in-law, Cecilia loved to entertain and expected her new daughter-in-law to enjoy the revelry of a social life as well. Fasting and scourging were far easier than this torture God now asked Frances to endure. She collapsed from the strain and for months laid close to death, unable to eat or move or speak.

At her worst, she had a vision of St. Alexis, the son of a noble family. Alexis had run away to beg rather than marry. After years of begging he was so unrecognizable that when he returned home his own father thought he was just another beggar and made him sleep under the stairs. In her own way, Frances must have felt unrecognized by her family—they couldn't see how she wanted to give up everything for Jesus. St. Alexis told her, God was giving her an important choice:

"Did she want to recover or not?" Finally, she whispered, "God's will is mine." They were the hardest words she could have said - but the right words to set her on the road to sanctity. St. Alexis replied, "Then you will live to glorify His Name." Her recovery was immediate and complete. Lorenzo became even more devoted to her after this.

Her mother-in-law still expected her to entertain and this made Frances so upset that one day her sister-in-law Vannoza found her crying and Frances explained to her how she wanted to be devoted to the Lord. Vannoza expressed the same feelings to Frances. They became close friends and worked out a program of devout practices and services to work together.

Shortly after having her first son, her mother-in-law passed away. Frances was thrust into the responsibility of managing the Ponziani's family affairs. She was an excellent administrator and a fair and pleasant employer. After bearing two more children, a flood brought disease and famine to Rome. Frances began to give all of the family supplies to the poor. At first her husband objected because the family cellar was empty. Later when confronted by her husband and her father-in-law, she said a prayer and when they went back into the cellar, it was filled with supplies. These incidents completely converted Lorenzo and her father-in-law.

Civil war came to Rome, it was a time for popes and antipopes and Rome became a battleground. At one point there were three men claiming to be pope. One of them sent a cruel governor, Count Troja, to conquer Rome. Lorenzo was seriously wounded in battle and his brother would be executed unless Lorenzo surrendered his oldest son Battista as a hostage. Reluctantly, Frances agreed to the terms. When Troja, put Battista on a soldier's horse - the horse refused to move. Finally the governor gave in to God's wishes. Frances was kneeling before the altar when Battista returned.