

AUGUST 1 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

Today we celebrate the Feast of Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer—more familiarly known to us as the Redemptorists.

He was born in 1696 and died two years before the French Revolution, in 1789. His father was a man of great integrity—very strict and full of ambition for his son. He wanted Alphonsus to be a famous, wealthy lawyer. His mother, on the other hand, was a very devout woman. She taught Alphonsus how to pray, something that left a deep impact on him. Later, as a priest and bishop, he would constantly tell people, “Pray, pray. Pray faithfully. If you pray faithfully, you will be saved.”

At the age of sixteen, Alphonsus had already graduated in both canon and civil law. He was so intelligent that for eight years, he never lost a case—until one day he did. Devastated by the loss, he began to discern a new path. He felt God calling him to something else—to be a priest, and specifically, a priest for the poor.

At the age of 36, six years after his ordination, he took a break and went to the outskirts of Naples, where he had been born. There, he encountered farmers and shepherds who were without the sacraments and without priests to preach the Gospel to them. He gathered a group of priests around him with a clear purpose, and on November 7, 1732, they committed themselves to three things.

First, they would ensure that these poor farmers and shepherds had access to the sacraments—nourishment for their spiritual journey. This was synodality in its real form. The word "synod" comes from the Greek **syn** (with) and **hodos** (road)—to be “on the road with.” This is exactly what Alphonsus Liguori did. He went on the road with these people.

Second, they committed to proclaiming the Good News. Like the Dominicans, the Redemptorists became a preaching order, proclaiming missions in various places, preaching to the people wherever they went.

Third, they focused on the youth—helping young people recognize their God-given talents, use them fully, and discern their vocation in life.

What led to this transformation in Alphonsus? As a lawyer, his image of God had been one of justice and reward: do right, and you're praised; do wrong, and you face consequences. But over time, he experienced a *metanoia*—a change of mind and heart. He came to see God not as a distant judge, but as a companion, a friend, someone who deeply cares.

Because of this new understanding, Alphonsus emphasized the importance of bringing people back to the Church, especially through the sacrament of reconciliation. Like the Curé of Ars in France, he would spend long hours in the confessional, reconciling people to God—because he believed that God wants all to be saved.

The Redemptorists were founded in 1732. A century later, they were persecuted—just as Jesus was in today's Gospel. They left Europe and came to the United States in 1832. Four decades after that, they arrived in Canada. They've done remarkable work: preaching to the poor, working with youth, and forming vibrant communities.

One of our own Canadian Redemptorists, Fr. Michael Brehl, was elected Superior General of the Redemptorists worldwide in 2014. Ten years later, Pope Francis appointed him Bishop of Pembroke here in Ontario.

Why did the Redemptorists leave Europe? For the same reason Jesus left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum. The Gospels tell us that Jesus preached continually in Nazareth. At first, the people were proud of him—he was their local boy made good. But jealousy set in. They wanted a piece of the action. Jesus wasn't withholding anything, but

when he spoke of the Spirit of the Lord coming upon him—to anoint him and bring Good News to the poor—they questioned his authority and drove him out.

St. Alphonsus also realized that personal conversion wasn't enough. It had to lead to social transformation. The late Cardinal Dom Helder Camara of Brazil once said, “When I took care of the poor, they called me a saint. When I asked why they were poor, they called me a Marxist and an atheist.”

St. Alphonsus Liguori, pray for us.