

Blessed John of Perugia

Blessed John of Perugia, a priest, and Peter of Sassoferrato, a lay brother, were sent to Spain with a large number of other friars by St Francis himself. There they were assigned to the kingdom of Aragon, where they built a small convent in the little town of Teruel, and reaped much fruit by their holy lives, their prayers, and their sermons on penance.

Their longing for the conversion of the infidels and the hope of obtaining the palm of martyrdom urged Friars John and Peter to go to the larger city of Valencia, which was governed at that time by the Moorish king Azotus. The friars began to preach in public that Jesus Christ is the true Son of God and that only through Him can we be saved. Azotus was a bitter enemy of the Christians.

Hearing of the activities of the friars, he had them seized and cast into prison. He used every possible means to force them to apostatize. But when promises and threats alike failed to shake their constancy, he condemned them to be beheaded. The friars thanked the king, praying fervently to God to enlighten their persecutor and in His mercy to grant him the grace of conversion to the true Faith. Then Blessed John of Perugia and Peter of Sassoferrato were beheaded. This occurred in the year 1231.

A few years later James I, the Catholic king of Aragon, made war on Valencia. His army defeated the army of Azotus, who by this ill fortune and by the grace which the holy martyrs had won for him from God, recognized Mohammed as a false prophet, and Christ as the Savior of the world. King James rejoiced exceedingly when Azotus asked to be baptized. After his baptism Azotus offered the Friars Minor his former palace for a convent.

“When I was still an infidel,” he told them, “I caused your brethren to be executed at Teruel. I sincerely regret this crime and desire to make reparation for it. Accept my palace, in which the blood of many holy martyrs has been shed, and convert it into a convent.”

The palace was remodeled into a convent and, next to it, a church was erected in honor of the two martyrs. Pope Clement XI approved the public veneration which was paid to them.

