

Life

St. Nicholas was born in Italy in 1245, he took his name from St. Nicholas of Myra, at whose remote shrine his parents prayed to have a child, and promised that if their wish came true, disregard of their child's gender, they would dedicate this child to God for life. Soon after, the mother became pregnant, and Nicholas was born. Young Nicholas was devoted and often hid in a cave in contemplative prayer like the hermits. At the age of 7, he had been fasting three times a week. At the age of 12, he heard an Augustinian priest preach in mass who persuaded people not to love worldly things. After that, he was very moved and decided to leave the secular world and joined the Augustinian Order, and his parents readily accepted it. In the Order, Nicholas obeyed his superiors, was diligent and humble, and often made self-sacrifices. He slept on the ground at night, using stone as a pillow. After several years of preparation, he was ordained as a priest in 1269. In 1274, Father Nicholas had a vision of a friar whom he had known, who told him that he was in purgatory and asked Father Nicholas to offer a mass for him to reduce his suffering. But because Father Nicholas had previously been assigned to preside over the conventual Eucharist, he could not accept. Then the friar showed him the scenes of numerous souls suffering in the fires in purgatory, which saddened Nicholas. Early the next day, he reported his vision to the superior, begging for him to hold a mass for the souls in purgatory. After the superior agreed, Father Nicholas offered the mass for seven consecutive days and prayed day and night. On completion, the friar appeared to him, thanked him, and told him that he and many souls have now ascended to Heaven. This is the origin of the "Tolentine's Septenary Masses for the Dead". Since then, Father Nicholas continued to offer mass for the souls in purgatory, prayed, fasted and made sacrifices, hoping that they could ascend to heaven sooner.

In 1274, he was sent to Tolentine where he spent the rest of his life for more than thirty years. That place had frequent civil wars and morality was in decline, Father Nicholas acted as a messenger of peace. He preached on the streets where some people deliberately shouted, waved their swords around him and hoped to frighten him, but he was unmoved, and the troublemakers eventually stayed to listen to him and repented. He also helped the poor, visited the sick and the prisoners. Father Nicholas respected God and loved mankind, lived an austere life, and loved his cross, numerous people were touched by him and converted. He died in 1306 at the age of 60. St. Nicholas is the patron of the souls in purgatory.

Reflection

St. Nicholas had performed countless miracles, but always told people afterwards that he was also a poor sinner, and instructed them: "Say nothing of this." After his death, these miracles spread afar, and his statue is related to these stories. Let's meditate on how these stories reflect on what kind of person St. Nicholas was, and what we can learn from him.

- Quail: In view of Father Nicholas's old age, austere life and sickness, his superior ordered him to eat meat as supplement. Someone took two cooked quails to him, but after he blessed them, both quails resurrected and flew away. He was happy to continue fasting.
- Bread: Once Father Nicholas was seriously ill. The Virgin Mary, St. Augustine and St. Monica instructed him to eat bread dipped in water, and he was healed. After that, he would pray and then send bread to the sick, and many of them were cured. The Augustinian Order still commemorates St. Nicholas by blessing and distributing the "Saint Nicholas Bread" to the sick, hoping that through the intercession of the saint, they would be cured.
- Star: For a period of time, every night before he died, a star moved from the place where he was born to Tolentine, symbolizing St. Nicholas' virtues.

Prayer

Catholicism of the Catholic Church #1032 said: "From the beginning the Church has honoured the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead." During the month of Holy Souls, let us imitate St. Nicholas's good example, to pray for our deceased relatives and benefactors, and for the souls who have no one to pray for them and do penance.

May we learn from St. Nicholas, to respect the Lord and love mankind, care about poverty and the sick, and have compassion on the souls in purgatory.

We pray especially for the souls in purgatory. St. Nicholas of Tolentine, pray for us.