

Saint of the Month for February 2013

(A monthly series compiled by Tom Quinlan)

Saint Jerome Emiliani **Friday, February 8**

Saint Jerome Emiliani was born in Venice in 1486. He initially embraced the military life, serving in the armies of the republic during the troubled times at the beginning of the 16th century. While in command at the fortress of Castelnuovo, in the mountains near Treviso, his unit was defeated and he was taken prisoner and chained in a dungeon. Up to that time he had led a rather careless and dissolute life, but now turned to God and prayer, and, in circumstances which appeared to be miraculous, was enabled to make his escape. He later hung up his fetters in a church in Treviso as votive offerings to Our Lady, to whom he vowed himself. He was given the post of mayor in that town!

Soon thereafter he returned to Venice to supervise the education of his nephews and to pursue clerical studies; he was ordained in 1518. Famine and plague had reduced many people to the greatest distress, and St. Jerome dedicated his life to relieving the suffering of all, particularly orphans who were otherwise abandoned. He gathered them in a rented house and fed and clothed them at his own expense. He also provided instruction in Christian doctrine and virtue. He contracted the plague, but recovered, and resolved in 1531 to devote himself and his property to helping others, founding three orphanages, a shelter for penitent prostitutes (!), and a hospital at Verona.

With two other priests Jerome founded a congregation of men about 1532, and at Somascha, between Bergamo and Milan, founded a kind of seminary for those who would enter his congregation. This group was called the Clerks Regular of Somascha, which supported orphan boys and the poor. The instruction of youth and young clerics became a goal of this order, and continues to be so, though the order has fewer members today.

It is claimed that St. Jerome was the first to introduce the practice of teaching Christian doctrine to children by means of a set catechism in the form of questions and answers. (I was interested in this practice having grown up with Father McGuire's Baltimore Catechism #3, the one with the blue cover- some of you might remember this book from the deep past!)

Jerome was so tireless in looking after the peasants around Somascha that they credited him with the gift of healing: he would work with them in the fields and talk of God and His goodness.

He caught an infectious disease while attending the sick in 1537, and died on February 8. He was canonized in 1767, and in 1928 was named the patron of orphans and abandoned children by Pope Pius XI.

His commemoration is given the rank of Optional Memorial. (**Magnificat**, February 2013; **Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition** (Scepter Publishers); Butler's **Lives of the Saints, 2nd edition** (Ave Maria Press))

Collect from the Mass of St. Jerome Emiliani:

O God, Father of mercies,
who sent Saint Jerome Emiliani as a helper and father to orphans,
grant, through his intercession,
that we may preserve faithfully the spirit of adoption,
by which we are called, and truly are, your children.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **(Roman Missal, Third Edition)**

Not many of us are called to give away so much, but we are all called to help the poor and abandoned in some way, by prayers, the gift of time, and by alms. Whether we are able to give only a little or a lot, we also need to periodically evaluate what we do give—sometimes it must be reduced, but for some a bit more can be done. May we obtain extra strength for the journey from the generosity of such friends of God. Saint Jerome Emiliani, pray for us!