



2007.003

Saint Francis of Paola

Unidentified Artist

Bolivia

Late 17th or early 18th century

Oil on canvas, 66 ½ x 49 ¾ inches

Inscribed: *MERCETVA MAGNAMIMIS, CHARITAS; TIMETE DEUM, OMNES, SANCTI, QUONIAM NIHIL. DE. EST, TIMENTIBUS, EUM.*

Saint Francis of Paola was born at Paola, Calabria, Italy in 1416, and died in Plessis, France in 1507. He founded the Order of the Minims whose name derives from the “least of all religious,” specifically from a passage in Matthew 25:40: “And the king answering, shall say to them: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.” In 1435 Francis fulfilled a vow made by his parents for a grace they had received through the intercession of Saint Francis of Assisi and spent a year of service at a Franciscan convent. He dedicated himself to a life of solitude and took on his first followers as the “Hermits of Saint Francis of Assisi.” In 1501 Pope Alexander VI confirmed the rule of this discalced order, a rule essentially based on that of the Franciscans, with the special proviso that the Minims (as he renamed the community) would abstain from all animal flesh except in case of grave illness and then only when recommended by a physician. The order, best represented in France and Italy, was never very widespread. Although the Minims did reach South America, this and other

paintings of Saint Francis of Paola probably owe more to an interest in hermit saints, whose images were widely spread through engravings, than in the order he founded.

In this painting, the saint wears the habit of the order, with its broad sleeves, and a scapular with a hood that is belted with a cord. His habit is brown, though it more properly should be black. The saint can always be identified by his emblem, a sunburst with the word *Charitas* emblazoned on it. Here, he is accompanied by a figure of the Christ Child standing on a volume of scripture as well as an angel bearing a basket of foodstuffs. The latter include bread, grapes, an apple, a fish, and a pomegranate, all of which have religious associations. Above the head of the angel is an inscription based on Psalm 33:10: "Fear the Lord, all ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him."

Certain stylistic characteristics suggest that this painting was created in the region once called Charcas, now Bolivia, where Potosí was an active artistic center. The palette of the painting offers more subtle, lighter colors and tones than are found in most paintings produced in Cuzco. The expressive face and hands of the saint, as well as the luminous body of the Christ Child, are carefully and correctly painted, as is the silky beard of the hermit saint.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt