

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

December 31, 2009 at 5:54am

Dec. 31, St. Jean-François Régis, S.J.

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NCR Today

Today is the feast of St. Jean-François Régis, S.J.

"Born on January 31, 1597, in the district of Fontcouverte at the foot of the Pyrenees in the south of France, he died at age forty-three on December 31, 1640, in the mountain hamlet of Lalouvesc (la-loo-vay) located in the *Massif Central*, not far from the French Alps."

He entered the Society of Jesus at the age of 19, and after four years of theology at Toulouse, he was assigned to teach at the college (high school) at Le Puy. "The main problem was keeping the fifteen-year-olds from killing each other in duels over petty arguments."

--John J. Callahan, S.J. (Scroll down an inch to "The 'Regis' of Regis University".)

He also went to the aid of the many prostitutes who worked the streets of the town. He arranged shelter and training in lace-making for them. He was beaten in the streets for that, and a "safe-house was burned to the ground."

As the first Jesuits had done, Jean-François Régis set out to preach missions to the poor mountain peasants.

"In mid-December 1640 the Jesuit missionary was giving a mission at Montregard; he interrupted his work there to return to his home at Le Puy because he had an intimation that he would soon die. He wanted to prepare for his death so he spent three days in retreat before making a general confession. Then he and his companion, Brother Claude Bideau, went back to Montregard to finish the mission there.

"On Dec. 23 the two set out for Lalouvesc, the site of the next mission, but a winter storm blew in and they lost their way in the snow and had to spend the night in a battered shack. The next day they were able to reach Lalouvesc where they found people waiting for them. Rather than taking a few minutes to eat and rest, Regis immediately began preaching, then heard confessions and celebrated Mass. So many people came for confession that Regis did not stop until it was time for Midnight Mass. Both Christmas day and the following day were also spent in the confessional. Because of the crush of people, the Jesuit had to hear confessions in the sacristy where a broken window let in cold air directly on him. By late afternoon he felt weak and suddenly collapsed. He was put in the pastor's bed but people followed him even there, seeking to confess. He lapsed into unconsciousness, and the physician who attended him confirmed that pneumonia had set in. Nothing could be done. Regis lingered on until Dec. 31, praying constantly."

--Jesuit Saints

"The peasants so loved John-Francis that they would not let him go; he was their own. Three times the Jesuits came to claim the body, but failed.

"Even before he was declared a saint in 1738, Lalouvesc had become one of the great pilgrimage places of France. Although his body was desecrated and scattered during the violence of the French Revolution, the place remains a shrine to this day. Here the first St. Regis Hotel was established."

--Callahan

(Ever notice how many St. Regis hotels, apartments, and resorts there are?)

Happy New Year to one and all!

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