

September 6

BONAVENTURE OF FORLÌ

Memorial

Bonaventure was born at Forlì about 1410. He entered the Order of Servants and became a Master of Theology. In his preaching he was noted for his courage and his wisdom. He held many positions within the Order and was known for his prudence. He lived a life of penance, loved solitude and fostered the regular observance. He died at Udine in 1491. Pope Pius X approved the devotion to Bonaventure in 1911.

From the common of 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 work by Baldwin of Canterbury, bishop
(Tract. 6: PL 204, 451-453)

The word lives in the heart of the Father, on the lips of him who announces it and in the heart of whoever believes and loves

The word of God is both living and powerful and much more piercing than a two-edged sword. The word of God is plainly shown in all its strength and wisdom to those who seek out Christ, who is the word, the power and the wisdom of God. This word was with the Father in the beginning, and in its own time was revealed to the apostles, then preached by them and humbly received ' in faith by believers. So, the word is in the Father, as well as on our lips and in our hearts. This word of God is living; the Father gave it life in itself, just as he has life in himself. For this reason it not only is alive, but it is life, as he says of himself: *I am the way, the truth and the life.* Since he is life, he is both living and life-giving. For, *as the Father raises up the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to those he chooses.* He is life-giving when he calls the dead from the grave and says: *Lazarus, come forth.*

When this word is preached, the very act of preaching gives to the voice which is heard outwardly a power which is perceived inwardly, so much so that the dead are brought back to life and by these praises the children of Abraham are raised from the dead. This word, then, is alive in the heart of the Father, on the lips of the preacher, and in the hearts of those who believe and love. Since this word is so truly alive, undoubtedly it is full of power.

It is powerful in creation, powerful in the redemption of the world. For what is more powerful, more effective? Who shall speak of its power; who shall make all its praises heard? It is powerful in what it accomplishes, powerful when preached. It does not come back empty; it bears fruit in all to whom it is sent.

It is powerful and *more piercing than any two-edged sword* when it is believed and loved. For what is impossible to the believer? What is difficult for a lover? When this word is spoken, its message pierces the heart like the sharp arrows of a strong man, like nails driven deep; it enters so deeply that it penetrates to the innermost recess. This word is much more piercing than any two-edged sword, in as much as it is stronger than any courage or power, sharper than any shrewdness of human ingenuity, keener than all human wisdom, or the subtlety of learned argument.

RESPONSORY See Isaiah 55:10-11

V. Just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return until they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful and giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats,

R. so shall my word be, that goes forth from my mouth.

V. It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.

R. So shall my word be, that goes forth from my mouth.

Alternative:

From the Spiritual Counsels of the venerable Giulio Arrighetti, priest of our Order (*Memorie della vita del servo di Dio P. Giulio Arrighetti*, Pistoia, 1920, pp. 337-338, 340, 342-345)

The love of God increases as self-love decreases

True devotion consists in the will's readiness to do good works, a sincere desire for greater spiritual growth, constant avoidance of offending God and perfect resignation to the divine will. just as bread provides the body with what is necessary for life, so, too, prayer provides what is necessary for the life of the soul. It follows that if prayer is discontinued the soul gradually becomes weak and loses its strength for divine service. Its noble sentiments and holy desires will fade away and it will be disposed to

tragic failings as Saint Bonaventure taught: "Without love of prayer, the soul is more liable to ruin." Prayer is an alms which can be asked of everyone and which can be denied to no one. While we remain in this world we must work for God's glory with the vigour of one who will live a thousand years and the detachment of one who will live an hour only. It is so important to Jesus that his disciples practice humility, that he expressly and repeatedly teaches nothing other than the two virtues of meekness and humility: *Learn of me for I am meek and humble of bears.*

We can never say that we perfectly love the Lord unless we do everything for the Lord's glory with complete resignation to the divine will.

To believe that one can grow in the love of God without mortifying the passions is vanity; as Saint Augustine says: "You will progress only as much as you do violence to yourself." Experience will teach you that your love of God will increase only to the extent that your self-love decreases. To pretend that one can love God by simply not offending him means to love from an easy chair or, worse yet, not to love him at all. Love, if it is true, effects great works. Saint Gregory says: "Love, if it is true, works miracles; if it refuses to act, it is not love. " One who truly loves God desires to serve him, not according to personal likes, but as God himself wills.

RESPONSORY See John 14:21; Matthew 7:21

V. Those who obey my commandments are the ones who love me. and those who love me will be loved by my Father.

R. I, too, will love them and reveal myself to them.

V. None of those who cry out, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of God but only those who do the will of my Father in heaven. R. I, too, will love them and reveal myself to them.

Alternative.

Mighty in word, exemplary in deed

Bonaventure of Forlì was born about 1410 and entered the Order of Servants of Mary in his native city. In 1448 he was sent to Venice where for six years he diligently pursued studies in sacred doctrine and received the degree of master of theology. In the priory at Venice he probably lived with Blessed Bartholomew, a man of exceeding holiness who was known for his love of the solitary life and his distinguished work of preaching the gospel.

Bonaventure zealously performed the ministry of proclamation of God's word. Indeed, many documents attest to his numerous and popular sermons especially during Lent in places such as Venice, Florence, Bologna, Brescia and Perugia. It is almost as if he were trying to emulate the apostle Paul. Fra Filippo Albrizzi fittingly wrote of Bonaventure that "he was mighty in word and both admirable and venerable in example and deed." His sermons in the plague-ridden city of

Perugia merit special mention.

There he convinced the people not only to implore God's help by means of prayer and penance, but also to take an active part in the care of the poor and the sick. The fame of this man of God was so widespread that Pope Sixtus IV named him Preacher Apostolic with the faculty to preach everywhere. Bonaventure performed many tasks in the Servite Order. He is credited with the foundations in Piob-bico in the region of Urbino and in Forlimpopoli in the district of Romagna. When he lived in Rome he was elected prior of San Marcello. It also seems he was procurator general in charge of, handling affairs of the Order with the Apostolic See.

In time Bonaventure desired to devote himself more fully to a life of penance and contemplation, so he petitioned Pope Sixtus IV for permission to observe the eremitical life. The pope acted favourably on his request and in 1483 permitted him and six companions to withdraw to a solitary place. It is not known where Bonaventure went, but several seventeenth century documents suggest that he may have spent some time on Monte Senario. In any case he was not there long but returned to community life out of either love or obedience. He then became prior provincial of the Province of Romagna, fostering religious discipline.

When the prior general, Antonio Alabanti, sought to return the Order to a stricter discipline, he made use of Bonaventure's advice and assistance. A serious dispute had arisen between the prior general and the friars of the Observance in 1487, and Bonaventure was entrusted with the task of settling the disturbance and restoring peace. The following year he was elected vicar general at the chapter of the Congregation of the Observance and was later confirmed in this office by the general chapter of the Order.

Several Servite writers were familiar with Bonaventure and they point to his love for penitential acts and solitude. Fra Filippo Albrizzi wrote of Bonaventure: "He was short of stature and slight of frame, but there was no mediocrity in his learning. He was a priest of great holiness. His beard was unkempt; his feet were bare, suffering the heat of summer and the freezing cold of winter. He never wore shoes and his feet were often seen to be bleeding. He despised vanity in dress; he never ate meat or drank wine; he slept on the bare floor or on a bed of wooden planks. In short, he did whatever seemed necessary to subdue the flesh. Even while living he obtained many miracles from God as a result of his prayers." Much the same was said of him in the poetic writings of Fra Gasparino Borro. In 1491, after delivering the Lenten sermons in the cathedral of Udine, Bonaventure collapsed, consumed by old age and broken by the austerity of his life and labours. He died on Holy Thursday, the feast of the Lord's Supper.

His body was at first placed in the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Udine. When Andrea Loredan who was the legate of the Venetian Republic to Udine became gravely ill, he sought the intercession of Blessed Bonaventure and was fully restored to health. In 1509 he returned to his native region and, in thanksgiving for his cure he had Bonaventure's body transferred to Venice and placed in the Church of Saint Mary of the Servants.

In 1911 the Sacred Congregation of Rites ratified the devotion to Blessed Bonaventure. After much effort his remains were returned in 1971 to the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie.

RESPONSORY See Mark 1:14-15; Philippians 1:27

V. Jesus came proclaiming the good news saying: "This is the time of fulfilment. The reign of God is at hand.

R. Reform your lives and believe in the gospel.

V. Conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ.

R. Reform your lives and believe in the gospel.

Prayer, as at Morning Prayer.

Morning Prayer

CANTICLE OF ZECHARIAH

Ant. Take up the sword of the spirit, the word of God.

PRAYER

Touch our hearts, O Lord, with the same spirit of conversion with which you touched your servant Blessed Bonaventure and made him both a herald of your gospel and an example of penance. 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. My word is like fire, says the Lord, like a hammer shattering rocks.