Blessed Among Us: St. Alphonsus Liguori

St. Alphonsus Liguori was born to nobility on Sept. 27, 1696 in Marionelli, Italy. His full name was Alphonsus Marie Antony John Cosmos Damien Michael Gaspard de Liguori!

He was a child prodigy and his education as a youth came from the best tutors his parents could afford. At 13, he began the study of jurisprudence and at age 16 received his doctorate in law from the University of Naples. He had his own practice by age 21 and soon became one of the leading lawyers in Naples.   He always attended Mass before going to court. He won all his cases except one, which he lost due to an oversight on his part. He apologized to his client and left the courthouse forever.

He had a strong attraction to the priesthood, studied theology and was ordained in 1726, spending his first years as a missionary near Naples. He met opposition from Church officials for his "laxity" toward sinners. In actuality, he treated people as penitents to be saved rather than criminals to be prosecuted.

His missionary work took him to China, where he met Fr. Thomas Falcoia, who became his Spiritual Director. It was with Fr. Falcoia and Sr. Mary Celeste that St. Alphonsus founded the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, the Redemptionists.

Alphonsus wrote over 100 books, the most important being _Moral Theology,_ which revolutionized the thinking of the Church and established him, along with Thomas Aquinas, as one of the greatest theologians ever. In this work, he "steered a middle course between rigorism and laxity. He taught that all are called to salvation and that the means are available to every person." [Blessed Among Us, p. 440] And that moral life was essentially the life of love.

St. Alphonsus, severely crippled by rheumatic fever, died on August 1, 1787 at the age of 90.   During his lifetime he was a lawyer, poet, musician, architect, writer, bishop, preacher and confessor. In 1796 he was venerated by Pope Pius VI, beatified in 1816 and canonized by Pope Gregory XVI in 1839. In 1871, St. Alphonsus Liguori was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius IX.

His feast day is August 1.

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