

Reflection Saturday Week 14 St Bonaventure 2023

Bonaventure was born at Bagnoregio in Etruria about 1218. He became a Franciscan in 1243 and studied philosophy and theology at the University of Paris. He became a famous teacher and philosopher, part of the extraordinary intellectual flowering of the 13th century. He was a friend and colleague of St Thomas Aquinas. The friars were still a new and revolutionary force in the Church. Radically embracing poverty and rejecting institutional structures raised suspicion and opposition from many quarters. Bonaventure defended the Franciscan Order. Elected general of the order in 1255, he ruled it with wisdom and prudence. He is regarded as the second founder of the Order. He declined the archbishopric of York in 1265 but was made cardinal bishop of Albano in 1273, dying a year later in 1274 at the Council of Lyons, at which the Greek and Latin churches were (briefly) reconciled. Bonaventure wrote extensively on philosophy and theology, making a permanent mark on intellectual history. He always insisted that the simple and uneducated could have a clearer knowledge of God than the wise. He was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1588 by Pope Sixtus V.

In case you are thinking, we can only be filled with the fulness of God when we die! The word humble, however, derives from the Latin *humus*, of the earth. It suggests being grounded, being mortal, being limited. To be humble implies putting God first and realising that all of our achievements, all of our power comes from God. We are but instruments. Ultimately this means that the service we offer is important and we are not, except in so far as we allow God to work in and through us. The brief summary of Bonaventure's life offers as an excellent example of this.

A lawyer is driving home one evening when he spots a man at the side of the road, eating the grass on the verge. He stops and asks the man what he is doing. The man says "I am so poor that my family and I cannot afford food and so we eat grass to survive". The lawyer is horrified and says "that's terrible! Look, I'm on my way home; grab your family, you can all eat at my house tonight" The man does as he says and once they are all belted up and on the move, the man, so humbled by such a grand gesture says "this is the kindest thing anyone has ever done. Are you sure your wife and family won't mind us coming?" "Sure they won't!" Replies the lawyer, "saves them a job. They haven't mowed the lawn in weeks!"