

Blessed Gentle of Matelica

Feast Day – September 5

Blessed Gentle was born at Matelica, a little town in the March of Ancona, of the noble and ancient Finaguerra family. As a young man he entered the Franciscan Order. After he completed his studies and was ordained a priest, he went to Mt La Verna, where he experienced the sweetness of intimate union with God in prayer and devout contemplation. He also preached the word of God in the neighboring towns and brought about many conversions. His own brethren were so edified by his holy example that he was twice chosen as guardian of the convent.

In time, his love for Christ and for the souls of men impelled him, like our holy Father Saint Francis, to preach the Gospel to the infidels. With the consent of his superiors he went first to Egypt. In spite of all his efforts, however, Gentle could not learn the languages of this country. Discouraged by the lack of success, the humble friar had already decided to return to Europe when he was met by a charming young man who encouraged him to preach the Gospel of Christ to these people. Gentle obeyed and found that he was well able to discourse in their languages.

Blessed Gentle of Matelica then went to Persia and preached in the Persian language. The unbelieving Mohammedans flocked to him in great numbers and listened attentively to his words. Frequently it happened that when he was preaching to the people, flocks of birds would fly towards him as if inviting the people to come to his sermons. More than ten thousand infidels were baptized by him. God favored him, moreover, with the gift of prophecy. The Venetian envoy to Persia, Marco Cornaro, fell seriously ill. Gentle foretold that he would recover from the illness, that he would have many vicissitudes and trials to endure after that, but in the end he would be elected Doge of the Venetian republic. Everything happened as Gentle had predicted.

The remarkable success which this apostolic man achieved through his sermons embittered the obdurate followers of Mohammed. They attacked him in the city of Toring, and clubbed him to death on September 5, 1340. The body of the martyr was taken to Venice. During this solemn procession that wound its way through the streets of the city one of the spectators grumbled that such honors were tendered to a person of whose sanctity nothing was known. Amid terrible shrieks, the mouth of the blasphemer was immediately torn wide open so that it extended from ear to ear. But he was healed again as he knelt repentant at the tomb of the holy martyr.

Pope Pius VI confirmed the veneration of Blessed Gentle.

