

May 30

BLESSED JAMES PHILIP BERTONI

Memorial

James Philip was born in 1454 in Celle di Monte Chiaro in the diocese of Faenza, Italy. Because of a vow of his parents, he was associated with the Order at the age of nine. He was noted for his spirit of prayer and penance as well as his love for the Scriptures and the works of the Fathers of the Church. Ordained a priest, his celebration of the sacraments demonstrated his deep spirituality and love for the liturgy. He died in 1483. His body rests in the cathedral of Faenza. Clement XIII approved devotion to him in 1761.

From the common of the saints and blessed of our Order, or from the common of holy men.

Office of Readings

SECOND READING

Choose one of the following readings.

From a letter on the death of Jerome by Pseudo Eusebius
(Cap. 17-18.27.32 passim: PL 22, 248-250, 256-257, 260-261)

We should be poor, humble, merciful, and love one another

Imitate Christ's poverty that you may be the followers of him who, being divine by nature, sustains the universe by his word of power. Yes, imitate him who emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and who was born into poverty and want even though his dwelling-place abounded in riches and splendour. He was poor and holy as well as needy all the days of his life. He died and was buried the poorest of men. Hence his words: *The fox has his den and the birds of the air their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.*

He even told his apostles to carry neither purse nor wallet; and counselled the rich young man to sell everything he owned and give the money to the poor. It is impossible to pursue riches and follow Christ at the same time.

If you are poor, be humbled beneath the mighty hand of God, lest, God forbid, you undo what you have done. Poverty without humility is unacceptable to God. God chose to become flesh of blessed Mary because of her humility rather than for any other virtue. For just as pride is the sole root of all evil, so humility is the sole root from which all that is good comes. Learn from our Saviour, for he is meek and humble of heart, and for our sake *he became obedient even to death, death on the cross.* Accordingly I say that if you want to be humble, be sure that for God's sake you are also obedient to every human creature. Reflect on the meaning of the name you bear: "monk." It means solitary, one only. It ill becomes a monk to have the choice of saying yes or no, unless it is a question of avoiding sin. Your freedom to choose is limited to doing whatever is good and obeying lawful commands. *Be merciful even as your Father is merciful.* He makes the rain to fall on the just and unjust; and the sun to shine on the good and bad alike. Judgment without mercy falls to those who show no mercy, for mercy occupies a more exalted place than judgment. If you refuse to forgive from your heart those who have sinned against you, your Father will not forgive you. He will look in vain for mercy who has refused mercy to others. The Apostle says, *bear it if someone should drag you into slavery or slap you in the face.* Your virtue is assured, a rich reward and recompense awaits you, if you love your friends in God, and your enemies for God's sake. That wicked servant, when he received mercy, refused mercy to his fellow servant, and in consequence, deserved to feel the full weight of justice. It is barbarous to insist on justice without mercy. If God insisted on justice, he could condemn us on account of our sins, whereas he has chosen to save us by his mercy. Which is why he who lacks mercy cannot be called a Christian. It is unthinkable for a person to be godly and merciful, and to be unable to appease God's wrath. *Blessed are those who*

show mercy, for it shall be shown them. More than any other, a priest and a monk who lacks mercy is like a ship in mid-ocean taking in water on both sides. Religion without mercy is worthless. My dear friends, love one another. This is a precept I have received, not from any mere man, but from our Saviour himself. He says: *This is my commandment, that you love one another.* The good of every virtue springs from love alone. For just as many branches grow from one root, so all the virtues are engendered by love. The Apostle says: *If I should speak the language of men and angels, if I should have the gift of prophecy and have insight into all mysteries and possess all knowledge, and if I should have enough faith to move mountains, and yet, I do not have love, then I am nothing.* Whoever has true love is kind and patient and loves not only those who are nearest as do the pagans and tax-collectors; but true love embraces enemies as though they were friends. We will know that we have charity if our love reaches out to those who oppose us.

Whoever lacks love, lacks God; for *God is love*, and love is God. One who abides in love has already begun to dwell in heaven. The love of all the saints had its origin in heaven. Where there is genuine love, there you will find no envy, no flattery, no grumbling, no detraction, no sneering at others. On the contrary, where there is genuine love, there you will find oneness of mind and heart.

RESPONSORY See John 5:39; 2 Timothy 3:14-15

V. Study the Scriptures, for in them you have eternal life.

R. Their words bear witness to Christ. (Alleluia)

V. Stay faithful to the things you have been taught, and remember who taught you. From your childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures which can teach you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith.

R. Their words bear witness to Christ. (Alleluia)

Alternative.

From the Life of Blessed James Philip of Faenza by Nicolò Borghese (Nn. 1-6.8: Monumenta OSM, IV, pp. 64-66)

He studied the gospel traditions and sacred writings with the greatest zeal

James Philip was born of virtuous parents of modest means. His father's name was Miserino dalla Cella, his mother's Domenica. Before embracing religious life, he was called Andrew. When he was struck by epilepsy at two years of age, his father prayed for a cure, making a vow to offer him to the Lord in religious life if he were healed. Already from earliest childhood Andrew visited churches on his own; he did not amuse himself with the usual sports and games of children. He was very timid and reserved by nature and loved solitude.

When he was about nine years old, his father -in order to fulfil his vow- sent him to the Order of Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Born again in spirit and with a new name, afterwards he was called James Philip. Even though he was just a child, from the outset he distinguished himself by his obedience and singular observance of the rules; as an adult he frequently was given to fasting and keeping vigils. With zeal he studied the gospel teachings and Sacred Scripture. And he seemed to draw nourishment for long periods when he read the lives of the Fathers and the examples of chastity, obedience and humility of the saints. As a young man, he dedicated himself so completely to literary studies that he was able to understand easily and exactly the books of Christian and other excellent Latin authors. He was well versed in the ceremonial rituals of the Church and his Order and the rubrics of the divine office and he performed them all with precision.

He filled some offices in the community to the full satisfaction of his confreres. He was, in fact, affable, gentle and obliging by nature. He was never seen to sulk or be angry. With evenness of spirit he bore any offences inflicted on him by others but he never offended anyone. He was at all times a man of few words, avoiding not only indecent ones but useless ones as well; if he happened to hear anything obscene in any conversation, his countenance would cloud immediately and he

would admonish the wrongdoers with a brief reproof and leave them. After ordination to the priesthood, no one was more devout or more reverent in celebrating with copious

tears the sacrifice of the Mass; no one contemplated more deeply the mystery of the Cross when he held the Host in his hands. He hated idleness and called it the cesspool of all evils. He always took part in singing and celebrating the divine offices in choir with the other friars. The rest of the time he spent in his room in prayer and reading; sometimes, however, he eased the burden of his mind by weaving or designing inlaid veneer so that he was never unoccupied. He was accustomed for the most part to walk and meditate alone; he did so with eyes lowered. He read with great delight the works of Saint Jerome and other sacred books, but especially he took up often a volume about the passing, that is, the death of Saint Jerome. By this time, he was meditating only on heavenly things. He sustained himself more with heavenly virtue than with material food, so that he was eating only once a day and was content with a small ration of poor quality food. When called to task for this by his superior, he ate what was prepared for the community. On Fridays, however, in memory of the Passion of the Lord he dressed in a hairshirt and ate only herbs.

He seemed to tolerate nothing with more reluctance than words of praise in his own regard. In our age it seems extraordinary that he would hide as much as he could his good works and excellent qualities. Although he was esteemed as good and upright by everyone, he was appreciated less by them than by God. Following the example of the Saviour, he wanted, in fact, to be rejected and despised by others; and in the depths of his heart he desired nothing more ardently than to please God his creator and follow the path of our Redeemer.

As the final days of his life approached, bad health took hold of him and this he manifested more by his appearance than by his words. To those who asked him how he felt, he replied, "Well, because the Lord wills it." There was neither impatience nor regret in him in meeting suffering or death. Although he was ill, he did not take to his bed but moved around freely. The day before he died, he was present in church to sing Matins with the other friars and the day before that he celebrated Mass. The evening before his death he visited his confreres one by one; humbly he asked their forgiveness and begged that they might pray to God for his soul in their prayers the following day because, he said, he believed himself about to depart from the bonds of the body. The holy man was in the twenty-ninth year of his life when he returned a victor to the heavenly homeland. It was Sunday, 25 May, the feast of the Most Holy Trinity. So thin was James Philip's tall figure that the skin seemed to cling to his bones; the nose jutted out from his long face; the eyes were sunken, the neck elongated, the fingers like claws and he was of remarkably pale complexion.

RESPONSORY See 2 Timothy 2:22-24; Matthew 11:29

V. Strive for justice, faith, hope, love and peace, together with those who call on the Lord with a pure heart.

R. For a servant of the Lord should be gentle, kind and patient toward all.

V. Take my yoke and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.

R. For a servant of the Lord should be gentle, kind and patient toward all.

Prayer, as in Morning Prayer.

Morning Prayer

CANTICLE OF ZECHARIAH

Ant. The sacrifice of this just man was received, and the Lord will not forget him.

PRAYER

Father in heaven, you richly endowed James Philip with a knowledge of divine truth and a heart on

fire with love whenever he celebrated the Eucharist. Draw us to yourself, source of our wisdom and font of generous love. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Evening Prayer

CANTICLE OF MARY

Ant. Dedicate yourselves to reading, preaching and teaching. Meditate on these things and dwell on them so that your progress may be recognized by all.

Note: Some biblical texts are taken from: The New American Bible <http://www.vatican.va/archives/>