

As the protagonist of the Cistercian reform he came into controversy with the Benedictine monks of the great congregation of Cluny. He respected their way of life but could not condone the abuses prevalent in some houses of the order. Yet the abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable, remained one of his most loyal friends. Bernard's fierce opposition to Peter Abelard is well known. He objected to the novel theories of Abelard, but he objected even more strongly to the way he discussed sacred matters in the market place and to his bumptious behavior. The first thought of Bernard was always for the faith of simple people and in every controversy he was on the side of conservatism against novelties; but he was a friend of learning and a patron of scholars, notably of Robert Pullen and John of Salisbury.

During all this time Clairvaux had been growing and founding daughter houses all over Europe, so that it seemed that, under Bernard's influence, all the world was becoming Cistercian. Although one of the most busy men of his times, he did not neglect his monks; he remained all his life a monk and a mystic before all else and always found time to instruct his monks, as well as to compose his superb commentaries on the mystical meaning of the Song of Songs, besides several other theological and mystical treatises. But his declining years were saddened by the failure of the second Crusade. The pope imposed upon him the duty of preaching it and, at his words, all Europe sprang to arms; but it was always his weakness that he could not understand the base motives of lesser men than himself. As soon as they were away from his influence the Crusades forgot the high ideals with which he had inspired them and ruined the expedition by fighting among themselves and by deeds unworthy of Christian men. Nevertheless this did not prevent them from blaming Bernard for the catastrophe they had brought upon themselves, so that, like many other saints and like Christ himself, he died, on August 20th in the year 1153, under the cloud of apparent failure.

After his death men realized that a prophet had passed from their midst, and all Europe mourned. Twenty-two years later Pope Alexander III canonized him, and his feast day is kept on the anniversary of his death. In the year 1830 he was formally accorded the title 'doctor of the church.' He lived before the birth of Scholasticism, and, because his teaching is still in the main stream of patristic tradition, he is often known as the last of the Fathers.

* (excerpted from: www.cin.org)

THE MEMORARE

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection,
implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided.
Inspired with this confidence, I fly to thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother;
to thee do I come; before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions,
but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

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Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

Feast Day: August 20



Saint Bernard of Clairvaux composed the famous prayer
to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary known as:

"The Memorare"

SAINT BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX ***(1090-1153)***

*Saint Bernard of Clairvaux was born in the year 1090 at Fontaines-les-Dijon and he died 63 years later in his monastery at Clairvaux.

It is not very hard to find the lineaments of the grown man in the childhood of Bernard. Like many gifted and highly strung characters, he suffered all his life from megrim, and one of the first things we know about him is that, when he was only a child, he drove from the room a local 'wise-woman' who had been called in to charm away his headache. He seems to have been a youth of uncommon good looks and intelligence; yet, if we may judge the child from what we know of the man, there could have been little of the prig about him. Nevertheless, when he was 22 years old, he chose to become a monk. This would have been nothing out of the ordinary in those days if he had elected to join one of the rich and powerful monasteries of Benedictine monks, where his gifts and the influence of his family would have assured for him a distinguished career; but he did nothing of the sort; instead he chose to enter an obscure house a few miles to the south of his home, that was known locally as the New Monastery or, for some reason that is not perfectly clear, Citeaux.

This monastery had been founded some years previously by a group of enthusiasts who wanted to live quite simply according to the letter of St. Benedict's rule; but the place had not prospered, the life was austere, and the whole project was crumbling for lack of recruits. Naturally enough Bernard's family were horrified at his choice, they thought it madness for a delicate young man like Bernard to attempt such a life; but he ended by taking his uncle, all his brothers, and most of his friends with him. Altogether he led no less than about thirty young men to Citeaux - all the gilded youth of his neighborhood. In his *Apologia* Bernard gives us the reason for this surprising choice of his when he implies that, much as he admired the usual Benedictine way of life, his own nature was so passionate that it needed stronger medicine, and nothing that we know of him contradicts this view that he had of himself.

This influx of new blood very soon infused Citeaux with life; the fashion started by Bernard and his companions was presently followed by an ever-increasing number of young men. The Englishman St. Stephen Harding was abbot at the time, and fortunately he was an administrator of genius

as well as a saint and a scholar. Very soon he was sending out small groups of monks to found other monasteries on the same pattern as the mother house, and, within three years of his arrival, Bernard's turn came. He set out at the head of twelve other monks and chose, as the site for his new monastery, a valley not far from Bar-sur-Aube and adjoining the territory of his kinsmen. It was known as the Valley of Wormwood; soon it became even better known as the Valley of Light, or Clairvaux.

The first years of the new foundation were not easy, the community suffered every sort of privation, the monks went short of even the bare necessities, and Bernard himself fell ill. Clearly he had been driving both himself and his monks too hard; when he recovered sufficiently to take his place again as abbot, he had learned how to be gentle and tolerant with others if not with himself. By this time his fame had spread, men came from great distances to seek his help, and he was repeatedly being called in to arbitrate in disputes. This did not please everyone, for Bernard was no respecter of persons: he held strong views and did not fear to express them, his wit could be devastating, and he had little understanding of lesser men than himself or patience with their pettiness. Very soon he got a curt letter from Rome telling him to stay in his monastery and not meddle with what did not concern him. Nothing would have pleased him better than to stay in his monastery, but he felt the good of the church did concern him, and he was not afraid to write back a very spirited reply.

He was an ardent advocate of the Hildebrand reforms, but he thought the centralization of the church had gone far enough and, while staunchly upholding the prerogatives of the Holy See, he did not believe it necessary to flatter the Pope. But when the schism in the papacy threatened to shipwreck the church, and he was called out of his monastery again, he went forth with reluctance; but it was due to him that the anti-pope was defeated and the church was able to right herself. By this time he was known all over Europe, and the whole world seemed to turn to him for advice and help. When men could not visit him in person they wrote to him, and Bernard made a point of answering all his letters, even those from the most humble people. Only a part of his huge correspondence survives, but it is one of the chief sources for the history of the time, and better still, it gives us a vivid impression of the writer, no ethereal spirit but a man of flesh and blood like ourselves.