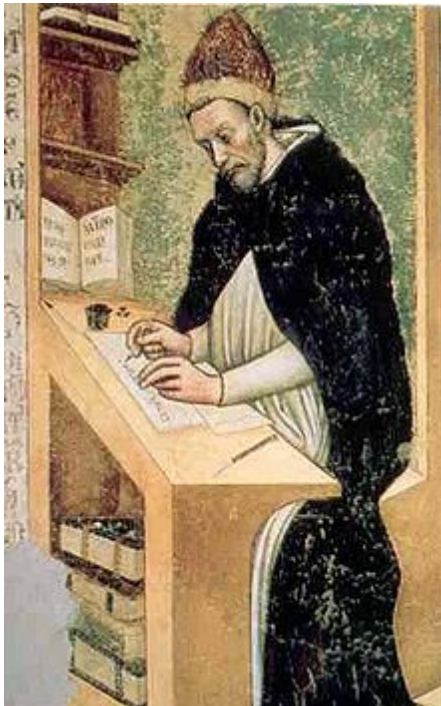


Blessed Innocent V, Friar and Pope, June 23

Born in 1225, joined the Dominican Order when he was sixteen years old and, after a routine Dominican life of theological studies and serving in Church government, he was the first Dominican to be elected Pope, succeeding Pope Gregory X in 1276. However Innocent did not reign long, he lived only a further five months before dying of ill-health on the 22 of June.



It might be said that Innocent did not really require a long pontificate; he had already achieved much in his service of the Church. Indeed, his papacy was directed towards carrying on that very same work, especially in regards to bringing the achievements of the Second Council of Lyons to a lasting fulfillment. The council had been held while Innocent was Archbishop of the city and as such he had a prominent role and, as is indicated by his elevation to the cardinalate in 1273, his contributions had been noteworthy.

The council had been faced with a dual-problem in regards to the unity of Christendom. Rome itself was under increasing pressure in the West due dynastic battles within the Holy Roman Empire and a resurgence of confidence in the eastern Byzantine Empire threatened to precipitate a war between the two halves of Christendom. Fortunately the Emperor of Constantinople, like the Pope, was eager to prevent such an eventuality and so he petitioned for a synod which would return the schismatic eastern churches into union with Rome. Thanks to the cooperation of Pope and Emperor the council secured the agreement from the delegates of Constantinople and issued a decree of reunification.

So Innocent's mission was to carry on what he started at the council but, it must be noted, he actually decided it best to achieve this through reversing his predecessor's policies. Even though Gregory X had sought to check Charles of Anjou's power by crowning Rudolf of Habsburg emperor Innocent instead delayed the coronation and made Charles the powerful senator of Rome. Innocent's disdain for emperors carried eastwards where he demanded swift and full acceptance of the decrees of Lyons, an approach which did little to persuade the emperor's recalcitrant episcopate to support his unpopular desire for union with Rome.

Innocent undoubtedly believed that his policies furthered the interests of the Church but, it has to be admitted, he did not act with the foresight or diplomacy that marked the more successful career of his predecessor. Nonetheless Innocent was renowned for his piety, learning and personal holiness and he was beatified by Leo XIII in 1898.