

April 14

Blessed Pica Bernadone

Today is Valentine's Day! While it would be enjoyable to reflect on the power of passionate love, our Franciscan Lenten reflections have us considering the love of St. Francis' mother. She was never formerly recognized as a Blessed or Saint, but she is honored for the role she played in shaping Francis' complete and singular devotion to Christ and the poor.

Francis of Assisi was his mother's son! To appreciate the hidden depth of such a statement one has to consider the fundamental need every human being has to be loved, cherished, protected and affectionately embraced. Blessed Pica kept alive the hope every loving mother has for her child, a firm belief that her child is special and that her child has a destiny. From his birth, Blessed Pica had this intuition.

It is said, that an old manuscript can be found in the Vatican archives telling the story of Francis' birth. The first part of the story says that a beggar visited her and told her she would not give birth to Francis unless it took place in a stable. The second part says that several months later another visitor conveyed that she was to show him the greatest motherly care. Blessed Pica viewed these encounters as messengers of God and generously loved Francis even to the point that this love caused tense friction among Francis, his father and herself.

We see traces of this motherly love in Francis' understanding that mothering is so much more than gender. Mothering is not only something we must receive, but it is a beautiful gift we all need to give. In his *Letter to the Faithful*, he tells us that: "We are mothers when we carry Christ in our heart and body through love and a pure and sincere conscience; and give Him birth through a holy activity. The "holy activity" is anything and everything that animates compassion, patience and justice. All we do that gives birth to love.

Let us pray.



God of tender care, you have cradled us in goodness, you have mothered us in wholeness, you have loved us into birth. All around us we have known you, all creation lives to hold you. In our living and our dying we are bringing you to birth. Amen. -Bernadette Farrell, "God, Beyond All Names"

Blessed Pica Bernadone is a friend of God, the company we keep today.