



San Fernando Rey de España by Orae Dominguez

San Fernando III King of Spain

The father of Ferdinand III was Alfonso IX, king of Leon, and his mother was Berengaria, who was the elder daughter of Alfonso III, king of Castile: her mother was a daughter of Henry II of England, and her sister Blanche became the mother of St Louis of France. The death of her brother Henry in **1217** left Berengaria heiress to the throne of Castile, but she resigned her rights in favor of her eighteen-year-old son Ferdinand. Two years later he married Beatrice, daughter of King Philip of Swabia, and they had seven Sons and three daughters.

Ferdinand was severe in the administration of justice, but readily forgave personal injuries. His wisdom showed itself particularly in the choice he made of governors, magistrates and generals; the archbishop of Toledo, Rodrigo Ximenes, was chancellor of Castile and his principal adviser for many years. In **1230**, on the death of his father, Ferdinand became king also of Leon, but not without strife, for there were those who supported the claim of his two half-sisters.

King Ferdinand was the real founder of the great University of Salamanca; but it is as the tireless and successful campaigner against the Moors that he impressed himself on the minds and hearts of Spaniards. For twenty-seven years he was engaged in almost uninterrupted warfare with the oppressors. He drove them out of Ubeda in **1234**, Cordova (**1236**), Murcia, Jaen, Cadiz and finally Seville itself (**1249**). It was at the battle of Xeres, when only ten Spanish lives were lost, that St James was said to have been seen leading the host on a white horse. In thanks-

giving for his victories, Ferdinand rebuilt the cathedral of Burgos and turned the great mosque of Seville into a church. Unlike some warriors he was a forbearing ruler it is remembered of him that he said that he “feared the curse of one old woman more than a whole army of Moors”; and he fought primarily not to extend his territories but to rescue Christian people from the dominion of infidels.

On the death of Queen Beatrice, Ferdinand married Joan of Ponthieu, who bore him two sons and a daughter: that daughter was Eleanor, who became the wife of Edward I of England. He himself died on May **30, 1252**, and was buried in the cathedral of Seville in the habit of the Friars Minor. Pope Clement X declared Ferdinand a saint in **1671**.

Butler's LIVES OF THE SAINTS