

**Feast Day:** April 7

**Patronage:** Teachers

**Death:** April 7, 1719



## **Saint John Baptist de la Salle**

John was born to a wealthy noble family in France and was considered very good looking, well-mannered, and well-educated in the 1650s. He entered into education to become a priest at age 11, when he received the tonsure (the top of his head shaved, as was customary to the time) and was ordained a priest at age 27. He was expected to rise within the priestly ranks because of his family's societal rank. He was named Canon of the Rheims Cathedral at age 16 and then received his doctorate in Theology at age 29, two years after his ordination.

By chance, John spent some time creating a school for the poor boys in Rheims. After initial hesitation, he threw himself into the work of education, moving out of his family's estate and distancing himself from the wealth that came with it. He formed the community known as the Brothers of Christian Schools, today sometimes known as the Lasalleans. It was a community of consecrated laymen that formed schools to allow poor boys, who had little future, hope for them and their families by providing an education free of charge. He was met with a lot of resentment from the education establishment of the time, who were particularly upset that this "free education" was eventually going to extend to all, regardless of if they could pay or not. There were also a lot of new teaching methods employed by the schools that were unorthodox. The instruction was in French, students were grouped by ability, and religion was incorporated into secular subjects. Parents were also much more involved than the other education institutes of the time, emphasizing the community aspect.

John also started some of the first programs to train lay teachers, opening colleges so that they could learn how to teach. The brotherhood also began instructing working young men in Sunday courses so that they too could further their education while providing for their families. Another standout group that John and the brothers reached were delinquents of noble class families. Schools and institutions were created for them as well.

John Baptiste de la Salle died from complications with asthma and rheumatism on the last Good Friday before his 68th birthday. He was canonized in 1900 and declared patron saint of teachers and all others who work in the field of education in 1950 by Pope Pius XII. Today, there are Lasallean schools in 79 countries.