

## BLESSED FRANCISCA DE PAULA DE JESUS

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Francisca de Paula de Jesus, also known as Nha' Chica (Aunt Francesca,) was born in 1808 in Santo Antonio do Rio das Mortes Pequeno, a neighbourhood of the Brazilian city of Sao Joao del-Rei in the State of Minas Gerais, where she was also baptized in 1811.



Francisca, an illegitimate daughter of a slave woman, and a brother, born from a previous union, moved to the city of Baependi, Brazil with their mother after they were freed from slavery in 1821. Completely illiterate, she received only religious education from her mother, along with the request to live a secluded life devoted to prayer and charity. Orphaned at age 10, Francisca chooses to remain unmarried despite numerous marriage proposals and lives alone in a humble two room house with a small altar with a few images of saints and a vase containing two red roses and one white rose.

Francisca de Paul chose a life of poverty—to live in prayer; poor among the poor. She organized daily and weekly meetings of prayer in her house to meet the spiritual needs of the people of the surrounding districts. People gathered in small groups, and she later gave counsel, words of comfort, physical and spiritual healing to anyone who visited.

Francisca also organized weekly lunches for the poor and gave alms to the needy. Her willingness to welcome all people into her home or chapel, including the poorest in the area, led to her reputation as the “Mother of the Poor”.

In 1862, Francisca received a considerable inheritance after the death from her brother; a lieutenant in the National Guard, then a member of the city council and a businessman. She used these funds to increase charitable and social activities, including supporting construction of a chapel dedicated to Jesus’ mother, *Immaculate Conception of Mary*.



On July 8, 1888, Francisca felt the need to divest herself of all that she possessed and donated her wealth to her parish, and returned to a life of poverty where she continued to enrich many spiritually.



Francisca died on June 14, 1895. She is buried in *Our Lady of Conception Sanctuary*, and her beautification was celebrated on May 4, 2013 in this sanctuary.



A statue of Nhá Chica, the first Afro-Brazilian woman to be granted the status of “Blessed” by the Vatican, is placed in front of Our Lady of Conception Sanctuary.