

Lives of Saints

St Cajetan

1480 - 1587

Feastday: 7th August



“If you want Christ to love you and help you, you must love him and always make an effort to please him. Do not waver in your purpose, because even if all the saints and every single creature should abandon you, he will always be near you, whatever your needs.”

St Cajetan

I can't say that I lived in the worst of times, but they were certainly troubled years. I was born in October 1480 from a noble family in Vicenza, near Venice. I was given a good Catholic upbringing, especially by our devout mother because our father, who was a Count of Thiene, was killed in a battle between Venice and Naples.

A comfortable life was open before me particularly since by the age of twenty-four I graduated as doctor in both civil and ecclesiastical law from the famous university of Padua. I spent some time with the poor in a nearby village, where I also taught catechism. But in 1506, I was called to Rome to serve in the court of Julius II who was indeed a formidable and “fearsome” Pope. I was sent too on diplomatic missions to Venice.

In the meantime I felt strongly called to become a priest, but I considered myself unworthy. Moreover, while in Rome I was greatly saddened by abuses that were going on, even unfortunately by people of the Church. On the other hand I was struck by the pious life of several priests and lay people, especially the members of a group known as “Confraternity of Divine Love”. Enlightened by God, I thought I could be of greater service if I accepted the call to become a priest.

So after the death of Pope Julius in 1513, I left the Roman court and studied for the priesthood. Three years later I was ordained. On Christmas Eve of 1517, while praying in the great Basilica of St Mary Major (Rome), I experienced the extraordinary grace of Our Lady Mary placing baby Jesus in my arms - as in fact I am depicted in most paintings.

I had to return quickly to my native Vicenza because my mother was approaching death. I lived in a poor room in one of the hospitals. When she died I distributed all my belongings to the poor.

Some years later I was directed to go to Venice where I encouraged people to receive and adore Jesus in the Eucharist. Then obeying my spiritual director I went back to Rome where the situation had worsened after the events connected with Martin Luther and his “reformation”. With other priests, we were inspired to form a society for priests who wanted to live poor in community and lead a deep spiritual life totally depending on Divine Providence. Pope Clement VII approved this society of “Regular Clerics” in 1524. I refused to be their Superior and instead Msgr Peter Carafa of Chieti was chosen. We became known as the “Theatines” since in Latin Chieti is Theate.

Sadly we had to experience the sack of Rome in 1527 by the soldiers of Emperor Charles V. We were even attacked; I was almost killed. We had to escape to Venice.

Later I moved to Naples to start there a new group of our society: we set a great example of poverty to all the people. Here a civil war broke out in 1547. I suffered greatly because of the loss of life of innocent people. I prayed a lot for peace. Amidst all this I died on 7th August 1547 - which became my feast day when I was declared a saint by Pope Clement X in 1671. Incidentally, I was chosen later as patron of the unemployed.

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