

St. Didacus' hidden acts of charity to the sick in Rome earned him a place among the elect

St. Didacus shows that heroic acts of hidden virtue are not inferior to noble deeds if, proceeding from the same ardent love, they produce in the soul the same increase of divine charity.



Saint Didacus Brings the Stillborn Girl to Life
– Maerten de Vos, circa. 1595
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Dom Prosper Guéranger

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([LifeSiteNews](#)) — A humble lay brother, Didacus of St. Nicholas, is welcomed today by his father [St. Francis](#) into the company of [Bernardine of Siena](#) and [John Capistran](#), who preceded him by a few years to heaven.

The two latter left Italy and the whole of Europe still echoing with their voices, the one making peace between cities in the name of the Lord Jesus, the other urging on the Christian hosts to battle with the victorious Crescent. The age which they contributed so powerfully to save from the results of the great schism and to restore to its Christian destinies knew little of Didacus but his unbounded charity. It was the year of the great Jubilee, 1450. Rome having become once more, practically as well as theoretically, the holy city in the eyes of the nations, not even the most terrible scourges could keep her children at a distance. From every quarter of the globe, crowds, urged by the evils of the time, flocked to the sources of salvation; and Satan's work of ruin was retarded by seventy years.

Men doubtless attributed but a very small share of such results to the humble brother, who was spending himself in the Ara-Caeli, in the service of the plague-stricken; especially if they compared him with his brethren, the great Franciscan apostles. And yet the Church pays to Didacus today the very same honors as we have seen her pay to Bernardine and John Capistran. What is this but asserting that before God heroic acts of hidden virtue are not inferior to the noble deeds that dazzle the world if, proceeding from the same ardent love, they produce in the soul the same increase of divine charity.

The Pontificate of [Nicholas V](#), which witnessed the imposing concourse of people to the tombs of the apostles in 1450, was also, and still is, justly admired for the new impetus given to the culture of letters and the arts in Rome; for it belongs to the Church to

adorn herself, for the honor of her Spouse, with all that men rightly deem great and beautiful. Nevertheless, who is there now of all the humanists, as the learned men of that age were called, who would not prefer the glory of the poor, unlettered Friar Minor, to that which vainly held out to them the hope of immortality? In the fifteenth century, as at all other times, God chose the foolish and the weak to confound the wise and the strong. The Gospel is always in the right.

Let us read [the luminous life](#) of this unlearned man, as given in the book of holy Church.

Didacus (a Latin form of the Spanish Diego, or James) was a Spaniard, born at the little town of St. Nicholas de Porto in the diocese of Seville. From his early youth he began the practice of a perfect life, under the guidance of a pious priest in a solitary church. Then, in order to bind himself more closely to God, he made profession of the rule of St. Francis, in the convent of the Observantine Friars Minor at Arizzafa. There he bore the yoke of humble obedience and regular observance with great alacrity; and devoted himself especially to contemplation, in which he received wonderful lights from God, so that, illiterate as he was, he spoke of heavenly things in an admirable manner, evidently by a divine gift.

He was sent to the Canary Isles to govern the brethren of his order; and there he had much to suffer. He was burning with the desire of martyrdom; and by his words and example, he converted many infidels to the faith of Christ. Coming to Rome in the Jubilee year, in the pontificate of Nicholas V, he was entrusted with the care of the sick in the convent of Ara Coeli. With such loving charity did he acquit himself of this duty, that the sick wanted for nothing even during the famine in the city; he also sometimes cleansed their ulcers by sucking them. He was remarkable for his great faith and his gift of healing; for by signing the cross upon the sick with oil from a lamp burning

before an image of the Mother of God, to whom he had the greatest devotion, he miraculously cured many of them.

At length, when at Alcala, he understood that the end of his life was at hand. Clad in an old torn tunic, with his eyes fixed on the cross, he devoutly pronounced these words of the sacred hymn: ‘O sweet wood, sweet are thy nails, and sweet thy burden; thou wast worthy to bear the King and Lord of heaven!’ He then gave up his soul to God, on the day before the Ides of November, in the year of our Lord 1463. His body was left unburied for several months, in order to satisfy the pious devotion of the numbers who came to see it; and, as though already clothed with immortality, it exhaled a sweet odor. He was renowned for many striking miracles, and was enrolled among the saints by Pope [Sixtus V.](#)

“O Almighty, everlasting God, who by an admirable order dost choose the weak things of the world, that thou mayest confound whatever is strong; mercifully grant to our lowliness, that by the pious prayers of blessed Didacus, thy Confessor, we may be made worthy to be exalted to everlasting glory in heaven.”
([Collect of the feast](#))

Such is the prayer addressed to God by the Church at all the liturgical Hours on this thy feast, O Didacus. Second her supplications; for thou art in high favor with him whom thou didst follow so lovingly along the way of humility and voluntary poverty. A royal road indeed, since it brought thee to a throne which far outshines all earthly thrones. Even here below, thou dost far surpass in renown many of thy contemporaries, who are now as forgotten as they were once illustrious. Sanctity alone merits crowns that endure through all ages of time and for all eternity; for God is the final awarder, as he is the supreme reason of all glory, just as in him lies the principle of all true happiness both for this world and for the next. May we all, after thine example and by thine assistance, learn this by our own blessed experience!

This text is taken from [The Liturgical Year](#), authored by Dom Prosper Guéranger (1841-1875). LifeSiteNews is grateful to [The Ecu-Men](#) website for making this classic work easily available online.