

Bl. Bartholemew Fernandes dos Mártires, friar and bishop

July 18

Bartolomeu Fernandes was born near Lisbon on 3 May 1514 to Domingos Fernandes and Maria Correia; he was baptized mere hours after in the local parish church of Nossa Senhora dos Mártires.[2][3]

He entered the Order of Preachers on 11 November 1527 and later made his solemn profession into the order on 20 November 1529. On the completion of his own studies in 1538 he taught philosophical studies in the convent of the order at Lisbon and then for about two decades taught theological studies in the various houses of his order. In 1551 he received his master's degree at the provincial chapter of Salamanca in Spain. He taught in Batalha and then in Évora.[2][3] He also served as the prior of the Benfica convent from 1557 to 1558 and was in Évora as a teacher from 1538 until 1557.



During the course of teaching theological studies at the Batalha convent he was summoned to Évora at the request of Luis of Portugal, Duke of Beja to undertake the religious education of his son who was entering the ecclesiastical life himself; he dedicated time to this great task. In 1558 - against his own desires - and out of obedience to his provincial superior (the Servant of God Louis of Granada) he accepted the appointment to the archepiscopal see of Braga for which Queen Catherine had chosen him for and in 1559 received his episcopal consecration at the convent of Saint Dominic on 3 September 1559 from the Bishop of Coimbra João Soares. In actual fact it was Luis of Grenada who was to become the archbishop though Luis urged the queen to select Fernandes instead. Pope Paul IV confirmed this appointment in the papal bull "Gratiae divinae praemium" on 27 January 1559. He devoted himself to the duties of his new office with his installation in his archdiocese on 4 October 1559.

On the resumption of the Council of Trent in 1561 the archbishop repaired to the council and took part in the last sessions. He made a total of 268 suggestions at the council and collaborated with Saint Charles Borromeo. There was also one instance in which he pushed for the defense of a certain topic and opposed view of the Archbishop of Toledo Bartolomé Carranza.[3] He was esteemed and held in high regard among the Council Fathers both on the account of his theological learning and the holiness of his life. The archbishop exercised great influence in the discussions and more so with regard to the decrees on the reform of ecclesiastical life and development.[1] The conclusion of that council saw him return to Braga in February 1564 and in 1566 he held an important provincial gathering of the diocese in which decrees were passed for the restoration of ecclesiastical discipline and the elevation of the moral life of priests and people ("Concilium provinciale Bracaraense quartum" in 1567). The archbishop now devoted himself to the task of enacting the reforms of the Council of Trent in addition to the decrees of his own provincial synod. A great famine and a visitation of the plague revealed the depths of his charitable and merciful nature in addition to his willingness to aid his flock in their time of need; he also constructed a series of hospitals and hospices.

He made repeated requests to resign from his episcopal see and received papal permission from Pope Gregory XIII on 20 February 1582 to resign and withdraw to his order's convent at Viana do Castelo where he lived in solitude for the remainder of his life but also serving as a teacher for some time.

Fernandes died at Viana do Castelo on 16 July 1590.