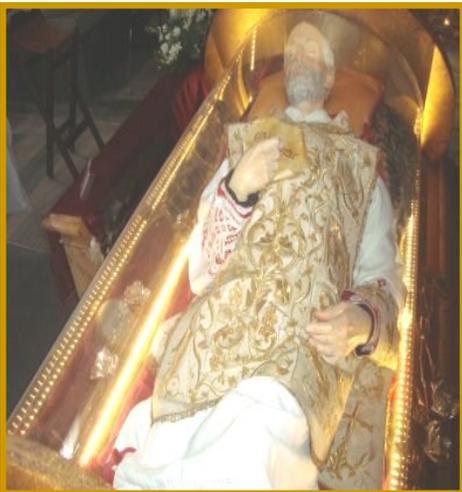


diagnosis of the evils that beset the Church so as to be able to prescribe for each of them the most appropriate remedy." And he noted that "the renewal of the Church must be confirmed as much in leaders as in followers, high and low. It must begin from those who command and be extended to the subjects."

It was because of this that, while soliciting the pope to promote a "universal reform of the Church," he was concerned with the Christian formation of the people, especially of the young, educating them "from their early years... in purity of the Christian faith and in holy practices."

Dear brothers and sisters, the luminous figure of this saint invites priests, in the first place, and all Christians, to tend constantly to the "high measure of the Christian life," which is sanctity -- each, of course, according to his own state. In fact, only from fidelity to Christ can genuine ecclesial renewal spring.

In those years, in the cultural and social passage between the 16th and 17th century, the premises of the future contemporary culture began to be delineated, characterized by an undue separation of faith and reason. This has produced among its negative effects the marginalization of God, with the illusion of a possible and total autonomy of man who chooses to live "as if God did not exist." This is the crisis of modern thought, which many times I have had the opportunity to point out and which often leads to a form of relativism.



John Leonardi intuited what the real medicine was for those spiritual evils and he synthesized it in the expression: "Christ first of all," Christ in the center of the heart, in the center of history and of the cosmos. And humanity -- he affirmed that he worked with great realism and zeal to promote holiness and the reform of society. During this Year for Priests, may the figure of this great missionary inspire priests and laity alike to "start anew from Christ" and embrace their vocation with passionate enthusiasm.

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SAINT JOHN LEONARDI

Feast Day: October 9



Quote:

"Do not be afraid any longer, little flock,
for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.
Sell your belongings and give alms.
Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out,
an inexhaustible treasure in heaven
that no thief can reach nor moth destroy"
(Luke 12:32-33).

Saint John Leonardi

"To Oppose the Weeds He Chose to be Good Wheat"

Vatican City, October 7, 2009— here is a translation of the address Pope Benedict XVI gave during the general audience in St. Peter's Square

The day after tomorrow, October 9, will be the 400th anniversary of the death of Saint John Leonardi, founder of the religious order of Clerks Regular of the Mother of God, canonized on April 17, 1938, and chosen patron of pharmacists on August 8, 2006. He is also remembered for his great missionary zeal.

Together with Monsignor Juan Bautista Vives and Jesuit Martin de Funes, he planned and contributed to the establishment of a specific Congregation of the Holy See for the missions, that of Propoganda Fide, and to the future birth of the Pontifical Urbanian Athenaeum "De Propoganda Fide," which in the course of centuries has forged thousands of priests, many of them martyrs, to evangelize peoples. We are speaking, therefore, of a luminous priestly figure, which I am pleased to point as an example to all presbyters in this Year for Priests. He died in 1609 from influenza contracted while he was giving himself to the care of all those who had been stricken by the epidemic in the Roman quarter of Campitelli.

John Leonardi was born in 1541 in Diecimo, in the province of Lucca. The last of seven siblings, his adolescence was sprinkled with rhythms of faith lived in a healthy and industrious family group, as well as the assiduous frequenting of a shop of herbs and medicines in his native town. At age seventeen his father enrolled him in a regular course in pharmacy in Lucca, with the aim of making him a future pharmacist, that is, an apothecary, as they were called then. For close to a decade young John Leonardi was vigilant and diligent in following this, but when, according to the norms established by the former Republic of Lucca, he acquired the official recognition that would have allowed him to open his own shop, he began to think if perhaps the moment had not arrived to fulfill a plan that he had always had in his heart.

After mature reflection he decided to direct himself toward the priesthood. And thus, having left the apothecary's pharmacy, and acquired an appropriate theological formation, he was ordained a priest and

celebrated his first Mass on the feast of Epiphany of 1572. However, he did not abandon his passion for pharmaceuticals because he felt that professional mediation as a pharmacist would allow him to realize fully his vocation of transmitting to men, through a holy life, "the medicine of God," which is Jesus Christ crucified and risen, "measure of all things."

Animated by the conviction that, more than any other thing, all human beings need such medicine, Saint John Leonardi tried to make the personal encounter with Jesus Christ the fundamental reason of his existence. It is necessary to "start anew from Christ," he liked to repeat very often.

The primacy of Christ over everything became for him the concrete criterion of judgment and action and the generating principal of his priestly activity, which he exercised while a vast and widespread movement of spiritual renewal was under way in the Church, thanks to the flowering of new religious institutes and the luminous witness of saints such as Charles Borromeo, Philip Neri, Ignatius of Loyola, Joseph Calasanzius, Camillus of Lellis and Aloysius Gonzaga.

He dedicated himself with enthusiasm to the apostolate among the youth through the Company of Christine Doctrine, gathering around himself a group of young men with whom, on September 1, 1574, he founded the Congregation of Reformed priests of the Blessed Virgin, subsequently called the Order of Clerks Regular of the Mother of God. He recommended to his disciples to have "before the mind's eye only the honor, service and glory of Christ Jesus Crucified," and, like a good pharmacist, accustomed to giving out portions according to careful measurements, he would add: "Raise your hearts to God a bit more and measure things with him."

Moved by apostolic zeal, in May 1605 he sent newly elected Pope Paul V a report in which he suggested the criteria for a genuine renewal of the Church. Observing how it is "necessary that those who aspire to the reform of men's practices must seek especially, and firstly, the glory of God," he added that they should stand out "for their integrity of life and excellence of customs thus, rather than constraining, they gently draw one to reform." Moreover, he observed that "whoever wishes to carry out a serious moral and religious reform must make first of all, like a good doctor, a careful