



Monday Pope Francis spoke to benefactors of the Vatican Swiss Guard about love of neighbor, which he said must first be steeped in love of Christ and drawn from prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments.

“Love to one's neighbor corresponds to the mandate and the example of Christ if it is based on a true love of God. It is thus possible for the Christian, through his dedication, to make others feel the tenderness of the heavenly Father,” the Pope said Sept. 25.

“To give love to brothers, it is necessary to draw it from the furnace of divine charity, through prayer, listening to the Word of God, and nurturing the Holy Eucharist. With these spiritual references, it is possible to operate in the logic of gratuity and service.”

Pope Francis met Monday morning with 50 members of the Foundation of the Pontifical Swiss Guard, an organization which offers financial, material and technical support to the Vatican's small military force.

He thanked them for their work in support of the young Swiss men who devote some years of their lives to “serving the Church and the Holy See.”

“This is an opportune occasion for me to reiterate that their discreet, professional and generous presence is so appreciated and useful for the good performance of Vatican activities.”

The business of the foundation expresses community spirit and solidarity, the Pope said, a typical feature of the Catholic presence in society and an attitude which is rooted in the appeal of the Gospel to love one's neighbor.

“Therefore, through your work, you are concrete witnesses of evangelical ideals and, in the Swiss social fabric, you are an example of fraternity and sharing,” he said.

Concluding, Francis wished them joy as they continue their “fruitful commitment,” and bestowed the apostolic blessing.

He also prayed for protection for them and their families through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Nicholas of Flüe, the patron of Switzerland, whose feast the Swiss celebrate on Sept. 25.

St. Nicholas of Flüe was born in 1417 near the Lake of Lucerne in Switzerland. He married at the age of 30 and had 10 children. In addition to his duties as a husband and a father, Nicholas donated his talents and time selflessly to the community and always strove to give an excellent moral example to all.

The saint was also able to devote much of his private life to developing a strong relationship with the Lord. He had a strict regime of fasting and he spent a great deal of time in contemplative prayer.

Around the year 1467, when he was 50 years old, Nicholas felt called to retire from the world and become a hermit. His wife and children gave their approval, and he left home to live in a hermitage a few miles away.

While living as a hermit, Nicholas quickly gained a wide reputation for his personal sanctity, and many people sought him out to request his prayers and spiritual advice.

Nicholas lived the quiet life of a hermit for 13 years. However in 1481, a dispute arose between the delegates of the Swiss confederates at Stans and a civil war seemed imminent. The people called on Nicholas to settle the dispute, so he drafted several proposals which everyone eventually agreed upon.

Nicholas' work prevented civil war and solidified the country of Switzerland. But, as a true hermit, he then returned to his hermitage after settling the dispute.

He died six years later on March 21, 1487 surrounded by his wife and children. The Church celebrates his feast day on March 21, though in Switzerland and Germany it is celebrated on Sept. 25.