

**St. Pedro de San Jose de Betancur
(Canary Islands/Guatemala) 1626-1667**

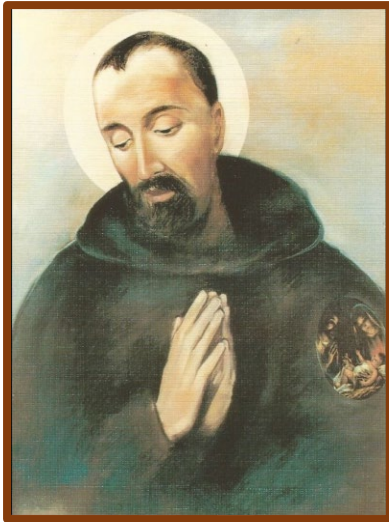
Known as "St. Francis of the Americas."

Opened a hospital for the convalescent poor.

Opened a shelter for the homeless and a school for the poor.

Rang bell on streets of city calling rich to repentance & begging alms.

Founded Bethlehemites (Order of the Brethren of Bethlehem).



St. Pedro de Betancur (Third Order Franciscans, Bethlehemite) was born on March 21, 1626, on Tenerife in the Canary Islands. He was poor and worked as a shepherd to the age of 24. He then planned to journey to Guatemala where he had a relative working in government service. Unfortunately he ran out of money in Havana, Cuba, so remained there for about a year.

In 1651, he arrived in Guatemala. He was destitute and found himself in a breadline run by the Franciscans.

Pedro enrolled in a Jesuit College hoping to study for the priesthood. He was unsuccessful in his studies and withdrew from school in 1655.

At this time he became a Third Order Franciscan and took the name Pedro de San Jose. Within three years, he opened a hospital for the convalescent poor, a shelter for the homeless and a school for the poor. The hospital of Our Lady of Bethlehem was

reportedly the first convalescent hospital in the world and cared for the sick poor who were expelled from hospitals. He served immigrants, the enslaved, abandoned children and anyone who needed him. He also established an inn for priests and several small chapels in poor areas.

So as not to neglect the rich, he walked through the streets of rich neighborhoods ringing a bell begging for alms and calling the wealthy to repentance. Soon other men came to share in his work and formed a community which, after Pedro's death, was given Papal approval as the Bethlehemite Congregation. A women's community was also founded after his death inspired by his life of prayer and compassion for the sick, poor and destitute.

Pedro de San Jose is credited with introducing the Christmas *posadas* procession, in which people representing Mary and Joseph seek a night's lodging from their neighbors. This custom spread to Mexico and other Central American countries.

Pedro died on April 25, 1667, in the City of Santiago de los Caballeros in Guatemala, at age 41 from pneumonia. His remains rest in the Church of San Francisco el Grande in Antigua, Guatemala.

Pedro de San Jose Betancur was beatified on June 22, 1980, at Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City and canonized at the Southern Hippodrome in Guatemala City by Pope St. John Paul II on July 30, 2002. He is the first and only saint from the Canary Islands, Guatemala and Central America. He is often referred to as the "*Saint Francis of the Americas*" due to his work with the marginalized and poor. (Memorial April 25).

References:

- 1) Franciscan Media. (26 Apr 2021). Saint Pedro de San Jose Betancur. <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-pedro-de-san-jose-betancur>. Accessed 14 May 2022.
- 2) Our Lady of Mercy, Sunderland, Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle. St. Pedro de San Jose Betancur. Accessed 14 May 2022. <https://sunderlandcatholic.com/news/st-pedro-de-san-jose-betancur-april-25>
- 3) Hagiography. 2002. Accessed 14 May 2022. <http://newsaints.faithweb.com/2002.htm>
- 4) Congregazione delle Cause dei Santi. <http://www.causesanti.va/celebrazioni.html> Accessed 28 May 2022.
<http://www.causesanti.va/it/celebrazioni.html>

Note: This biography is for all desiring to grow in holiness and follow His Holiness Pope Pius XI address to 2000 nurses assembled at Castel Gondolfo on August 27, 1935 for the II World Congress of Catholic Nurses (www.ciciams.org / www.nacn-usa.org): *to first and foremost bring the Christian supernatural, Christ to our patients, bring salvation to souls*. May it also help nursing students with your Nursing History course. Source: Diana L. Ruzicka (2022). *The Book of Nurse Saints*. Available at www.lulu.com/spotlight/Ruzicka