



"Saints adoring Jesus Resurrected", by Fra Angelico – Detail of the Fiesole Panel, San Marco Museum, Florence (Italy)

St. Juan Macias

1585 - 1645

September 18

St. Juan Macias is a saint dear to the heart of Dominicans. To the chorus of Dominican saints, this humble lay brother adds his characteristic notes of contemplation and spiritual friendship, a living example of the Dominican motto, "to contemplate and to give to others the fruits of our contemplation."

Juan Macias was born on March 2, 1585 in a small village in southwestern Spain. His parents were poor farmers; both died when Juan and his sister Agnes were young. The two children were raised by their uncle whose last name, "Macias," they took as their own.

When he was sixteen, Juan met a Dominican priest while attending Mass in a neighboring village. Like most young people, Juan was full of wonder about what his future would hold. This experience made a new impression on Juan and opened his heart to the possibility of a Dominican vocation. Unlike most young people, Juan received another special grace: it is said that as he began to seek God's will for his life, he was frequently visited by the Blessed Virgin Mary and by his patron, St. John the Evangelist. At the age of 35, Juan still felt drawn to the Dominican Order. St. John told him that it was not to be in Spain that he would become a Dominican, but in Lima, Peru. In 1622, Juan Macias entered the Dominican convent of St. Mary Magdalene in Lima, Peru. He entered as a lay brother, a non-ordained friar who, instead of preaching, would do the manual labor necessary in the monastery. Juan was the assistant Porter (doorkeeper) until his death in 1646. Although he was uneducated, Juan Macias exemplified the Dominican charism. Like St. Dominic, he learned the most sublime theology by studying the "book of charity," the Cross. Juan Macias' entire life preached the Word of God to those he met.

One of Juan Macias' chief duties was to meet the poor who came to the convent seeking material or spiritual assistance, often over two hundred people every day. Besides his cheerful disposition and encouraging manner, Juan Macias became known for the sometimes-miraculous nature of his service to the poor. Everyone knew that Juan worked extremely hard to collect alms for distribution. Still, he would often return empty handed. Yet, somehow Juan never turned anyone away. From what he had been able to collect, he would have enough to feed all who came to him for help.

Juan Macias knew that he must help meet the physical needs of those who came to him, but he also knew that their spiritual hunger was much greater. Juan was an instrument of conversion for many.

Juan Macias is well known for his close friendship with another Dominican saint, Martin de Porres. The two saints often met on their daily rounds of the city and became close spiritual friends as well. They were a constant source of encouragement and ideas for one another. The two were beatified together in a single ceremony by Pope Gregory XVI in 1837.

The Dominican Order, the Order of Preachers, has a long tradition of saints who inspire us through their preaching, most often by placing their intellectual gifts at the service of Christ and His Church through teaching, writing, or preaching parish retreats. The source of strength of the preacher, however, comes through holiness of life in union with Christ. In this sense, St. Juan Macias captures the essence of the Dominican charism, preaching his homily through the witness of his daily life.