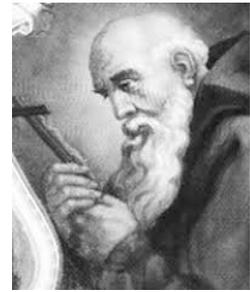


## St. Conrad of Piacenza (O.F.S.) [1290 – 1351]

(Feast Day: February 19)



Born in 1290 of a noble family in northern Italy, Conrad as a young man married Euphrosyne, daughter of a nobleman. One day while hunting, he ordered attendants to set fire to some brush in order to flush out the game. The fire spread to nearby fields and to a large forest. Conrad fled. An innocent peasant was imprisoned, tortured to confess, and condemned to death. Conrad confessed his guilt, saved the man's life, and paid for the damaged property. One site stated that he paid for the damaged property and he and his wife gave everything they owned to the poor in recompense. The other site stated that he paid for the damaged property, selling nearly all he owned in order to raise the cash.

Conrad and his wife saw the hand of God in the dramatic event. Soon after this event in 1315, Conrad and his wife agreed to separate: she to a Poor Clare monastery and he joining a community of hermits, who were Franciscan tertiaries (**known today as Secular Franciscans**), following the Third Order Rule. Soon Conrad developed a reputation for holiness, and the flow of visitors left him unable to keep the solitude he sought. He then embarked on the life of a pilgrim, going to Rome, and from there to the Holy Land and Malta and, about 1340, to Palermo in Sicily, where he was directed to an isolated grotto in the Val di Noto.

Conrad felt called by God to serve the local people more directly and in 1343 went to the city of Noto, where he cared for the sick at the Hospital of St. Martin there for the next two years. Conrad would regularly return to his grotto for silent prayer.

He spent a most austere and penitential life, working numerous miracles, and was gifted with prophecy. The miracle for which Conrad is best known is the "Miracle of the Bread." This developed during the famine which afflicted Sicily as a result of a severe outbreak of the bubonic plague on the island during 1348 – 49. During that catastrophe, anyone who approached the hermit for help was given a loaf of bread, still warm, which, it was said, he had received from the angels.

Conrad was also known for invoking a cure for hernias. The legend relates that a former friend who was suffering from the pain of a hernia he had developed visited him at his hermitage. Seeing the pain his old comrade was suffering, Conrad was moved to pity and prayed for him. The friend was immediately cured of the hernia. The same outcome was accomplished for a local tailor, who suffered severely from several hernias. Conrad died while in prayer, kneeling before a crucifix, on February 19, 1351, the day he had predicted.

Shortly after Conrad's death, his demonstrably holy life and the large number of miracles attributed to him led the leadership of the city to request that the Bishop of Syracuse, to which diocese Noto belonged, begin the process for his canonization. When the waiting period required by Church law expired in 1485, this process was opened by Bishop Dalmazio Gabriele, O.P., who had himself witnessed the Miracle of the Bread. As part of the process, Conrad's body was exhumed for examination, and was found to be incorrupt, and placed in a silver urn for the veneration of the public.

Pope Leo X beatified Conrad on July 12, 1515. On June 2, 1625, he was canonized by Pope Urban VIII in a solemn ceremony at the cathedral of Piacenza, where it was declared an obligatory feast. On September 12 of that same year, permission was granted to the Franciscan Order by the same Pope for a distinct text for the Divine Office and Mass to be used for his feast; today it is celebrated solely by the Third Order of St. Francis to which he belonged.