



"Saints adoring Jesus Resurrected", by Fra Angelico – Detail of the Fiesole Panel, San Marco Museum, Florence (Italy)

Bl Lawrence of Ripafratta

1359 - 1457

September 28

One of the outstanding characters in the Dominican reform of the late fourteenth century was Blessed Lawrence of Ripafratta, who was novice-master of several saints and blessed of our Order. Lawrence was born in the fortified city of Ripafratta, in 1359. His noble family had the duty of guarding the outer defenses of the city of Pisa against the depredations of its powerful neighbor cities. It was a warlike place and time to come into the world, but Lawrence gave early evidence of being a man of peace. At the age of twenty, after innocent and promising youth, he entered the convent of Saint Catherine, in Pisa. He made rapid progress, both in prayer and in study, and busied himself with the works of the Order for several years before being called upon to help in the reform movement that was headed by Blessed John Dominici.

In 1402, Lawrence was made novice-master in the novitiate of the reformed congregation of Tuscany, in Cortona. Here the novices were to be trained in the primitive rigor of the Order, in an attempt to by-pass the destructive elements of the past half century, which had reduced religious observance to an alarming state of indifference. Plague and schism had taken toll both in numbers and quality of the religious orders, and the remaining houses were living under a relaxed observance of the rule, in a struggle for survival. John Dominici, under the inspiration of Raymond of Capua, felt that the time had come to tighten up the observance once more and return to the first practices of penance and silence. His suggestions were not popular among those who lived in the relaxed convents. The only alternative was to begin again, with a new novitiate, and hope that the idea would take hold gradually and effect internal reform among the other houses.

Excellent novices soon made their appearances at Cortona: Saint Antoninus and Blessed Peter Capucci, and the artist brothers, Fra Angelico and Fra Benedetto. Several others who were to attain fame in the order came under Lawrence's influence and were shaped by him and to saintly and useful members of the apostolate, not all in the same fashion- Saint Antoninus was to become Archbishop of Florence, Fra Angelico and his brother made San Marco world famous for its art. Blessed Lawrence is, indeed, an interesting study; a severe and exacting man when it came to keeping the rule, a man of broad vision and great resourcefulness in carrying out the work of preaching. He was obviously not at all afraid of talented people going astray if they were allowed to use their talents for God, and he displayed great insight into the development of each of his novices as individuals.

Eventually, Blessed Lawrence was appointed vicar-general of the reformed congregation and moved to the convent of St. Dominic of Pistoia. Here he preached almost continually, and had a reputation for compassion to the poor whom he tended, taught and visited, even in time of plague.

Lawrence of Ripafratta died in 1457, and was beatified, after a long history of miracles at his tomb in 1851. Beatified: Pope Gregory XVI confirmed his cult in 1851