



Sustaining Life on the Land

Reflections on Rural Life

ST. ISIDORE THE FARMER

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OUR LADY OF SORROWS/HOLY TRINITY/OUR LADY OF LOURDES PARISHES,
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Miracle working is not a prerequisite in the earthly life of saints, but there are saints in whose stories the supernatural is a constant, both before and after their bodily death. Saint Isidore the Farmer is just such a saint.

Fellow laborers reported to their employer, John de Vergas, that attending daily mass caused Isidore to arrive late at work each day. Hiding himself so that he could observe Isidore's arrival, de Vergas found the accusation to be true. As de Vergas advanced to admonish Isidore's behavior, he was surprised to see a second team of snow white oxen led by unknown figures plowing beside the team driven by Isidore. Other people also reported seeing angels assisting Isidore at various times.

Once, when invited to a confraternity dinner, Isidore -- who loved the poor and often shared his meal with them, keeping only the scraps for himself -- remained so long in prayer at the church that the feast was nearly over when he arrived accompanied by a train of beggars. The hosts feared that there would not be enough for so many. Isidore, however, assured them that there would be enough for himself and for Christ's poor. And so there was -- with some to spare.

Yet another example of multiplication of food is associated with Isidore's great love of animals. One snowy winter day, as he carried a sack of grain to be ground, he

saw a number of birds perched on the bare branches, obviously unable to find anything to eat. Isidore opened the grain sack and, despite the mockery of his companion, emptied half the grain onto the ground. However, when the two arrived at the mill, the sack was still full and produced more than the usual amount of flour.

In the forty years following his death, the many miracles worked through his intercession led to his body being transferred to a shrine within the church of St. Andrew. In 1211, Isadore appeared to King Alphonsus of Castile, who was fighting the Moors in the pass of Navas de Tolosa; Isadore appeared and showed the king an unknown path by means of which he was able to surprise and defeat the enemy. More than four hundred years later, King Phillip III was so ill that the physicians despaired of his life. The shrine of St. Isidore was carried in solemn procession from Madrid to the sick monarch's room. At the hour the relics were removed from the Church the fever left the king and when they were brought into his presence he recovered completely.

Who was this man said to be so favored in his earthly life, so powerful before the throne of God after his earthly death?

In an age when holiness was associated with celibacy and the monastery, Isidore was a married layman. In an age



when courage and valor were associated with the armies that were gradually reclaiming Spain from its long domination by the Moors, Isidore was a civilian. In an age when wealthy men like John de Vergas were being awarded large tracts of land on the frontier between the recently conquered Christian lands and the lands still under the domination of Islamic rulers, Isidore was a poor man, a mere “hired hand” with no hope of ever owning a farm, much less an estate.

Yet, this “hired hand” is spoken of in Spain as one of “The Five Saints.” The royal family of Spain strongly advocated Isidore’s canonization, and when at last Isidore was canonized, he was elevated along with no less than St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Francis Xavier, St. Teresa of Avila and St. Philip Neri four of the greatest saints of the Catholic Reformation.

To the purely secular mind, Isidore may seem little more than a romantic sop, a nod to the hard-pressed farmers whose lives, like so many lives in the late twentieth century, appear to be falling apart at the seams. Even believers may not know what to make of this holy hired hand who works in the company of angels, who multiplies food not only for hungry men and women, but for hungry birds as well.

The life St. Isidore practically shouts at us the power and the glory of a God who is in complete control of creation. Can this medieval, miracle-working hired hand have anything to say to our jaded, suffering, confused and confusing world? Can Isidore show us what he showed the King of Castile—an unknown path by means of which we will be able to surprise and defeat the enemy, or must we consign the accounts of his life and witness to the credulity of a more naive age? It is an important question, for it is after all the same question we must ask ourselves when we read these words of Christ “**...if you have faith and do not waver...even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will be done. Whatever you ask in prayer in faith, you will receive.**” (Mt.21:21-22) -