

December Holy Hero

## **St. John of the Cross, 1542-1591**

“Mystical” Doctor of the Church

Feast Day Dec. 14



“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” These words from the Gospel of Mark (Chap 8, verse 34), sum up the life of St John of the Cross. John’s father was disowned by his rich and noble family after he married a weaver’s daughter. Juan de Yepes, St. John, was born in Spain in 1542. His father died when he was just a baby and his mother kept the homeless family together as they searched for work. He learned early on about self-sacrificing love and offering up sufferings for the love of Jesus. He went to a school for poor children and at fourteen, took a job at a hospital caring for patients suffering from terrible diseases and madness. It was during these times that John searched outside of this world for happiness and beauty, and found it in God.

After attending a Jesuit college, John joined the Carmelite Order. St. Teresa of Avila asked John to help her in reforming the order by returning it to a more prayerful life. Some Carmelites felt threatened by the reform and threw John into prison. In his dark, tiny cell, John knew the cross of suffering. He had nothing left but God. Faith and love became his warmth and light. John grew closer and closer to God and received deep peace and joy in that desolate place. After nine months, he managed to escape. He spent the rest of his life explaining his experiences of God’s love. St. John of the Cross is famous for his spiritual books on how to unite our souls more deeply with God through prayer and charity. These books include: Dark Night of the Soul, Ascent of Mount Carmel, and The Living Flame of Love. He was canonized in 1726 by Pope Benedict XIII and is one of the 33 Doctors of the Church, as his profound, mystical writings are recognized as an important contribution to the Catholic Church.

Let’s ask St. John to help us have a strong faith, especially during the times when God seems far away. We tend to run from the cross of suffering, we want life to be easy and comfortable. We sometimes don’t want to hear words like sacrifice, discipline, and self-denial. St. John’s message echoes the Gospel’s; don’t be afraid to take up your cross and follow Jesus, for only through Him will we find true peace and joy!