

St. Louis IX, King of France, Patron of the Third Order.

August 25th.

THE holy King Louis IX of France was born at Poissy, near Paris, on April 25, 1215. His saintly mother, Blanche of Castile, gave the greatest care and

love you; but I would rather see you dead at my feet, than you should ever commit a mortal sin." The earnest words and the example of the saintly mother did



attention to his education in all matters pertaining to his high office, but she was, above all, solicitous for the welfare of his immortal soul. In this her solicitude, she sometimes said to him: "My son, God alone knows how much I

not fail to make a deep impression on the tender mind of her son. At an early age, Louis learned to detach his heart from the riches and pleasures of the world, to the dangers of which persons of his state are especially exposed, and

to find delight in prayer and in the practice of virtue.

Louis succeeded to the throne in 1226. On account of his youth, his mother acted as regent, governing with great prudence and energy, and at the same time superintending the education of her son in the duties of a Christian ruler. It was during this time that Louis joined the Third Order of St. Francis. After assuming the reins of government in 1234, he ruled most happily for about ten years, when he was seized with a serious illness, which soon seemed to bring him to the very brink of the grave. In his illness he vowed to undertake a crusade to free the Holy Land from the hands of the Mohammedans, and on recovering he at once set about to fulfill his vow. He captured Damietta, in Egypt, but was taken prisoner with his army, that had been decimated by a pestilence, and was made to undergo the privations and humiliations of captivity for several months.

A treaty of peace was at length drawn up and ratified. The infidels now demanded of the pious king to declare that, in case he would violate the treaty, he would be regarded as having denied God and the Christian religion, and as having spit and trampled upon the cross. Shocked at so impious a proposal, Louis answered: "Such a blasphemy shall never pass my lips." The infidels then threatened him with a most painful death; but the saintly king courageously answered their threats with the words: "You can kill my body, but you cannot take the life of my soul." Full of admiration for his courage and constancy, the Mohammedans set him free on the accepted conditions.

In the government of his kingdom, Louis had no other end in view than the honor of God, the

good of religion, and the welfare of his subjects. Hence, he was most exact in performing the many and laborious duties of his exalted position. His dealings with foreign princes, as well as with his subjects, were characterized by the greatest charity, patience, and justice. In the midst of the distractions of court life and of his many duties, he lived the life of an ascetic, scrupulously regulating his conduct according to the commandments of God. He delighted in attending divine service, and spent several hours of the day,—sometimes whole nights—in prayer, and when certain persons expressed their dissatisfaction at this, he quietly answered that, if he employed his time in hunting, in tournaments or games, these persons would not take so exact an account of the time which he lost at them. Though, as his biographers assure us, he preserved his baptismal innocence to the end of his life, he was wont to go to confession several times a week. He esteemed the grace of baptism so highly, that he loved to sign himself in letters to his friends as Louis of Poissy, because he had been baptized in the church of that place. The pious king would not tolerate cursing or sinful language among his servants and courtiers; he himself was never heard to speak an uncharitable or impatient word. In order to be able to satisfy his charity towards the poor, hundreds of whom he often fed and served in his palace, he forbade all excessive display at his court. He himself practiced the greatest moderation in dress, and always wore the scapular and cord of the Third Order; on special occasions he appeared clothed in the habit of the Tertiaries. To mortify sensuality, he often wore a hair cloth, used disciplines, and not only strictly observed the fasts, but was very

ingenious in mortifying his appetite in various ways. Yet his piety and severity towards himself did not make him morose. On the contrary, it enhanced the natural liveliness and cheerfulness of his temper; he delighted in cheerful conversations, and was kind and affable towards all. He was most solicitous for the welfare of the eleven children which God had given him. He prayed with them daily, watched over their progress in their studies, taught them to perform works of mercy, and left to them in his testament the most beautiful and wholesome instructions.

The failure of his first crusade, and complaints of oppressions and sacrileges on the part of the infidels in the Holy Land, induced the saintly King to undertake a second crusade. He landed with his army at Tunis. A pestilence broke out, and Louis was himself seized with the dreadful malady while visiting his stricken soldiers. Lying on his bed of pain, he praised and thanked God for the affliction which he had sent him, and begged him to enlighten and show mercy to infidels and sinners, and to lead his soldiers back into their native land. The holiness of his life became more manifest than ever to all and his humility, patience, resignation, and charity edified and softened the hearts of even the most hardened. When the end approached, the holy King, after receiving the last sacraments, lifted up his eyes towards heaven, and repeated aloud the words of the Psalmist: "Lord, I will enter into thine house; I will adore in thy holy temple, and I will give glory to thy name."—"Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit." And with these sentiments of longing for heaven and of confidence in God, he breathed forth his soul on August 25, 1270. His body was

transferred to Paris and buried in the church of St. Denys. Many miracles were wrought at his tomb, and he was canonized by Pope Boniface VIII on August 6, 1297.

Reflection.

Mindful of the words of his pious mother, St. Louis was filled with a hatred of mortal sin, and would rather have lost his kingdom, yea, even his life, than offend God grievously. And these ought to be the sentiments of every Christian. For mortal sin is the greatest of evils. Other evils, such as sickness, poverty, humiliations, persecution, and even death, deprive us of a temporal good; but they are sometimes blessings in disguise, soon pass away, and bring us a great reward, if they are borne in the right manner. But mortal sin deprives the sinner of the very life of the soul: sanctifying grace, with all it implies: the love and friendship of God, the right to heaven,—God himself. A terrible loss; but it is in proportion to the crime. For mortal sin is an act of rebellion; the sinner deliberately turns away from God, refuses to obey him. It is an insult offered the almighty and most holy God; the sinner despises God's commandments, his love and friendship, and chooses rather to follow his own inclinations and desires, though he is conscious of his dependence on God in all things and of the punishments which the justice of God must inflict upon him. And this insult is offered the infinite God, the kindest Father for—riches, honors, and pleasures that pass away, leaving behind disappointment and unhappiness. Let us ask St. Louis to obtain for us a great hatred of sin, so that we may always resist the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and thus remain firm in the love and friendship of God.