

820 SAINT BERNARD, ABBOT & DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH (AUGUST 20TH, 2021)

Readings: *Ecclesiasticus 15: 1 – 6; Psalm 118(119): 9 - 14; John 17: 20 – 26.*

Bernard was born into an aristocratic family in Burgundy in AD 1090. He had six brothers and sisters – four of whom have also been added to the list of saints.

In 1112, at the age of twenty-two, Bernard entered the abbey of Citeaux, which had been founded in 1098 by a group of Benedictine monks who wished to follow more closely the Rule of Saint Benedict. Thirty-one other young Burgundian noblemen, including some of his brothers, entered the monastery with Bernard. From this foundation arose a new form of the monastic life, known – from the name of the abbey – as Cistercian.

In 1115 the abbot of Citeaux asked Bernard to find a site for another monastery. With twelve other monks he founded the abbey of Clairvaux and became its abbot. Life at Clairvaux was austere, and Bernard became ill, but the abbey prospered. Daughter houses were founded and among those who joined were Bernard's father and his remaining brothers.

In 1128 Bernard was made secretary of the Council of Troyes. From this time he was constantly involved in public affairs in many countries. Between 1130 and 1138 there was a schism in the Church in which Bernard supported Pope Innocent II against the antipope Anacletus.

In 1146 Bernard began to preach the Second Crusade intended to defend the Kingdom of Jerusalem from the Turks, but unlike some other Christian leaders he opposed the persecution of Jews, writing "The Jews are not to be persecuted...they are for us the living words of Scripture". He was a profound theologian and an equally profound mystic, writing about the nature of God, and the place of prayer and bible study in drawing us close to him. He stresses the importance of self-knowledge as the way to the imitation of the humility, selflessness and compassion of Jesus. His devotion to Mary is an important feature of his writings: he describes himself as 'the Chaplain of Blessed Mary, and is often shown in paintings contemplating her in a vision.

Bernard died on 20th August 1153 and was buried at Clairvaux. He was canonised in 1174 and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1830. Because of the attractiveness of his teaching he is known as *The Honey-mouthed Doctor*. When Clairvaux was taken over by the state at the French Revolution his relics were moved to a new shrine in Troyes Cathedral.