

Readings: *Ephesians 3: 14 – 19; Psalm 118 (119): 9 – 14; Matthew 23: 8 – 12.*

Giovanni di Fidanza was born near Orvieto in 1221. When he was twenty-two he joined the Order of Friars Minor (Lesser Brothers or Franciscans), which had been begun by Francis of Assisi in 1209. He took the name Bonaventure in religion. From 1243 to 1257 he was involved in study and teaching at the University of Paris.

During this period the Franciscan movement was troubled by divisions between those who wanted to stick closely to the teaching on strict poverty of S. Francis and those who wanted to modify his rule, allowing the friars to own their own buildings, and also between those who wanted a centralized government and those who wished there to be more local freedom.

In 1257 Bonaventure was elected as Minister-General. He saw the need to hold the differing factions together and adopted a balanced approach to the various problems within the movement. He wrote a commentary on the Rule of Saint Francis and a biography (the *Legenda Maior*), which in 1266 was accepted as the only official biography of the saint.

In his own life Bonaventure demonstrated that it was possible to combine high academic qualities and the holding of high office in the Church with a life of personal poverty based on the imitation of Christ, as it had been preached by Saint Francis.

Bonaventure wrote many works of theology and spirituality – earning the title *The Seraphic Doctor*, because of his devotion to Saint Francis's vision of the crucified Seraph, which had led to the marks of Christ's wounds (the *stigmata*) appearing on the saint's body.

In his teaching Bonaventure insisted that the purpose of all human knowledge was not the development of philosophical theories, but a deepening of love.

In 1273 Pope Gregory X made Bonaventure cardinal-bishop of Albano (one of the dioceses surrounding the city of Rome). From March 1274 he took part in the Council of Lyons, which had been called to bring about reunion between the Eastern and Western Churches, to free the Holy Land from Muslim rule, and to reform the Church. He supported the plans for reunion and preached at the Mass of Reconciliation, but died on 15th July 1274 and was buried in Lyons.

He was canonized in 1482 and declared a Doctor (Teacher) of the Church in 1588.