Saint Benedict of Aniane

SAINT OF THE DAY   12_02_2020

Saint Benedict of Aniane (c. 750-821), was among the protagonists of the Carolingian Renaissance, defended orthodoxy and contributed to spreading the Rule of Saint Benedict of Nursia throughout the Holy Roman Empire, integrating it with some features from other monastic traditions. Due to his austere holiness and the trust awarded him by Charlemagne (742-814) and especially by his successor Louis the Pious (778-840), this

man of God had a significant influence on the history of the Church.

He was born in the south of France from aristocratic parents of Visigothic origin
, who called him Witiza. His education took place at the Frankish court of Pepin the
Short, whose nephews were his fellow-students. With a military career in mind, he
participated in Charlemagne's Italian campaign against the Lombards (733) but a
particular event which occurred during this war caused him to change his life: in an
attempt to save his brother he risked death by drowning. He then resolved to become a
monk at the abbey of Saint-Seine, assuming the name of Benedict.

During his early years in the monastery he began to study the different
monastic rules of Saint Basil, Saint Benedict, Saint Columba, Saint Pachomius, among
others. This study would result in the drafting of a collection, the *Codex regularum*,
containing 27 rules, practically all the ones he knew. Another seminal work was the
Concordia regularum, a commentary on the Benedictine Rule, with extracts from other
rules to demonstrate that this was the best compendium of the ancient monastic
traditions. In the meantime, he had founded an abbey at Aniane, Languedoc, where the
Benedictine Rule was partially integrated with that of Saint Columba. The monastery of
Aniane soon became a great spiritual and cultural centre; under Benedict's guidance, it
came to count more than 300 monks.

Benedict's reform of monasticism was facilitated by the support of the
Carolingian court, as well as by some outstanding clerics, such as Blessed Alcuin of
York (732-804), abbot at the monastery of Marmoutier (founded by Saint Martin of
Tours) and master of the *Schola Palatina*, a centre of the cultural renaissance started by
Charlemagne, in which the Church and the Benedictine monasteries played a crucial
role. In 816-817 Louis the Pious summoned all the abbots of the Empire to Aachen for
the promulgation of the monastic rule prepared by Benedict: this document established
the observance of the Benedictine Rule in all abbeys, allowing small adjustments based
on the climate and the preservation of certain traditions. This was a milestone in the
history of the Benedictine Order and of the entire European monastic movement.

Saint Benedict of Aniane also distinguished himself in the struggle against
adoptionism, a heresy that denied the eternal divine nature of Christ (with multiple
variations over the centuries). It had spread to western France and Spain through the
bishops Elipandus of Toledo and Felix of Urgell. Benedict wrote three treatises and
several letters to refute adoptionism. The heresy was condemned by the councils of
Regensburg in 792, Frankfurt in 794 and Aachen in 799. Benedict also went on a mission
to the Marca Hispanica, a region that coincided with the Pyrenees belt: with his charism

and theological competence he succeeded in bringing many people, both clerics and ordinary laymen, back to orthodoxy.