

Readings: *Proverbs 31: 10 – 13,19,20,30,31; Psalm 33(34): 1 – 10; Matthew 22: 35 – 40. Today is another of the 'lesser feasts' which in Lent are commemorated, not provided with a full set of prayers and readings. The readings are given above for personal use.*

Frances was born in Rome in AD 1384, at about the time when the Church was divided – with rival popes in Rome and Avignon. Her parents were wealthy and devout, and Frances received a deep spiritual education from a priest at the church of Santa Maria Nuova in the Roman Forum. When she was eleven, she asked her father to allow her to become a nun: But he had already promised her to an equally well-born and wealthy young man named Lorenzo, and insisted that Frances marry him. At the age of thirteen she obeyed and remained with her husband for nearly forty years, bearing him three children and nursing him for the last seven years of his life.

At first she was unhappy, but, when she found that her sister-in-law shared her wish to be entirely devoted to God, she was strengthened. The two of them agreed to live their married lives with outward generosity to their families, but to develop an interior life of prayer. They set up an oratory in the family palace and gave time to nursing the sick. In 1400 Frances became mistress of the house and was more easily able to feed the poor. In 1408 Rome was occupied by supporters of the Avignon anti-pope, and for seven years this led to the destruction of property, poverty and plague. Frances's husband and son were taken prisoner. Throughout this time Frances and her sister-in law worked to help the poor. They founded a hospital in the partly ruined palace, and Frances developed a gift of healing. She attributed this gift to the presence – visible to her – of a guardian angel always beside her. The Schism was healed in 1414, her husband and son returned, and Frances continued her charitable work. In 1425 she founded the Olivetan Oblates of Mary, a confraternity of women, not enclosed or under vows, free to combine a life of prayer with service to the community. When Lorenzo died in 1436, Frances entered the community house, and became superior of the Oblates. Her life of prayer became even deeper than before. In March 1440 she was taken ill and died a week later.

Her last words were "The angel has finished his work. He is beckoning me to follow."

She was buried in Santa Maria Nuova, now dedicated to Saint Frances of Rome.

In art she is shown with her guardian angel pointing to the place in her prayer book.