

## Saint Dominic of Silos

**SAINT OF THE DAY**

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The reputation for holiness that Dominic of Silos (1000-1073) enjoyed during his lifetime led to his canonisation just three years after his death, while Spain was in the midst of the so-called *Reconquista*. In the 11th century, in fact, much of the Iberian peninsula was occupied by Muslims (the final liberation came in 1492 with the Catholic kings Isabel I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon), and Saint Dominic endeavoured to save the Christians who had fallen into Muslim hands, enslaved and prevented from professing freely their faith, which some had abandoned, with grave danger to their souls. The

problem was so widespread that in the Middle Ages several other saints (such as Peter Nolasco, founder in the 13th century of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy, who carried out this work in a systematic way) undertook to ransom Christian prisoners by whatever means, from paying a sum of money or by offering themselves in exchange to free one or more prisoners.

**Before helping persecuted Christians**, and even before entering the religious life, Dominic had been a humble shepherd. Following the Lord's calling, he had entered the Benedictine monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla, where his human and spiritual qualities earned him the admiration of his brethren, who elected him abbot. His kindness was combined with the gift of fortitude. Having noticed this, the king of Navarre Garcia III tried to impose an extortionate tax on the monks who lived off Divine Providence as well as agricultural work, but was told that the monastery's resources were not for kings but for the poor. Garcia became irritated with the saint, who was forced to move, eventually finding refuge in Castile under the protection of Ferdinand I. There, Ferdinand asked him to restore the derelict monastery of San Sebastián de Silos (founded 4 centuries earlier in the Visigothic age) to its former glory.

**Dominic threw himself body and soul into this work**, and soon the abbey – including the cloister, a true architectural gem that can still be admired – flourished again, becoming a centre of charity and culture. Within the monastery of Silos, subsequently dedicated to St. Dominic, the Mozarabic liturgy has been handed down through the centuries, and is one of the few rites still in use, together with the Roman and the Ambrosian. After a life in the service of God, Dominic died in his monastery, where his remains still rest today.

**Less than a century after returning to the Father's house**, Dominic's name became linked to a more famous saint. Blessed Joan of Aza had gone on a pilgrimage to the monastery of Silos to ask for the intercession of Saint Dominic and make sense of a strange dream about the baby she was carrying. Her request was granted, and she understood that her vision (a dog that came out of her belly with a lit torch in its mouth) meant that her son would ignite the world with the fire of Jesus Christ through his preaching. In thanksgiving, she named the child after the saint of Silos: the baby in her womb was to be **Dominic of Guzmán**, founder of the Order of Preachers better known as the Dominican Order. Following this event, a tradition spread that survived until 1931 – the year in which the Second Spanish (anti-Christian) Republic was established: every time a Queen of Spain was pregnant, the abbot of the monastery of Silos would bring her the crozier which was placed next to the bed until the day of the delivery, to

propitiate the birth.

**Patron of:** women about to give birth