

January 15

## Blessed James da Villa, Almsgiver



Blessed James was born in Citta' della Pieve, in central Italy, about 1270. trained in law, he became a defender of the poor and oppressed. At his own expense he restored a church and hospice outside the gate of Vecciano, where he cared for the poor and sick with great love.

When in 1304 James defended the rights of the poor he incurred the hatred of a powerful man who then had him killed. The townspeople gave him the title of "Almsgiver", and in 1806, Pope Pius VII approved his cult.

### *Defender of the poor and oppressed*

James was born in Città della Pieve, central Italy, about 1270, son of Anthony da Villa and Mostiola. A devout young boy, he frequently attended services at the nearby Servite Church. There are indications that he studied both law and letters at Siena, gaining proficiency in both.

Even at that time he became concerned about the poor and the sick; he spared no sacrifice in defense of orphans, widows and the needy. Later, so as to fulfill better the commandment of the Lord, he gave all his possessions to the poor and dedicated himself completely to the care of the sick. As an example of his great love, the author of an early life of Blessed James did not hesitate to apply to him what we find in many other lives of the saints: during Mass one day James was struck by the words of the Lord: *If anyone comes to me without turning his back on his father and mother, his wife and his children, his brothers and sisters, indeed his very self, he cannot be my follower. In the same way, none of you can be my disciple if he does not renounce all his possessions.* He felt that these words were addressed to him, and so he left all and dedicated himself to the service of God and his neighbor. This description, though a commonplace in the lives of the saints, nevertheless testifies to his reputation for holiness.

He restored a church and hospice which had fallen into disrepair, and there he received the poor of the town. He fed them, treated their wounds, and cared for their needs. When a powerful man of Chiusi usurped the possessions of the hospice, James defended the rights of the poor at the Roman Curia and won his case. The usurper then invited James to come to Chiusi on the pretence of desiring to resolve their differences. This avaricious man then arranged to have assassins attack and kill James on his way back to Città della Pieve. Thus James, defender of the poor and oppressed, died in 1304, giving a witness of justice and love with his own blood.

Some letters, documents and old paintings of Blessed James seem to indicate that he was not only a Servite tertiary, but that he was also a member of the Franciscan Third Order and an Oblate of the Hospice of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena. At that time it was not unusual for an individual to belong to several such groups.

In 1806 the Sacred Congregation of Rites approved the cult of Blessed James and in 1846 Pope Pius IX permitted the Servite Order to celebrate a Mass and Office in his honor.

### Prayer

Father in heaven, your love inspired James to risk his life in defense of the rights of the poor and oppressed. Make us strong and courageous against opposition as we work for peace and justice, building a community of love. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**For the Eucharistic and LH see Liturgical Books**