DAILY COMPASS
Managing Director Riccardo Cascioli
MADE FOR THE TRUTH

Saints Nicholas Tavelić and Companions

SAINT OF THE DAY 14_11_2020

We should not forget the example of these four glorious Franciscan martyrs (†14 November 1391), who spent years in the Holy Land to guard the places of the life, death and resurrection of Our Lord. Imitating Saint Francis in his encounter with the Sultan, they announced Jesus Christ to the Muslims.

The Croatian Nicholas Tavelić, the Italian Stephen of Cuneo, and the Frenchmen Deodat of Rodez and Peter of Narbonne left as missionaries for Palestine between

1381 and 1383. They worked for the rest of their earthly days in the convent on Mount Sion, which for centuries had been the base of the Custody of the Holy Land, the province of the Franciscan Order that had been established in 1217 during the General Chapter convened by St Francis himself, and was born out of deep veneration towards the Holy Places.

The four friars found themselves doing apostolate in a territory then mainly occupied by Muslims. It was a historical phase in which the missionary drive to free the Holy Land from the persecutions that undermined pilgrims and churches had long since ended in the previous century (1272). However, the difficult context did not discourage the momentum of Nicholas and his companions, who felt called to proclaim the Gospel to the Mohammedans. They therefore consulted with two theologians and prepared a paper in which they explained Christian doctrine, using various historical and theological references with which they refuted Islam and demonstrated the truth of Christianity.

On 11 November 1391 they finally appeared before the qadi, a Muslim judge, and in the presence of other followers of Mohammed they bravely read their doctrinal document. After listening to them, the Muslims became angry and asked them to retract what they had said. But the Franciscans refused to deny anything. So they were locked up in prison, suffering torture of all kinds while awaiting execution of the death sentence. Three days later they were taken to the square where they again refused to abjure, renewing their profession of faith in the Risen Christ. They were chopped to pieces and burned.

Their executioners even removed any trace of the ashes of the four martyrs because they did not want them to be honoured by the Christians. But Divine Providence arranged it differently. Already two months later, their martyrdom was accurately recounted in a report by Father Gerardo Calveti, then Custodian of the Holy Land. And today the Martyrology (in the 2004 edition) remembers them as follows: “In Jerusalem, Saints Nicholas Tavelić, Deodat Aribert, Stephen of Cuneo and Peter of Narbonne, priests of the Order of Minors and martyrs, who were burned in fire for having courageously preached the Christian religion in the public square before the Saracens, firmly professing Christ the Son of God”.