



Unidentified Artist

Patronage of Our Lady of Mercy

Viceroyalty of Peru

18th century

20 2/3 x 15 1/2 inches. Framed: 39 1/3 x 24 inches.

Oil on canvas

Collection of the Carl and Marilyn Thoma Foundation, acc. no. 2024.57

The Thoma collection includes a number of paintings which showcase Our Lady of Mercy. For more information about the iconography, see *Our Lady of Mercy* (1997.014).

In this painting, the figures gathered under Mary's capacious mantle are Mercedarians. However, the composition is found in a number of paintings of members, founders, and devotees of the religious orders, as seen in a well-known example by Francisco de Zurbarán (fig. 1), which honors the Carthusian order.

In this South American representation of the *Patronage of Our Lady of Mercy*, the artist and patron take a more expansive view of who belongs under Mary's mantle. They include not only members of the male order, but of the female branch founded in 1265 by Santa María de Cervelló. Bishops in their mitres and a crowned king join the worshipful throng overseen by God the Father.

Although Saint Peter Nolasco is normally pictured in art in the white habit of the Mercedarians; here he wears armor, reminding the viewer that the order was first established as a military order, only later becoming one of the mendicant orders. The pope probably represents Gregory IX who approved the order in 1235.

The frame merits special attention, not only for its intricate combination of carving, gilding, and painted decoration, but also because it was likely created specifically for this painting. The emblem of the Mercedarian order, based on the heraldic symbol of King Jaume I of Aragon—a royal patron who authorized its use—is prominently featured. While traditionally shown on the Virgin Mary's chest, it also appears at the top of the frame, underscoring that the frame was likely a bespoke commission for this work.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt



Fig. 1. Francisco de Zurbarán, *The Virgin of Mercy of Las Cuevas*, c. 1644-55, Museo de Bellas Arte de Sevilla.