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THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

Saint Godfrey of Amiens:

Visible fruits as abbot, bitter fruits as bishop

It is a great gift for a bishop of the Holy Church to see the fruits of his labor, praise God for them, and depart for eternity with a heart full of gratitude. However, not everyone receives that joy, and apparent failure can be a profound trial.

Today's saint, Godfrey, came from a noble family in the Soissons region of France. After becoming a widower, his father chose to spend the rest of his life in a monastery. Godfrey was only five years old when he was entrusted to the care of the Abbot of Mont-Saint-Quentin, who had also baptized him.

From a young age, Godfrey strove to live a virtuous life by following the example of the religious. He prayed fervently, studied diligently, and willingly carried out any task entrusted to him. He also had a generous heart toward the poor, often giving them part of his own ration.

When he reached the required age, he received the habit in the same monastery. Among his duties was the care of the sick, whom he served tirelessly—praying with them and reading spiritual books to them.

At twenty-five, he was ordained a priest. Shortly thereafter, he was elected abbot of the monastery in Nogent, Champagne. Under his strict discipline, the monastery soon attained great prestige. Godfrey was a devout religious leader and became a role model for the other monks, who recognized that he truly followed the path of holiness.

Godfrey was so spiritually vigilant that he had complete control over his senses. He never uttered a useless word or fixed his gaze on any object unless necessary. His silence and upright conduct were visible signs of his constant spiritual recollection. One day, when presented with a more refined dish than usual, he complained, *“Don't you know that flesh becomes rebellious when flattered?”*

As abbot of the monastery of Nogent—which had been on the verge of collapse before his arrival—he not only restored it internally through monastic discipline and externally through new buildings, but also ensured its future stability. He also had an asylum built to house and care for the poor and sick, whom he personally attended.

Abbot Godfrey's virtue and prudence did not go unnoticed by other clergymen. Thus, in 1103, he was appointed Bishop of Amiens at the Council of Troyes. Although he initially resisted the appointment, he eventually accepted.

In this position, he entered a path of suffering. Even as bishop, he maintained his strict lifestyle and continued to serve the poor with love. Every day, he washed the feet of thirteen of them and served them at table. At the same time, he rebuked the pretensions of the powerful with unwavering fervor, as they stubbornly clung to their disorderly lives. He also fought firmly against the abuses that prevailed among the clergy and, after overcoming many difficulties, managed to improve the situation of the monastery of Saint Valeric.

Despite his kindness and gentleness, his holy zeal for profound reform across all social classes brought him much suffering. Not only was he mocked, despised, and challenged in his authority, but he was even offered poisoned wine in an attempt to eliminate him. However, God revealed the danger to him, and his life was spared. He continued his work with fervor, even as his soul sighed over the obstinacy in sin of the city's inhabitants.

It pained him deeply that the people refused to convert, and he felt that, despite all his efforts, he had failed to achieve lasting results. For this reason, he wished to resign from his position and secretly retired to a Carthusian monastery near Grenoble, devoting the final years of his life to the salvation of his soul. From there, he wrote a letter to the synod being held in Beauvais, humbly requesting that the Church of Amiens be entrusted to someone more suitable.

However, his request was denied, and he had to return. The inhabitants of Amiens welcomed him joyfully, but they did not change their godless ways. Therefore, with prophetic spirit, Godfrey announced imminent divine punishment upon the unrepentant city. Indeed, it was not long in coming. A revolt broke out, and rebels

wreaked havoc—murdering people and setting fires. Plague and famine also ravaged the city.

As a result of these tribulations, the survivors improved their way of life, but the change did not last. A cloud as black as night hung over Amiens. A furious storm broke out, and fire spread everywhere, reducing almost the entire city to ashes—except for the Church of Saint Fermin, the episcopal residence, and a few poor people’s houses.

The man of God set to work—comforting, helping wherever he could, and exhorting conversion and a change of life, with the promise that God, who has the power to give and take away, would soon bless them again. However, his soul could no longer find peace or comfort on earth; it longed for redemption from this valley of tears.

This time, his prayer was quickly answered. While traveling, Godfrey fell seriously ill and was taken to the Abbey of Saint-Crépin, where he received the last rites and passed away on November 8, 1118.

St. Godfrey’s life was marked by two very different stages. As abbot, his work bore visible fruit and made a deep impact. As bishop, however, he was unable to see the fruits of the work he had attempted to accomplish for eleven years. We can imagine how difficult this must have been for him. He suffered for the unrepentant city entrusted to his care and would have preferred to pray and offer sacrifices for it in a Carthusian monastery. But the Lord did not allow it. So he drank the cup to the last drop until, finally, God called him to his eternal home.

Would it have been better for him to remain abbot and not accept the office of bishop? We need not ask this question, for apparent success in the apostolate is no guarantee that it aligns with God’s will. Likewise, apparent failure is not an indication that one has failed in God’s plan. Divine designs are more profound. Godfrey shared in the Lord’s suffering when he realized that those entrusted to him did not recognize the “hour of grace” (cf. Lk 19:41–44).

Thank you, St. Godfrey, for the witness of your life!

The Lord worked many miracles at his tomb and thus glorified his servant.

Meditation on the Gospel of the Day: <https://en.elijamission.net/2023/11/11/>