Saint Fidelis of Sigmaringen

SAINT OF THE DAY   24_04_2024

"If I am killed, I will gladly accept death for the love of Our Lord. I will consider it a great grace", Saint Fidelis of Sigmaringen (1577-1622) had told his confreres. He was martyred by the Calvinists after having converted many of them to the true faith. Born Markus Roy, he studied philosophy and then law in Freiburg, Germany, where he taught for some time. Even as a student he was known for his modesty, meekness and chastity. He wore a hair shirt and spent hours on his knees worshipping the Blessed Sacrament. In 1604, accompanied by three noble Swabians whom he tutored, he set off on a journey

that lasted six years. During the journey he crossed the main European cities, visiting churches and bringing comfort to the sick in hospitals. On the way back, he stopped in Alsace, where he worked for a few months defending the needy for free and earned the nickname "lawyer of the poor".

Around the age of 34, disillusioned by the evil he observed in much earthly justice, he left everything and joined a Capuchin friary. His superior imposed on him the religious name of Fidelis, inspired by a passage from Revelation: "Be faithful until death and I will reward you with the crown of life" (Rev 2:10). Upon receiving priestly ordination, he was immediately engaged in intense preaching to bring the followers of Zwingli and Calvin back into the Church: several souls were converted, convinced by the humility and profound theological knowledge of Fidelis and by his zeal for God. The Inquisition then entrusted him with the task of preaching in the canton of Grisons, where Protestantism was spreading. The conversions made by the saint, who led a mission with eight other Capuchins, caused the angry reactions of the Calvinists, who began to accuse Fidelis of being a mere agent in the service of the Habsburgs, supporters of Catholicism.

On April 24, 1622, the priest celebrated Mass and then preached in the Swiss village of Gruesch, where he suddenly went silent, staring in ecstasy at the sky. Realizing that the time had come for martyrdom, he wrote his prophecy: *P. Fidelis, prope diem esca vermium,* "Father Fidelis, soon food for the worms". On the same day he went to the nearby hamlet of Seewis and his companions noticed a particular joy in him. In his sermon at the church in Seewis, he urged Catholics to remain firm in their faith and encouraged Protestants to convert: one of them fired a musket at him but missed. The saint did not lose his composure. On his way back to Gruesch he was stopped by about twenty Calvinist soldiers, who ordered him to repudiate the Catholic faith: "I came to extirpate heresy, not to embrace it. The Catholic religion is the eternal faith, I do not fear death".

Fidelis was struck on the skull with a sword, but he still managed to get up onto his knees, invoke Jesus and Mary, and ask God for forgiveness for his enemies. Another stroke of the sword left him in a pool of blood and then the Calvinist heretics continued the assault, stabbing the martyr's body. At the head of the group was a Protestant priest, who later converted, publicly abjured Calvinism, and was welcomed into the Church. Saint Fidelis had written these words in his spiritual testament: "In our day, what is it that leads Christians to neglect easy undertakings, to renounce comforts, to endure trials, to live a life of affliction? It is faith that works through charity. It is the faith that has led Christians to deprive themselves of present goods in the hope for future

rewards and, in exchange for present goods, to receive the rewards of the future world".