

16. January 2026  
**THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS**  
**“The Franciscan Protomartyrs”**

St. Francis had sent six of his friars to preach the Gospel in Saracen lands. He himself had tried to convert the Sultan of Egypt, but had failed.

The superior of the six missionaries fell ill, so the remaining five left for Spain. Their names were Berardo, Otto, Peter, Acursio, and Adyuto. Their mission was to proclaim the message of Christ to the Muslims living in Spain. Their first destination was Seville, which at that time was under Muslim rule, as was the entire southern part of the Iberian Peninsula.

Following the example of their holy founder, they first went to the caliph. They proclaimed the Gospel to him and tried to convince him that Muhammad’s message was wrong and misleading. However, they found no ears willing to listen, and the caliph, enraged, wanted to have them beheaded. Thanks to the intervention of his son, this order was not carried out, but they were locked up in a high tower. This did not prevent them from continuing to proclaim the Gospel from there until the caliph forbade them to remain in the country and had them taken to Morocco.

There, Caliph Miramamolin reigned.

With great fervor, the friars preached the Gospel in Morocco, and Caliph Miramamolin listened to the priest Berardo as he preached. However, he too refused to accept the message of the Gospel and expelled the Franciscan friars from the city and from the entire kingdom. The Franciscans’ friends wanted to bring them to safety and take them to a Christian region. However, the brothers were so determined to fulfill their mission, even at the cost of their lives, that they escaped from their friends and returned to Morocco. Once again, they preached the faith in Jesus Christ, and once again they were imprisoned, this time deprived even of water and food.

Shortly after their capture, however, a violent storm broke out, which was interpreted as divine punishment for the cruel treatment inflicted on the friars. Thus, they were released from prison. Seeing that they had survived unharmed, the caliph was greatly surprised. Once again, some Christians wanted to bring the friars to safety, but they escaped again and returned to the city to continue preaching. The

caliph encountered Friar Berardo a second time while he was preaching and became so enraged that he ordered him to be killed immediately. However, the prince who was ordered to carry out this command, named Albozaido, had recently witnessed a miracle performed by Friar Berardo. Therefore, he did not carry out the death sentence immediately, but only imprisoned the intrepid confessors of Christ. This time they were treated quite well.

Nothing and no one could prevent the friars from proclaiming the Gospel, not even prison. This greatly angered Albozaido, who ordered them to be tortured almost to death. But after these torments, the guards saw a wonderful light descend upon the friars. The caliph heard about what had happened and sent for them. On this occasion, he tried to persuade them by showing them beautiful women and promising to give them in marriage and make them rich and renowned men.

But the brothers were not seduced and replied, *"We want neither your women nor your money, for we despise all these things for the sake of Christ."* With this reply, their death sentence was sealed. The king beheaded the five brothers with his own hands, and their bodies were dragged through the streets amid insults and mockery, then abandoned on the outskirts of the city.

When the Christians wanted to collect them with reverence, the Saracens prevented them from doing so and threw the bodies of the saints into the fire. However, through divine intervention, they remained intact. Finally, the Christians managed to obtain the relics and placed them in two precious reliquaries. They were later transferred to Coimbra (Portugal), where the young canon Fernando Bulhões was so impressed when he saw them that he decided to become a son of St. Francis. He would become the great saint we know as St. Anthony of Padua.

In view of the zeal of the first Franciscan martyrs, we must ask ourselves: what is happening today with the proclamation of the Gospel? Do we still consider it so important that we would give our lives for it? Are we aware that Jesus sent us to the ends of the earth to *"make disciples of all nations"* (Mt 28:19)?

Or have we aligned ourselves with the tendency of the current hierarchy, which seeks to place all religions on the same level and thus renounce the mission in its original sense?

May God preserve us from abandoning the missionary mandate that He Himself entrusted to us and from allowing ourselves to be led astray by erroneous ideas!

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**Meditation on the day's reading:** <https://en.elijamission.net/god-alone-is-our-king-2/>

**Meditation on the day's Gospel:** <https://en.elijamission.net/we-have-never-seen-anything-like-this-2/>