

Homily for May 20th 2017

Today I have chosen to mark the memorial of St. Bernardine of Sienna who was born September 8, 1380 and died on May 20, 1444, aged 63.

He was the greatest preacher of his time, journeying across Italy, calming strife-torn cities, attacking the paganism he found rampant, attracting crowds of 30,000, following St. Francis of Assisi's admonition to preach about "vice and virtue, punishment and glory."

Compared with Saint Paul by the pope, Bernardine had a keen intuition of the needs of the time, along with solid holiness and boundless energy and joy.

At 22, he entered the Franciscan Order and was ordained two years later. For almost a dozen years he lived in solitude and prayer, but his gifts ultimately caused him to be sent to preach. He always traveled on foot, sometimes speaking for hours in one place, then doing the same in another town.

Especially known for his devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus, Bernardine devised a symbol—IHS, the first three letters of the name of Jesus in Greek—in Gothic letters on a blazing sun. This was to displace the superstitious symbols of the day, as well as the insignia of factions: for example, Guelphs and Ghibellines, two warring clans memorialized by Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliette*. The devotion spread, and the symbol began to appear in churches, homes and public buildings. Opposition arose from those who thought it a dangerous innovation. Three attempts were made to have the pope take action against him, but Bernardine's holiness, orthodoxy, and intelligence were evidence of his faithfulness.

General of the Friars of the Strict Observance, a branch of the Franciscan Order, Bernardine strongly emphasized scholarship and further study of theology and canon law. When he started there were 300 friars in the community; when he died there were 4,000. He returned to preaching the last two years of his life, dying while traveling.

Saint Paul wrote of himself:

I will not be a burden, for I want not what is yours, but you.... I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your sakes" (2 Corinthians 12:14).

In this month's *Living with Christ* there is this quote from St. Alphonus Liguori on page 100:

He who trusts himself is lost. He who trusts God can do all things.

St Bernardine is a man whose life so trusted God that with today's psalm he knew:

It is God who made us and we are his, we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

When we know that we are God's, we can give ourselves totally to His service. For us that service will not be the same as was St. Bernardine's. What can be the same is the purposeful and intentional way we too live our lives.

The saints are given to us as inspirations and examples. St Bernardine exemplifies how his love for Jesus and His name gave to him such purpose to live each day "worshipping the Lord with

gladness” because he knew that “the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations”.

Knowing something of St. Bernardine’s life may we hear again the part of today’s Collect that prayed:

O God, who gave the priest Saint Bernardine of Siena a great love for the Holy Name of Jesus, grant through his merits and prayers that we may ever be set aflame with the Spirit of your love.