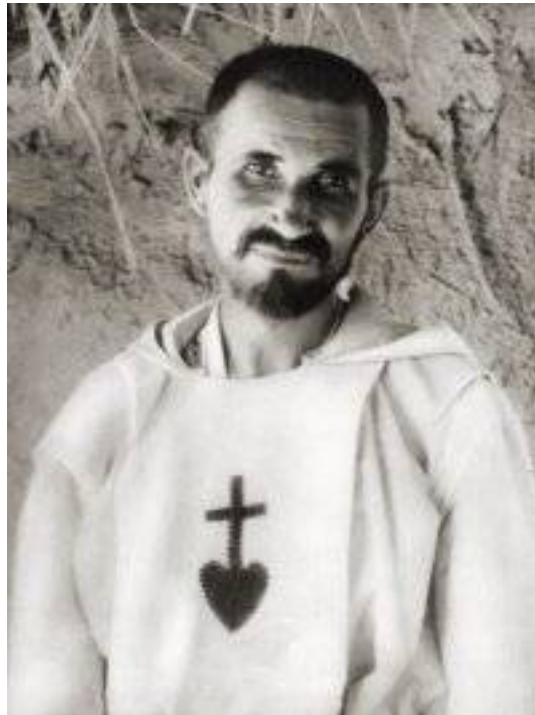


Charles de Foucauld, Hermit and servant of the Poor (1858-1916)

Observed 1 December



Born into the French aristocracy, Charles de Foucauld had a difficult early life after the death of his parents when he was only six and his subsequent loss of faith. After he finished school he spent time in the French army in Algeria and Tunisia, and then as an explorer in Morocco. After his return to France in his late 20s he experienced a personal conversion and became a Trappist monk. He spent time in a French monastery and then one in Syria, before he left to follow his own personal religious calling in Nazareth. There he lived near other religious communities, but on his own most of the time in solitary prayer. He was ordained a 'free priest for the Sahara' in France in 1901. Thereafter, he returned to North Africa where he set up a home in the desert, much like the Desert Fathers of the early church. He called it a place of 'adoration and hospitality'. From his private hermitage he felt called to move to the land of the Tuareg in the Sahara and devoted himself to their welfare. He made a deep study of the language and cultural traditions of this fascinating people, resulting in a dictionary, published after his death, still a valued resource among scholars. He was killed in a Bedouin raid on the Tuareg in 1916, during the chaos of World War I. His ideas had already inspired a confraternity of lay men and women supporting his work and his vision of living the life of Jesus in the world. After his death, the vision continued to take root in France leading to the foundation of a group of religious orders (most notably 'the Little Brothers of Jesus') known collectively as the

Fraternity. They are part of 20th century movement to establish ways of communal and consecrated living in simplicity and devotion, working among ordinary people. They began in France, called mostly to live in the desert of North Africa, but have since expanded their understanding of 'desert' and are to be found on all the inhabited continents of the world. Charles and his brothers and sisters have found a path of total devotion to God in Christ, while living totally immersed in any place and culture of the world. – *Raggs Ragan+*

More information about their life and thought can be found on

<http://www.jesusc Caritas.info/jcd>, the website of 'the spiritual family of Charles of

Foucauld'. Here is a quote:

"Born in the vast Saharan desert, the brothers retain a sense of the value of living with a minimum of human supports in the simple presence of the living God. Their mission is to be "among people" (in the 'heart of the masses'), but like Jesus they retire periodically to the 'desert', to be more free to seek God, and to learn dependence on God alone. The desert is a place where one is 'stripped down' to basic essentials, a key experience on the road to contemplation."

Lessons Wisdom 3:1-5; Psalm 73:24-28; James 1:2-4,12; John 16:25-33

Collect Loving God, who restored the Christian faith of Charles de Foucauld through an encounter with Islam in North Africa and sustained him in the desert where he converted many with his witness of presence: Help us to know you wherever we find you, that with him, we may be faithful unto death; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.