



For the past several years, I have mentioned that my favorite television show is *Blue Bloods*. It stars Tom Selleck as the New York City Police Commissioner, with his father being the retired commissioner, two of his son on the police force, and a daughter who is an assistant prosecutor for the City of New York. They are Irish, Catholic, and live in Brooklyn - so what's not to like. However, last year, I started to follow a television show called *This is Us* that rivals *Blue Bloods*. It is very hard to describe the show since it takes place in both the present and in the past, with hints of the future, and the characters are spread all over the nation. The similarity that it has to *Blue Bloods* is that it is show about how a family interacts with one another, and how the members of a family affect one another in very profound way.

Well, with all this talk of the Irish and Brooklyn, St. Alphonsus Liguori grew up in a little town named Marienalla, just outside of Naples Italy. He was born September 27th, 1696, the oldest of eight children. His family was relatively well-off financially, with his father being a naval sea captain; his mother was a very devout Catholic woman. His father wanted Alphonsus, as the oldest son, to follow him in his profession, but Alphonsus wanted to be a priest. They argued about this very much and Alphonsus reluctantly became a lawyer as a compromise. He was a brilliant student and had degrees in both church and civil law before he turned twenty. He became one of the most famous lawyers in Naples. Still, he was very committed to his Catholic faith and worked among the poor in hospitals and even prayed with people on death row.

Then came a major turning point. After never losing a case, he had his first loss and was humiliated. It seems that the judge had been bribed in this case. It is said that he locked himself in his room and wept for three days. This becomes a key turning point in the life of Alphonsus. His words tell of his transformation: *O world, I know you now*. He leaves his gentleman's sword at the statue of the Blessed Mother and commits his life to the Virgin Mary and begins to study for the priesthood.

Skip to the future now. A young boy is growing up in Brooklyn in the 1950's. His parents are Irish immigrants. The boy loves playing ball in the streets of Brooklyn and it is said he could hit two sewers on a windy day. He goes to Church, but is not more religious

than any other of his friends. The parish where he lives is staffed by Redemptorists and the parish is the center of the neighborhood. The boy's best friend decides to go the high school seminary. So, our young man follows him to the seminary, not to be a priest as much as to be with his friends and continue his love of all sports.

Back in the 17th century, Alphonsus is ordained and becomes a renowned preacher. He is giving retreats and missions all over Naples and is in demand everywhere. Alphonsus is on fire with love for God, and works himself to the point of exhaustion. His doctor tells him he must take a rest and go on a vacation.

In the 20th century, the young Brooklyn boy is doing well in the seminary. After a severe bout of homesickness, and some struggle with Algebra, he takes to the seminary routine. From a family of three with two sisters, he loves having many friends and companions. He begins to learn how to pray a little bit in front of the Blessed Mother picture. The idea of being a Redemptorist priest is taking hold in his heart.

While on his recuperation and rest period in the mountains off the Amalfi Coast, Alphonsus encounters many poor goat herders. They have no priests to serve them since most of the priests want to stay in the big city of Naples. These people are abandoned and have no one to tell them about Jesus. Alphonsus now has another turning point in his life. God is calling him to serve these people who are the edges of society. So, moved by the Holy Spirit, Alphonsus begins a Congregation of priests and brothers to preach the good news to those who do not have the opportunity to hear it. It is called the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, but becomes popularly called the Redemptorists.

The years in the seminary move fast for our friend from Brooklyn. His best friend, the reason why the young man entered the seminary is dismissed from the seminary for making illegal wine. Yet, the young man stays on. He is beginning to see himself as a priest. He likes his teachers who are almost all Redemptorists. He begins to truly pray. Somethings amazing happens to him when he is a young man of 18: he falls in love with Jesus Christ and his heart is captured.

Alphonsus' new congregation gets off to a shaky start but soon takes root. Over the years since the first days on the Amalfi Coast, candidates are pouring into the order and the poor are hearing the Gospel preached. As Alphonsus grows older, he is happy to hear that the Congregation has spread to other parts of Europe.

The young man in America grows to love his Congregation and its founder Alphonsus. He learns there are more than 5000 Redemptorists all over the world, following the footsteps of this great saint who wrote 111 books. Alphonsus was a skilled musician and painter, a Bishop of the Church, but most especially a lover of the poor.

Our young priest's first assignment is to teach in a seminary, the same one where he began his own journey to the priesthood, he learns that his order has decided to take a parish, St. Martin of Tours in Long Island in a town called Bethpage. The Provincial at

the time explains that Long Island has a great many Catholics and not enough priests to serve them.

St. Alphonsus died on August 1st, 1787. Among his best-known works are *The Glories of Mary* and *The Way of the Cross*, the latter still used in parishes during Lenten devotions. He was canonized in 1839 by Pope Gregory XVI and proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius IX in 1871. One of the most widely read Catholic authors, he is the patron saint of confessors. St. Alphonsus, who himself suffered from scruples, is know for his kindness in the confessional.

Today, at St. Martin of Tours Church in Bethpage, a son of Alphonsus is telling you about his spiritual father. This concludes our story of: *This this is us*-The Redemptorists.