



St. John Baptist de La Salle

April 7th

Today we celebrate St. John Baptist de La Salle. He is the founder of the modern-day Christian Brothers.

Born in Reims, France on April 30, 1651, John was the first son of wealthy parents. He had to assume the administration of family affairs after his parents died, but from a very early age, he felt called to the priesthood so, he completed his theological studies and was ordained a priest in April 1678. Then, two years later, he received a doctorate in theology.

What truly set him on his renown path was a chance encounter with a lay missionary, who was establishing schools for socioeconomically poor children. John got involved in this process, which led him to deeply engage in education as a ministry. He took an interest in teaching; therefore, he invited underprepared and under-resourced teachers into his home for a retreat and some basic teacher training. Later he moved with the teachers to a new house, renounced his clerical position, and gave away his wealth. He established a group of lay religious men dedicated exclusively to education called the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Ultimately, this group sought to form a community of consecrated laymen to conduct gratuitous schools “together and by association.” But this was met by the educational establishment of the time with resentment. They begrudged the Brothers of the Christian Schools’ innovative methods and insistence on gratuity for all, regardless of whether they could afford to pay.

Within the next 40 years, this community of De La Salle Christian Brothers established a network of quality schools throughout France that introduced the intersection of religious education with secular subjects. Additionally, John developed training programs for lay teachers, Sunday classes for the working class, and institutions for delinquent youth.

St. John Baptist de La Salle died on Good Friday in 1719, with 23 active communities and 100 Brothers continuing the mission he set forth. He was canonized a saint in 1900 and named the patron saint of teachers in 1950.

Now, the Christian Brothers are celebrating 300 years! They are one of the largest education networks in the world, where 5,000 De La Salle Brothers and more than 80,000 partners ministers are working in approximately 1,000 schools and training centers serving approximately 850,000 children, youth and adults in more than 80 countries.

St. John Baptist de La Salle, pray for us.

