

In honor of our celebration of St. Regis this weekend, the family life council asked me if I would say some things about the life of John Francis Regis and why it is our parish carries his name. So here's our story:

John Francis Regis was born in 1597 in Fontcouverte, way down in the very south of France, not far from Spain. He attended a nearby college and joined the Jesuits, who taught there, when he was 18. He was a humble student who taught catechism in his spare time, and won the praise of children, adults and his own superiors. He was ordained a priest when he was 34 years old, and celebrated his first Mass on Trinity Sunday, the same feast we celebrate today.

In the early part of the seventeenth century, France was largely rural, outside of Paris and some other towns. People lived in small villages, and many of them had grown lax in their faith. Throughout his priesthood Regis went to these areas of southern France to evangelize. His sermons were easy to understand, homely, yet filled with fervor, and he attracted people by the thousands. His social service was directed toward the poor, for whom he collected clothing from the rich and built granaries to hold corn for their food. He helped prisoners, the sick, and even prostitutes. In fact his enemies tried to defame his character by claiming his intentions were not altogether pure. But Regis is said to have worked several miracles--restoring sight to the blind and health to the sick, and his reputation was secure.

Regis wanted to go wherever the Gospel was not and fill up the void with the good news. He worked tirelessly in southern France, but his real desire was to cross the ocean to Canada to preach to the Native Americans here. Regis knew he might be killed if he did that, but he welcomed the thought of martyrdom. However, his superiors never permitted him to make the trip. He contracted pleurisy while conducting another mission in southern France. He died at age 43 on December 31, 1640 in the town of La Louvesc, where he is buried today.

Two hundred years later, Jesuits from France were among the first to settle the area which would come to be known as Kansas City. Since they were actually living the dream that Regis had--bringing the Gospel to North America--they named a little log cabin church after him. There's a model of it over against that wall. That church was replaced by our cathedral, and 28 years ago when Bishop Helmsing decided to open a new parish in the wilds of southeast Kansas City, he chose the name of the saint who inspired the first settlers to our area, John Francis Regis.

So for us to carry the name of Regis is to carry on his work for the poor and his zeal for evangelization. Whenever we bring the church into the world, whenever we stock the food pantry, whenever we offer clothes to St. Vincent's, whenever we support our friends in El Salvador, whenever we make moral decisions, whenever we tell others about our parish, we do the work of St. John Francis Regis.