

council met at Lyons, St Bonaventure was its moving spirit until his premature death on July 14, 1274.

Although he had been an almost universal object of veneration during his life, for his saintliness and for his repute as miracle-worker, the process of his canonization was, owing to the unfortunate dissensions within his own Order, unduly deferred. The great popular esteem in which he was held may be gauged with fair accuracy from the prominent part assigned to him by Dante in *Paradiso*, XII, 127ff, where his disinterested spiritual outlook, even when holding high ecclesiastical office, fits him both to relate the story of St Dominic and to criticize some of his relaxed followers. The popular cult of St Bonaventure was greatly enhanced in 1434 when his remains were translated and his head found incorrupt. But it was still not until 1482 that he was canonized by Pope Sixtus IV. His tomb was plundered by the Huguenots, but the head was safely hidden, only to disappear finally in the troubles of the French Revolution. In 1588 Pope Sixtus V pronounced him a doctor of the universal church.

St Bonaventure is called the "Seraphic Doctor" because he revealed a certain warmth toward others as a divine fire. His leadership with the Franciscans, following St Francis of Assisi, expressed itself by showing charity, goodwill and ardent affection toward others besides having great discernment in decision-making and judgment. He offers to help us, as will all those in heaven, when we petition him for help. We can truly be transformed and change our habits and attitudes only with divine assistance. We must help ourselves but most interior betterment only comes with divine assistance... Everyone loves cheerful, enthusiastic and unselfish givers. Our doctor's generosity and kindness toward others were fervent and caring...St. Bonaventure tells us to look carefully at the crucified Christ. Gradually this practice will enable us to become more compassionate and understanding toward others. People will begin to see God in you, even if you do not...When we humble ourselves, reflect upon the crucified Lord often, and share unselfishly, acting with goodness toward others, Jesus mysteriously becomes alive in us, and is plainly seen by others... As a child Bonaventure was cured of a serious illness through the intercessory prayers to St Francis of Assisi. Later Bonaventure felt called by God to join the Order. He devoted himself, according to God's will, to earnest study and prayer. God filled others with the fruits of his learning through his example, teaching and writings. The Order of Friar Minor (OFM), and the world, through Bonaventure, was renewed through his leadership and God's graces.

*(excerpted from: www.cin.org; www.doctorsofthecatholicchurch.com)

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Saint Bonaventure

Feast Day: July 14



**Saint Bonaventure entering the
Franciscan Order**

Saint Bonaventure

*The baptismal name of St. Bonaventure, the "Seraphic Doctor", was Giovanni. He was the son of Giovanni di Fidenza and Ritella, born at Bagnorea near Viterbo, Italy in 1221. As a young man he joined the Roman Province of the Franciscans and was sent to complete his education at Paris University. Here he studied under Alexander of Hales, the English scholar who joined the friars and laid the foundations of the Franciscan school of philosophy and theology. Both as a student and later as a teacher in Paris, Bonaventure had St. Thomas Aquinas as his colleague and friend. They were associated in a defense of their respective Orders and the whole Mendicant version of the religious life against the attacks of the secular master William of St. Amour.

In 1257, despite his youth, Bonaventure was elected as minister general of the whole Franciscan Order, an exacting position which he filled for sixteen years almost until his death. The situation he had to face was delicate, the Order was internally divided between *Spirituales* or zealots for the literal observance of the Rule, and the *Relaxati* who desired mitigations. It is a tribute to his holiness as well as his abilities that he solved this problem so well as to merit the title of 'Second Founder' of the Friars Minor. At the general chapter at Narbonne in 1260 he gave the Order its first constitutions, and he was untiring in his visitation of the different provinces to see that his legislation was being put into practice. It was he also who organized the studies of clerics in the order and so made possible the wide apostolate of both learned and popular preaching which we have come to associate with the best of the medieval friars. He himself was a much-sought-after preacher to clerical and lay congregations, to regulars and seculars, to the learned and to the simple. Nonetheless he managed all the time to put forth a series of writings bearing on Franciscan history and spirituality, as well as more general treatises on philosophy, theology and scripture which were the outcome of his Paris professorship. Among them we may signalize his Commentary on the Franciscan Rule, his biography of St Francis (a peace-making rather than a critical essay) and the celebrated *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (*Journey of the Soul to God*) written in 1259 at La Verna, where St Francis had been stigmatized just thirty-five years previously.

The early controversy with William of St Amour was only the first phase in a long struggle to get the Franciscan ideal accepted in all contemporary circles. We find him upholding the same cause later against Gerard of Abbeville, and in the

council of Lyons. He had also to curb the excesses of those of his brethren who followed the prophetic notions of the Calabrian Cistercian, Joachim of Flora, and looked for the establishment of an apocalyptic 'eternal gospel' of which the 'Spiritual' Franciscans would be the natural heralds. On a wider plane, we see him helping to resist the rise of 'Latin Averroism' in the philosophical arena at Paris.

It is, however, as a saint and as one of the greatest of mystical theologians, that he was prized by contemporaries and is still studied by the enlightened. Everyone was impressed by his authentically Franciscan devotion towards the Passion of our Savior; among his works is to be found an office of the Passion which he composed for the personal use of the saintly King Louis IX. Bonaventure was the first to give the mystical movement inaugurated by St Francis of Assisi a solid theological and psychological basis. His spiritual teaching, like his whole system of thought, centers about Christ. In him the tender affective love of Francis for the humanity of Christ is united with the traditional theology (rather than the newer Dominican Aristotelianism), and there is, in consequence, a stress on love and the part played by will rather than on knowledge and the part played by intellect. He did not hesitate to teach that an idiot might love God as well as the most learned divine. For him the Incarnation and Redemption are the crowning glory of God's work for man, the supreme purpose of all creation and therefore, necessarily, the focus of all spiritual life. The practical goal of spiritual endeavor for all, according to Bonaventurian teaching, is a lofty contemplative prayer, union with the divine wisdom. This attitude is to be discovered in all that he wrote, but as an example of its explicit statement we may point to the much commented *De triplici via* (*The Threefold Way*), a miniature but nevertheless complete *summa* of medieval mystical doctrine.

His solid, even obstinate humility, enabled him to evade, in 1265, the burdens of the archbishopric of York to which he was appointed by Pope Clement IV, but it proved unavailing eight years later when Pope Gregory X compelled him to accept the see of Albano and made him a Cardinal. It is related that when the legates arrived with the red hat they found that the saint was doing the washing-up (cleaning the dishes). He asked them to hang the hat on the branch of a tree until he had finished. The last months of his life were passed in close association with the Pontiff in preparing for a forthcoming Ecumenical council by means of which it was hoped to reunite Greeks and Latins. When the