

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: October 31

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IN BRIEF

Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez

Spanish Jesuit lay brother, doorkeeper of the college of Montesión in Palma de Mallorca, mystic.

Feast day	October 31
Born	July 25, 1532 or 1533, Segovia, Spain
Died	October 31, 1617, Palma de Mallorca, Spain
Canonized	January 15, 1888, by Pope Leo XIII
Era	17th century
Patron saint of	Jesuit brothers

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez, the Holy Doorkeeper

Novena to Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez

Credits and sources

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LIFE

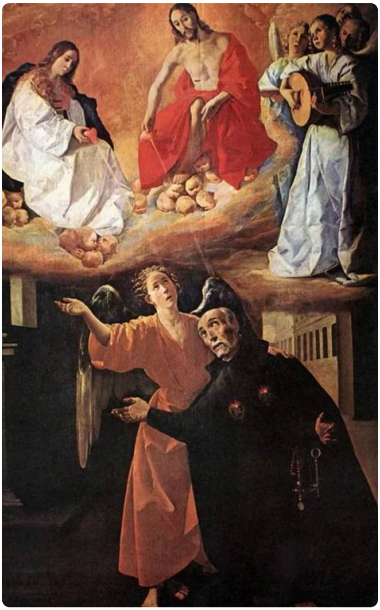
Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez

Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez (in Spanish *Alonso Rodríguez*) was a Spanish Jesuit lay brother who died in Palma de Mallorca in 1617. A ruined cloth merchant, a widower and a bereaved father, he entered the Society of Jesus at nearly forty and spent decades as doorkeeper of the college of Montesión. Behind this humble job lay a deep mystical life and a much sought-after spiritual counselor, who guided Saint Peter Claver toward the missions. Canonized in 1888, he is celebrated on October 31.

Who was Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez?

Alphonsus Rodriguez is the patron saint of Jesuit brothers, the members of the Society who are not priests and who look after the practical running of its houses. His life was that of a man sorely tested: bankruptcy, the death of his wife and three children, and a refusal when he first asked to enter religious life. Yet in a porter's lodge he found a place of daily encounter with God and with others.

He should not be confused with his namesake and contemporary, Father Alphonsus Rodriguez, the Jesuit author of the famous treatise *The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection*, nor with Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez, the Jesuit martyred in Paraguay in 1628.



The Vision of Alphonsus Rodriguez, by Francisco de Zurbarán (1630).

Key dates in the life of Alphonsus Rodriguez

- **July 25, 1532 or 1533**: Born in Segovia, Castile, into a family of wool and cloth merchants (sources differ on the year).
- **1541**: The Jesuit Saint Peter Faber, passing through Segovia, stays with his parents and prepares him for his First Communion.
- **1546**: His father dies; he breaks off his studies at Alcalá to take over the family business.
- **1558**: He marries María Suárez, with whom he has three children.
- **1560s**: The business fails, then his children and his wife die.
- **1568**: His first request to join the Jesuits is refused; he goes to study in Valencia.
- **January 31, 1571**: He enters the Jesuit novitiate in Valencia as a brother.

- **1571**: He is sent to the college of Montesión in Palma de Mallorca, where he remains until his death.
- **1579**: He becomes the college porter.
- **1605**: The young student Peter Claver arrives; Alphonsus encourages him to go to America.
- **October 31, 1617**: He dies in Palma de Mallorca.
- **1825 and 1888**: Beatified by Leo XII, then canonized by Leo XIII on January 15, 1888.

The merchant of Segovia

Alphonsus was born in Segovia into a well-off family of wool and cloth traders. In 1541 the Jesuit Peter Faber, one of the first companions of Saint Ignatius, preached a mission in the city and stayed in his parents' home. He prepared the boy for his First Communion, a meeting that left its mark.

At about thirteen, Alphonsus studied at Alcalá de Henares with his older brother. But his father's sudden death in 1546 called him home: his mother, with many children, could not run the business alone. The young man took it over without much talent for it. In 1558 he married María Suárez, and three children were born.

Grief and conversion

The following years brought one bereavement after another. Within a few years Alphonsus lost a son, then his daughter and his wife, then his last son. His business declined and he had to close the shop. In that darkness he found support from two Jesuits, and his heart turned toward God. He lived months of solitude, penance and prayer, and the desire for religious life grew in him.

In 1568 he asked to join the Jesuits and was turned down: he was thirty-five, in poor health and without enough education for the priesthood. He went to Valencia to study Latin again, sitting among young schoolboys. Two years later he renewed his request, ready to be only a brother. Despite unfavorable opinions, the provincial, Antonio Cordeses, accepted him with words his biographers record: "Let him come in; we will receive him to be a saint!" He began his novitiate on January 31, 1571.

The holy doorkeeper of Montesión

After a few months in Valencia, Alphonsus was sent to the Jesuit college of Montesión in Palma de Mallorca. He stayed there for forty-six years. At first he held various household jobs, then became porter in 1579. His task was simple: open the door, welcome visitors, pass on messages, receive the poor. He made it an apostolate.

Students, priests, parents, beggars and visitors of every kind came through the college door. Brother Alphonsus had for each a word of encouragement, advice or comfort. According to an often-quoted tradition, whenever someone knocked he answered inwardly, "I'm coming, Lord," seeing Christ himself in the person waiting outside.

Mentor of Peter Claver

In 1605 a young Catalan Jesuit student, Peter Claver, arrived at the college. He became friends with the old porter and loved to talk with him about the things of God. It was Alphonsus who encouraged him to volunteer for the missions in Spanish America. Peter Claver did go, to Cartagena in present-day Colombia, where he became "the slave of the slaves." The porter and the missionary were canonized on the same day by Leo XIII, January 15, 1888.

A hidden mystical life

His contemporaries sensed his holiness but did not know the depth of his inner life. After his death, notebooks were found that he had written on the orders of his superiors. In them he speaks of himself in the third person, as "a certain person." These pages reveal a profound union with God, mystical graces, a constant struggle against temptation and an ardent love for Christ and the Virgin Mary.

From 1615 he was weak and almost always bedridden, rising only for Mass. He died on October 31, 1617, and the whole city came to venerate him.

A saint in an English poem

For his canonization, the English Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote the sonnet "In Honour of St. Alphonsus Rodriguez, Laybrother of the Society of Jesus." Hopkins contrasts the visible exploits of the martyrs with the hidden war fought by the brother at the door, Its closing lines say that God

> *Could crowd career with conquest while there went*
> *Those years and years by of world without event*
> *That in Majorca Alfonso watched the door.*

No better summary of his holiness exists: a heroism nobody saw, lived in the faithfulness of ordinary days.

Why is Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez the patron saint of Jesuit brothers?

Because he lived the brother's vocation to the full: no priestly ordination, no public preaching, only the faithful service of a religious house, made holy by prayer. Beyond the Society of Jesus, he is a friend of doorkeepers, receptionists

and everyone who welcomes others for a living, of widows and widowers and parents who have lost a child, and of late vocations.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez in art

- **The black Jesuit habit**, often with a rosary in his hands.
- **Keys** or a door, recalling his work as porter.
- **A vision of Christ and the Virgin**, as in Zurbarán's painting in Madrid.

To pray with him, use the prayer to Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez or follow the novena to Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez, from October 23 to his feast on October 31.



The church of Montesión in Palma, next to the college where Alphonsus was porter.

Where to pray to Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez

- **Palma de Mallorca** (Spain): the church of Montesión, beside the former Jesuit college where he lived, which long kept his body. In 2024, after the Jesuits left, the transfer of his remains to Palma Cathedral was authorized.
- **Segovia** (Spain): his native city, where his memory is honored.
- **Saint-Alphonse-Rodriguez** (Quebec, Canada): the parish and town that bear his name.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez, the Holy Doorkeeper

Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez spent his life opening a door. His spiritual notes contain many prayers of his own, but no short prayer to him has become established in English devotion. Here is an original prayer by Saintspedia, inspired by his work as a doorkeeper and by his road of trials, followed by a short invocation to say during the day.

Prayer to Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez

Saint Alphonsus, you knew financial ruin and the loss of your wife and children, and yet you found your comfort in God. Come to the help of all whom life has wounded. Teach us not to despair.

You were turned away, then accepted as a simple brother, and you took the last place with joy. Heal us of pride and of the need to be seen.

For years you opened the college door to everyone who knocked, seeing Christ in each one. Open our hearts to those God puts on our path: the poor, the anxious, the visitor who comes at the wrong moment.

You counseled Peter Claver and encouraged him to set out. Help us to discern our own vocation and to support the vocations of others.

Through your intercession, obtain for us the grace we entrust to you: (name it in silence). And teach us to say, each time someone calls us: "I'm coming, Lord." Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

The doorkeeper's invocation

> *Lord, when someone knocks at my door or calls my name, let me recognize your voice. I'm coming, Lord.*

This invocation is also an original text by Saintspedia, inspired by the tradition that Alphonsus answered in this way every knock at the college door. It is easy to remember for anyone who answers phones, emails or a doorbell all day.

Intentions to entrust to Saint Alphonsus

- For religious brothers and all who serve behind the scenes.
- For doorkeepers, receptionists, front-desk staff and maintenance workers.
- For widows, widowers and parents who have lost a child.
- For late vocations and for those who have had a door closed on them.
- For shopkeepers and business owners in difficulty.

When to pray this prayer

His feast day is October 31. You can pray to him at the start of a working day, before welcoming someone, or in a time of grief. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez, and read the life of Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez, Jesuit lay brother and doorkeeper of the college of Montesión in Palma de Mallorca. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, October 31, begin on October 23. It can also be prayed at any time, especially in a season of grief, failure or discernment.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act of the day helps you carry the prayer into your ordinary tasks, as Alphonsus did at the door of his college.

The nine days follow his life: from his childhood in Segovia, through bereavement and refusal, to the porter's lodge where he found God in every visitor. If you are praying in a time of loss or disappointment, do not hurry: let each day's meditation speak to your own story. Alphonsus did not become a saint in spite of his wounds, but by letting God enter them.



The Vision of Alphonsus Rodriguez, by Zurbarán.

Day 1: A seed sown in childhood

As a child, Alphonsus was prepared for his First Communion by Peter Faber, a companion of Saint Ignatius. God often sows early what will only grow much later, sometimes after many years of silence.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who passed on the faith to me. Make what you have sown in me bear fruit.

Today: Pray for the person who first taught you about God.

Day 2: The weight of responsibility

When his father died, young Alphonsus had to leave his studies to run the family business. He accepted a burden he had not chosen, and he was not particularly gifted for it. Many of us live with duties we would not have chosen; they too can become a path to God.

Prayer: Lord, help me to carry with courage the responsibilities that have been given to me.

Today: Do a task that weighs on you without complaining.

Day 3: In the night of grief

Alphonsus lost his wife and his three children. In that night he did not turn away from God: he threw himself into his arms. Grief did not disappear, but it was no longer without hope.

Prayer: Lord, comfort all who mourn a loved one, and keep them in the hope of the resurrection.

Today: Pray for your own dead, and call someone who is grieving.

Day 4: Accepting the closed door

His first request to join the Jesuits was refused. He did not rebel: he went back to his Latin books, among children, and persevered until the door opened.

Prayer: Lord, when a door closes, give me the patience and humility to look for your will.

Today: Entrust to God a failure or a refusal you have experienced.

Day 5: The last place

Alphonsus agreed to be a simple brother, without the prestige of the priesthood. He found his joy in serving, and never looked back with regret.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the desire to be admired, and teach me the joy of serving.

Today: Do someone a favor without anyone knowing.

Day 6: I'm coming, Lord

According to tradition, at every knock on the door Alphonsus answered inwardly, "I'm coming, Lord." He saw Christ in every visitor, even the ones who came at the worst moment.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to recognize you in the people who interrupt me.

Today: Welcome with a smile someone who interrupts you.

Day 7: A word that lifts people up

Students, poor people, anxious visitors: all left the porter's lodge a little lighter. A simple word, spoken with faith, can change someone's day. Alphonsus had no great learning, but he listened, and people sensed that God was close to him.

Prayer: Lord, put on my lips words that encourage and console.

Today: Give someone a sincere word of encouragement.

Day 8: Helping another find the way

Alphonsus encouraged the young Peter Claver to leave for America. He knew how to recognize a vocation and support it, without keeping the young man for himself. Good mentors do not make disciples for themselves; they point others toward Christ and then let them go.

Prayer: Lord, make me a support for those who are searching for their vocation.

Today: Pray for vocations and for a young person you know.

Day 9: The hidden war

Gerard Manley Hopkins praised the "years and years" of a "world without event" in which Alphonsus watched the door. His holiness was hidden, but it was heroic, a daily battle fought in silence.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez, give me faithfulness in small things and perseverance in the spiritual struggle. Amen.

Today: Make one concrete resolution to pray better every day.

Closing prayer

Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez, faithful doorkeeper and friend of God, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. You opened the door so many times to Christ hidden in your brothers and sisters; help me to open my heart to him. Pray for those who suffer, for those who serve unseen, and for those who are looking for their path. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez and pray the prayer to Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez.

CREDITS

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