

cures through the intercession of Isidore throughout history, and they desired that Isidore be declared a saint. Cured of a deadly disease after touching Isidore's relics, King Philip III of Spain spearheaded the cause for Isidore's beatification. On March 12, 1622, Isidore was canonized along with St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Francis Xavier, St. Philip Neri, and St. Teresa of Avila, referred to in Spain as "The Five Saints."

Isidore's life is a story of the dignity of work. His life is proof that ordinary life can lead to holiness.

Today, the city of Madrid celebrates their patron saint annually on May 15<sup>th</sup> as a public holiday with what are known as the San Isidro Festivities. The celebration begins with a pilgrimage to San Isidro Hermitage to collect and drink water from that shrine. The site is where Isidore struck a rock with his cattle prod and prayed for water to come forth for de Vargas to drink. The spring still flows to this day.

After the pilgrimage and Mass, participants move to the streets for music, dancing, markets, performances, and carnival games. It is traditional to wear at least a handkerchief around the neck or head for the day, although many also dress in the 19<sup>th</sup> century attire of working-class people—who are called *chalupas* or *chalupos*. Typical dishes of the celebration include those made with lamb, as well as a beef and chickpea stew called Cocido Madrileño, and donuts flavored with anise seeds called rosquillas. In the evening, a procession departs from the Collegiate Church of St. Isidore and moves through the streets of the old portion of the city where Isidore and his family lived.

### Socials with the Saints

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Sources include: *Butler's Lives of the Saints, Vol. II (reprinted 1981)*; *Wikipedia*; *Lives of the Saints for Every Day of the Year, Edited by Rev. Hugo Hoever, S.O. Cist., Ph.D. (Catholic Book Publishing, 1955)*; *The Book of Saints: The Lives of the Saints According to the Liturgical Calendar text by Victor Hoagland, C.P. (Regina Press 1986, 2005)*; *Blessed Among Us: Day by Day with Sainly Witnesses by Robert Ellsberg, A Give Us This Day Book (Liturgical Press 2016)*, *EDYPRO Biotechnología, Madrid Destino Cultura Turismo y Negocio S. A.*



### *St. Isidore the Farmer* *Laborer, Husbandman*

**Born:** 1070 or 1082

**Died:** 1130 or 1172

**Fest Day:** May 15 internationally;  
October 25 in the USA

**Patronage:** Farmers and day laborers, agriculture, the City of Madrid and many other cities throughout the world. In 1947, St. Isidore was named Patron of the U.S. National Rural Life Conference.

Born to poor, devout Catholic parents in 1070, Isidro de Merlo y Quintana was named after the Archbishop of Seville, now St. Isidore of Seville. The family were Mozarabic settlers; Christians in the Iberian peninsula which was under Muslim rule at the time. Most of the Mozarabs were descendants of local Christians and were primarily speakers of Romance languages influenced by Moorish Arabic. Isidore's parents instilled in him a deep love of prayer and a revulsion of sin.

At some point as a boy, Isidore was orphaned. He worked as a well-worker like his father, in the service of the Vera family. It is said that there was no well in his service from which water did not flow abundantly, even in dry lands. One woman hired him to open one on excessively rocky terrain. Through his fervent prayer, the stone was so softened that his footprint is said to have remained when he was done.

In 1110, the peninsula was invaded by Ali ibn Yusuf, causing Isidore to move to Torrelaguna near Madrid. There, he became a hired hand on the farm of Juan de Vargas, a wealthy landowner.

He was married to Maria Torribia, known in Spain as Santa María de la Cabeza. Isidore and his wife had one son, Illán (Ian), who is said to have fallen into a deep well as a child. His parents' prayers for him were answered when the water rose to ground level and their son with it. In thanksgiving for that miracle, Isidore and his wife vowed to live

their lives in celibacy and even lived in separate houses from then on. Sadly, Illán died while still in his youth.

Isidore was known for his piety and for sharing all that he had with the poor. He prayed constantly, conversing with God, the saints, and his guardian angel as he worked in the fields. He rose early each morning to attend Mass before going to work, which sometimes made him late for work. On holidays, he would visit the churches of Madrid and the surrounding area.

After his co-workers complained to their employer about Isidore being late for work in the mornings, the landowner, while on his way to reprimand him, investigated and found him at prayer while an angel did his plowing. Another time, his master saw an angel plowing along with Isidore on either side of him, making Isidore's plowing equal to three times that of his fellow field workers. When the team of oxen and their drivers disappeared, de Vargas realized that Isidore had supernatural assistance in fulfilling his work. At various times, others also witnessed angels helping Isidore with his duties.

The humble farm worker was a man of miracles. His employer grew to revere Isidore, who was said to have brought de Vargas' deceased daughter back to life. Another miracle attributed to him is that he caused a fountain of fresh water to burst from the dry earth to quench his master's thirst. Isidore was eventually made bailiff of the entire estate.

Isidore is reported to have loved animals. One story told about his love of God's creatures involves his having pity on a flock of wood pigeons that were scratching on the hard, frosty ground for food. He poured out half his sack of wheat, which he was taking to the mill to have ground into flour, onto the ground for the birds. When he reached the mill, however, his bag was still full of wheat, which, when ground, yielded double the expected volume of flour.

Yet another miracle involved his wife Maria, who always kept a pot of stew simmering on their hearth because Isidore often brought home anyone who was hungry. One day, he brought more hungry folks home with him than usual. When, before everyone had been served, Maria told him the stew pot was empty, he urged her to check the pot

once more. She did and found there was indeed enough stew to feed everyone! Isidore was known to share his meals with the poor to the point of only saving a few scraps for himself. He is said to have lived on what scraps remained after feeding those poorer than himself.

Another example of this is the occasion of a confraternity dinner to which he had been invited. He stayed so long in church, deeply engrossed in prayer, that the banquet was almost over when he arrived along with a crowd of beggars. Though the host had kindly saved a portion of food for Isidore, it would not have been enough to feed all of them. However, Isidore insisted it was and, sure enough, not only was there plenty to satisfy everyone... there was some to spare!

It is believed that Isidore died at his birthplace on May 15, 1130. His wife survived him. Due to the relationship between the saint's feast day and the arrival of good weather on the 15th of May, a saying developed in Spain: "San Isidro Labrador takes away the water and puts in the sun." He is traditionally asked to pray for good harvests, good weather, and even good market conditions and profitable prices for farmers and those who raise livestock.

In 1212, torrential rains caused cadavers to be exhumed from Madrid's cemeteries. Isidore's was one of them; it was discovered to be incorrupt.

The reason Isidore's wife is called Santa Maria de la Cabeza is that her head ("cabeza") is devoutly carried in procession during times of drought, as a request for heavenly favor.

Among the over 438 miracles attributed to St. Isidore, one such miracle was his appearance after his death to King Alfonso VIII of Castile, during which Isidore showed him the hidden path used to surprise the Moors in the victory of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212. That decisive battle was the turning point in the *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula from the Moors and the reign of the Catholic Monarchs of Spain, a very important event in Spain's medieval history.

Members of Spain's royal family have been known to seek miracle