

Saint of the Month for October 2013

(A monthly series compiled by Tom Quinlan)

Saint Anthony Mary Claret, Bishop
Thursday, October 24

Saint Anthony Mary Claret (in English) was born in Sallent in Catalonia (northeast Spain, which includes Barcelona) in 1807 as Antonio Maria Claret y Clara (in Spanish). He was of humble origin, and practiced his father's trade of cloth-weaving; in his spare time he learned Latin and printing. At age twenty-two he entered the seminary, and in 1835 was ordained a priest. After a few years he thought he was called to be a Carthusian, but that seemed to require more physical strength than he had.

He then went to Rome and eventually entered the Jesuit novitiate with the idea of becoming a missionary to foreign lands. However, his health broke down and the Jesuit father general advised him to return to Spain and evangelize his countrymen.

Saint Anthony followed this advice for ten years, and gave missions and retreats in Catalonia; he also spent time in the Canary Islands (islands of volcanic origin in the Atlantic Ocean west of Spain, and part of that country). With others he worked to establish the Carmelites of Charity. His zeal encouraged other priests to join in his work, and in 1849 he was a principal in founding the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. (That institute is commonly known as the Claretians and flourished in Spain, the Americas, and elsewhere.)

Fr. Anthony was appointed Archbishop of Santiago, Cuba, and won renown for his pastoral zeal and his attempts to obtain humane treatment for slaves. The work in Cuba was not easy: his efforts at reform "were resisted by a powerful organization of disorderly and anti-Christian fanatics." Several attempts were made on his life, including one by a man whose mistress had been won back to a more proper Christian life and had left him. The archbishop interceded to have the would-be assassin's death sentence remitted.

He returned to Spain in 1857 where he became the confessor to the Queen of Spain, Isabella II. He resigned his archbishop's position. He avoided more contact with the royal court than his official position required, and devoted himself to missionary work and the diffusion of good literature, especially in his native Catalan, the main language in Catalonia (it still is).

Saint Anthony preached an incredible number of sermons, and wrote many books and pamphlets for the clergy and the people. He also established a science laboratory, a museum of natural history, schools of languages and music, and more!

Political conditions in Spain deteriorated, and in the revolution of 1868 he was exiled along with the queen. He went to Rome, where he promoted the belief in papal infallibility. Some people tried to get him to return to Spain, but that didn't occur. He developed a fatal illness in France and died at the Cistercian monastery of Fontfroide, France, on October 24, 1870. He was canonized in 1950 by Pope Pius XII.

The commemoration is given the rank of Optional Memorial. (**Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition** (Scepter Publishers); **Butler's Lives of the Saints, 2nd Edition** (Ave Maria Press); **Magnificat**, October 2013; **Catholic Dictionary, Revised** (Our Sunday Visitor).)

Collect from the Mass of Saint Anthony Mary Claret:

O God, who for the evangelization of peoples
strengthened the Bishop Saint Anthony Mary Claret
with admirable charity and long-suffering,
grant, through his intercession,
that, seeking the things that are yours,
we may earnestly devote ourselves
to winning our brothers and sisters for Christ.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. (**Roman Missal, Third Edition**)

Saint Anthony was certainly flexible in trying to do the will of God, and he accomplished much, though not always what he thought he would do! His power to forgive seems a very great lesson for those of us who don't do so as readily as we should: it seems easiest to be angry, harder to try to blot out the memory, harder still to forgive, and pretty tough to seek a lighter sentence for the man who wanted to murder you! He thus reminds me of Blessed John Paul II visiting and forgiving his would-be murderer. Saint Anthony Mary Claret, pray for us!