



The *Patrocinium* of St. Joseph Calasanz

November 27

Although the Feast of St. Joseph Calasanz is celebrated on August 25, this date often falls at the end of summer vacation for most Piarist Schools. As a result, the religious order has designated November 27, which is the day he opened Europe's first free public school, as the *Patrocinium*, a special day to honor and celebrate St. Joseph Calasanz.

Joseph was born on September 11, 1557 in a tiny village called Peralta de la Sal. He was a Spanish priest from Aragon, Spain, who went to Rome at the end of the sixteenth century and started schools for poor and homeless children. He also started a religious congregation to serve these schools which is today spread throughout the world. He was well educated in philosophy, law and theology at the Spanish universities of Estadilla, Lerida, and Valencia. His family initially did not support his religious calling. His father wanted him to marry and to continue the family, but after recovering from an illness which brought him close to death, Calasanz was ordained as a priest on December 17, 1583. He subsequently became vicar general of Tremp. He later relinquished much of his inheritance and resigned his vicariate. For the next ten years, he held various posts as a secretary, administrator and theologian in the Diocese of Albarracín in Spain.

In 1592, Joseph went to Rome, where he became a theologian in the service of Cardinal Marcoantonio Colonna and a tutor to his nephew. He worked alongside St. Camillus de Lellis during the plague, which hit Rome at the time. He helped to carry the bodies of the dead on his own shoulders to burial. Joseph worked with the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, and in

November 1597, he opened Europe's first free, public school for poor children in the Church of St. Dorothy, which is located in the Trastevere (Trans Tiber) section of Rome.

Within ten years, he had rented a house at Sant'Andrea della Valle and started a religious community, which taught poor children and was later called the Piarists. Popes Clement VIII (1592-1605) and Paul V (1605-21) both gave him financial help, and he soon had a thousand children in his charge. In 1612, the school moved to San Pantaleo, near Piazza Navona, and this became the motherhouse of what came to be called the Pious Schools. In September 1616, the first public and free school in Frascati was started up on his initiative. A year later, Pope Paul V approved the *Congregation of the Pious Schools*, the first religious institute dedicated to teaching. During the following years, Joseph was able to set up Pious Schools in various parts of Europe. After convincing the pope of the need to approve a religious order with solemn vows dedicated exclusively to the education of youth, the congregation was raised to that status on November 18, 1621, by a papal brief of Pope Gregory XV, under the name of *Ordo Clericorum Regularum Pauperum Matris Dei Scholarum Piarum* (Order of the Poor Clerics Regular of the Mother of God of the Pious Schools). The abbreviation "Sch. P." following the name of a Piarist stands for *Scholarum Piarum*, which in Latin means "of the Pious Schools."

Joseph was a man of great moral courage. He accepted Jewish children into his schools and made sure that they were treated equally. Although Latin was the accepted language of the time, he defended and had textbooks printed in vernacular languages, and he advanced the study of mathematics and science. He was a friend of the scientist Galileo Galilei, and sent some of his Piarists to study with him and to serve as his secretaries. He shared and defended Galileo's heliocentric view of the cosmos and even after Galileo was condemned and became blind, he stood by him. This caused opposition towards him and his congregation in influential quarters, and he was removed from his post as superior general of the Piarists, but he remained patient and humble in the face of difficulty.

Calasanz died in Rome on August 25, 1648 at the age of 90, and he was buried in the church of San Pantaleo. Eight years after his death, Pope Alexander VII cleared his name and that of the Pious Schools, so that the Piarist congregation continued to spread throughout Europe. It had considerable success in the education of physically and mentally disabled persons.

Joseph Calasanz was beatified in 1748 by Pope Benedict XIV and canonized by Pope Clement XIII in 1767. In 1948, Pope Pius XII declared St.

Joseph Calasanz as the patron saint of Christian public schools. Today the Order has 1,421 members in 36 countries on five continents.