



ST. BONIFACE: WORD OF GOD AND UNION WITH THE POPE

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In today's general audience, held in St. Peter's Square, the Pope focused his remarks on St. Boniface, "apostle of the Germans".

This saint, Benedict XVI explained, was born in Great Britain around the year 675 "and baptised with the name of Winfred. Attracted by the monastic ideal, he entered a monastery while still very young. ... Having been ordained a priest at the age of around thirty, he felt called to pursue the apostolate among the pagans of continental Europe".

"In the year 716 Winfred and several companions travelled to Frisia (modern-day Holland) but he encountered opposition from a local chieftain and the attempted evangelisation failed. ... Two years later he went to Rome to meet Pope Gregory II who, ... having given him the new name of Boniface, granted him official letters entrusting him with the mission of preaching the Gospel among the people of Germany".

Boniface "achieved great results" and the Pontiff consecrated him as a bishop. "Showing great prudence" the saint "restored ecclesiastical discipline, called a number of synods to ensure the authority of sacred canons, and strengthened communion with the Roman Pontiff".

The Holy Father also recalled how Boniface "backed the foundation of various monasteries, for both men and women, to act as beacons irradiating human and Christian faith and culture in the region".

Shortly before his eightieth birthday, Boniface "readied himself for a new evangelising mission, ... returning to Frisia where his work had begun". There, "as he was celebrating Mass in Dokkum on 5 June 754, he was attacked by a band of pagans" and killed.

"What message", Pope Benedict asked, "can we draw from the teaching and the prodigious activities of this great missionary and martyr?" Firstly, he went on, "the central importance of the Word of God, lived and interpreted in the faith of the Church, which he preached and to which he bore witness even unto the supreme gift of self in martyrdom". Secondly, "his faithful communion with the Apostolic See, which was a fixed and central principle of his missionary work".

"One result of this commitment was the firm spirit of cohesion around Peter's Successor which Boniface transmitted to the Churches in his mission territories, uniting England, Germany and France to Rome, and thus making a decisive contribution to establishing the Christian roots which would produce fertile fruits over later centuries".

A third characteristic of the saint identified by the Holy Father was his "promotion of the encounter between Roman Christian culture and Germanic culture. Transmitting the ancient heritage of Christian values, he gave the people he evangelised a more humane lifestyle, thanks to which the inalienable rights of the person enjoyed greater respect".

"Boniface's courageous witness", said the Pope, "is an invitation to us all to welcome the Word of God into our lives as an essential point of reference, to love the Church passionately, to feel a joint responsibility for her future, and to seek unity around Peter's Successor. At the same time, he reminds us that Christianity, favouring the spread of culture, promotes the progress of mankind. Now it is up to us to show ourselves worthy of such a prestigious heritage, and to bring it to fruit to the advantage of coming generations".

The Holy Father concluded by saying that if we compare St. Boniface's "burning faith and dedication to the Gospel" with "our own faith, often lukewarm and bureaucratised, we have to ask ourselves: how can we renew it so as to ensure the precious gift of the Gospel reaches our own times?"