

Blessed Francis of Fabriano

1251-1322

PURGATORY

The Blessed Francis Venimbeni was born in 1251 in Fabriano (Ancona) from Compagno Venimbeni, a physician, and Margaret di Federico. His mother had uttered a vow for him, perhaps prior to his birth, and when the boy was able to accompany her she went to fulfill it in Assisi on the tomb of the Saint. On this occasion, she met “Brother Angelo”, one of the authors recorded in the *Legend of the Three Companions*, who approached the boy and looking into his eyes said: “This one shall be one of ours.” Venimbeni, who recounts the episode, acknowledged that from that time on his mother repeated to him that “he too had to be of the Order of the Blessed Francis and not remain in the world.” Indeed, after completing his studies in philosophy, at the age of 16, he entered in the Franciscan Order. He attended the novitiate in Fabriano and from there he went to Assisi to receive the indulgence of the Porziuncola, with the desire to meet Brother Leo, the most well known of the companions of Saint Francis, one of the signers of the letter introducing the *Legend of the Three Companions*. Venimbeni confirmed that “I saw him and I read what he wrote about the life and the sayings of Saint Francis.” The Franciscan scholars recognize the importance of these words that certify what

was done by Brother Leo, memorialist more than biographer of Saint Francis. The Blessed was elected twice, in 1316 and 1318-21, as superior of the new friary built by the Franciscans in Fabriano. With the funds received from his paternal inheritance he built a library where he collected a large quantity of manuscripts and for this he became the first founder of the libraries within the Order of Friars Minor. The Blessed mentioned the arrival of Saint Francis to Fabriano in an indirect manner: “In 1260, when I was a novice, died Brother Raniero, a parish priest of Civita, to whom Saint Francis confessed several times, when he was a parish priest, foretelling him that he would become one of our monks. He was indeed a Holy man and a true Friar Minor.”

Venimbeni lived entirely at the service of the poor, the marginalized and the sick. He himself took care of the needy who knocked at the friary. His charity reached out also to the spiritual necessities of the brothers. He spent many hours in the confessional or preaching. He was dressed in a rough tunic, scourged himself with rigorous penances, and slept little to devote as much time as possible to prayer. His favorite subjects for meditation were the mysteries of the Passion of Christ.



He nurtured a profound devotion in regard to the Souls of Purgatory to whom he dedicated his good works and the Masses he celebrated. He died, as he had foretold on April 22, 1322, at the age of 61. His veneration was recognized by Pius VI on April 1, 1775.

It is told that one day while he was celebrating the Mass for the Souls of Purgatory, as he was often doing, at the end he recited the prescribed prayers, according to the old liturgy of the Mass for the deceased, and he heard in the almost empty church numerous voices, which were responding joyfully: “Amen!” They were the voices of the souls for whom he was celebrating the Mass.

