Saint Benjamin

SAINT OF THE DAY   31_03_2021

"The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him, who shelters him all the day long; and he shall dwell between His shoulders" (*Dt 33, 12*). The book of Deuteronomy tells us how Moses, shortly before his death, blessed the Israelites, represented by the various tribes, including that of Benjamin, the last of Jacob's 12 sons.

From Genesis (Genesis 35, 16-20) we know that the birth of Benjamin had been so difficult that it led to the death of his mother Rachel. Before taking her last earthly

breath, she had called the fruit of her womb *Ben-Oni*, "son of my sorrow". But Jacob instead called him Benjamin, "son of my right hand", that is, beloved. And Benjamin would be beloved not only by his father, but also by his brothers, unlike the fate - at least before the time in Egypt - of Rachel and Jacob's other son: Joseph.

The saint celebrated today bears the name of the youngest of Jacob's sons. Saint Benjamin, deacon and martyr, lived between the fourth and fifth centuries AD. His martyrdom took place during the persecutions in Persia, which began under king Yazdegerd I, a follower of Zoroastrianism. We are told that the king changed his tolerant attitude after the attempt by some Christians of the city of Ctesiphon to set fire to a temple dedicated to the cult of the Great Fire. The destruction of all the churches was ordered and Benjamin was among those who were sent to prison, where he remained about two years. According to the hagiography, he must have been a well-known public figure because the Eastern Roman Emperor Theodosius II (401-450), when he was negotiating peace with the Persian king, had placed the liberation of Benjamin among the conditions.

The king replied that he would free him on condition that the saint cease evangelising the Persians, but Benjamin refused, explaining that it was his duty to announce the salvation that comes from Jesus Christ. The deacon, at the insistence of the Roman ambassador to the Persians, was nevertheless freed, and continued his work of evangelisation. Meanwhile Yazdegerd (†420/421) was succeeded on the throne by his son Bahram V, who continued the policy of persecutions. Benjamin was arrested again. And, the Martyrology reports, he suffered martyrdom in Argol "with sharp reeds stuck in his nails", because "he did not desist from preaching the Word of God".