

St. Francis of Paola



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The Founding of the Minims

THE number of those who wanted to live like Francis and his first two companions continued to grow. By 1452 there were enough of them to seek approval from the local Archbishop to become a religious order. He gave them his blessing. They were called “the Hermits of St. Francis of Assisi,” but later on they changed their name to “the Order of Minims,” the least brothers, meaning that they wanted to be the least important of all people.

Francis and his companions also built a new monastery for themselves as well as a new church for the many people who were beginning to visit them. The people of that region held them in such high esteem that they all helped them in their building project. It was most inspiring to see the rich working alongside the poor peasants as they built a house for God and His servants.

As the years went on, more and more people came to visit Francis and his followers. So many came, in fact, that the Holy Father, Pope Paul II, sent someone to check out this new group to make sure that they were faithful to the teachings of the Church. He found Francis laying stones for their new church building.



The Holy Father Gives His Approval

THE representative of Pope Paul II was so impressed with Francis that he reached out to kiss his hands. Francis pulled his hand back and said that it was he who should kiss his hands for he had celebrated Mass as a priest of God for thirty years. (In many countries people kiss priests' hands as a sign of respect.) This made it even clearer to the representative that Francis was a man of God, for no one had ever told Francis that he had been a priest for thirty years.

As much as he was impressed by Francis, he was not too sure about his way of life. He thought that eating no meat, cheese, or eggs all year long might make Francis and his followers sick.

At this point, Francis reached out into the fire and pulled out a handful of red hot coals. He held them in his hands for quite some time, and when he put them down and held up his hands to show the Pope's representative, there was absolutely nothing wrong with them. This convinced him that God was behind what Francis and his followers were doing.

In 1474 the Holy See officially approved of this new order.