

Reflection Friday Week 20 St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 - 1153)

Bernard was born near Dijon, in France, in 1090, of a noble family. In 1112 he joined the new monastery at Cîteaux, founded fourteen years earlier. Cîteaux rejected the current laxity and riches of the Benedictine Order to return to a primitive poverty and austerity of life. Bernard arrived at Cîteaux with four of his five brothers and two dozen friends. Within three years he was sent to found a new monastery at Clairvaux, in Champagne, where he remained abbot for the rest of his life. By his death, the Cistercian Order had grown to 343 monasteries, 68 were daughter houses of Clairvaux. Bernard was a man of great holiness and wisdom, and, although suffering poor health, he was active in many great public debates of the time. He strongly opposed the luxurious lives of the clergy, and fought against the persecution of the Jews. He was a prolific writer, of an inspiring rather than a technical kind.

In John 17, Jesus is speaking to his disciples at the Last Supper. *“I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them.”* He addressed the same words to St Bernard who responded in a way that revealed Christ’s promise to live in him and through him. A life of wisdom that inspired so many and not just in the number of monasteries that arose because of him. These same words of Jesus are also addressed to us because Christ wishes to live in us and through us. This he does whenever we live in a way that proclaims his Good News for the world. If we allow Christ to work fully in us, not only will we receive wisdom but be able to influence others, opening them to the power, presence and love Jesus Christ.