

Patron of the Persecuted St. Alphonsus may be the true patron saint of anyone mistreated by the Church.

Long before he was canonized, long before he was made the patron of moral theologians, long before he was given the rare high honor of “Doctor of the Church,” the prolific author and founder of the Redemptorists lived in unending persecution by Church leaders.

In 1726 he was ordained in Naples, and for the next two years worked with a group that tried to forge a Catholic path between two extremes of the time: rigid Jansenists and slack Renaissance enthusiasts.

But his group was denounced by Church leaders, and because the Church and state often acted in tandem, members were arrested.

St. Alphonsus learned more about prayer in this circumstance than he ever would have otherwise. “Speak to God often of your business, your plans, your troubles, your fears – of everything that concerns you,” he said. “For God is not going to speak to a soul that does not speak to him.”

An archbishop finally intervened to help St. Alphonsus, but a powerful marquis spent decades thwarting his plans to found a congregation, and an archbishop sent Liguori far away. St. Alphonsus did great things in his new position, and would say, “If they found out it was God’s will, it would be the greatest delight of the seraphs to pile up sand on the seashore or to pull weeds in a garden for all eternity.”

He was eventually made a bishop and said, “Those who are seeking the true religion will never find it outside the Catholic Church,” because, despite its members, Christ is its foundation, its sacraments, and its goal.

The crowning defeat came at the end of his life. St. Alphonsus became sick and crippled in his seventies and asked to be allowed to resign as bishop. Two popes refused before Pope Pius VI finally gave him his rest.

But then, a bishop and priest tricked him into signing an altered version of his rule. “You have founded the Congregation and now you have destroyed it,” his confreres told him. “I never thought I could be deceived by you,” St. Alphonsus told his betrayer, and then burst into tears. It was the hardest test of his maxim: “A soul who loves Jesus Christ desires to be treated the way Christ was treated – poor, despised and humiliated.”

St. Alphonsus did not simply suffer silently, but he didn't dwell on resentment and bitterness, either.

His advice: First: Focus on doing good. "The past is no longer yours; the future is not yet in your power. You have only the present wherein to do good."

Second: Focus on God's presence everywhere, not the sins of his representatives. "When we see a beautiful object, a beautiful garden, or a beautiful flower, let us think that there we behold a ray of the infinite beauty of God, who has given existence to that object."

Above all, pray. "Were you to ask what are the means of overcoming temptations, I would answer: The first means is prayer; the second is prayer; the third is prayer; and should you ask me a thousand times, I would repeat the same."