



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

St. Peter's Square

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[\[Video\]](#)

Saint Lawrence of Brindisi

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I still remember with joy the festive welcome I was given in [Brindisi in 2008](#). It was in this city that in 1559 was born a distinguished Doctor of the Church, St Lawrence of Brindisi, the name that Julius Caesar Russo took upon entering the Capuchin Order.

He had been attracted since childhood by the family of St Francis of Assisi. In fact, his father died when he was seven years old and his mother entrusted him to the care of the Friars Minor Conventual in his hometown. A few years later, however, Lawrence and his mother moved to Venice and it was precisely there that he became acquainted with the Capuchins who in that period were generously dedicated to serving the whole Church in order to further the important spiritual reform promoted by the Council of Trent.

With his religious profession in 1575, Lawrence became a Capuchin friar and in 1582 he was ordained a priest. During his ecclesiastical studies for the priesthood he already showed the eminent intellectual qualities with which he had been endowed. He learned with ease the ancient languages, such as Greek, Hebrew and Syriac, as well as modern languages, such as French and German. He added these to his knowledge of Italian and of Latin that was once spoken fluently by all clerics and by all cultured people.

Thanks to his mastery of so many languages, Lawrence was able to carry out a busy apostolate among the different categories of people. As an effective preacher, his knowledge, not only of the Bible but also of the rabbinic literature was so profound that even the Rabbis, impressed and full of admiration, treated him with esteem and respect.

As a theologian steeped in Sacred Scripture and in the Fathers of the Church, he was also able to illustrate Catholic doctrine in an exemplary manner to Christians who, especially in Germany, had adhered to the Reformation. With his calm, clear exposition he demonstrated the biblical and patristic foundation of all the articles of faith disputed by Martin Luther. These included the primacy of St Peter and of his Successors, the divine origin of the Episcopate, justification as an inner transformation of man, and the need to do good works for salvation.

Lawrence's success helps us to realize that today too, in pursuing ecumenical dialogue with such great hope, the reference to Sacred Scripture, interpreted in accordance with the Tradition of the Church, is an indispensable element of fundamental importance. I wished to recall this in my Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (n. 46)

Even the simplest members of the faithful, those not endowed with great culture, benefited from the convincing words of Lawrence, who addressed humble people to remind them all to make their lives consistent with the faith they professed.

This was a great merit of the Capuchins and of other religious Orders which, in the 16th and 17th centuries, contributed to the renewal of Christian life, penetrating the depths of society with their witness of life and their teaching. Today too, the new evangelization stands in need of well-trained apostles, zealous and courageous, so that the light and beauty of the Gospel may prevail over the cultural tendencies of ethical relativism and religious indifference and transform the various ways of thinking and acting into genuine Christian humanism.

It is surprising that St Lawrence of Brindisi was able to continue without interruption his work as an appreciated and unflagging preacher in many cities of Italy and in different countries, in spite of holding other burdensome offices of great responsibility.

Indeed, within the Order of Capuchins he was professor of theology, novice master, for several mandates minister provincial and definitor general, and finally, from 1602 to 1605, minister general.

In the midst of this mountain of work, Lawrence cultivated an exceptionally fervent spiritual life. He devoted much time to prayer and, especially, to the celebration of Holy Mass — often protracted for hours — caught up in and moved by the memorial of the Passion, death and Resurrection of the Lord.

At the school of the saints, every priest, as was emphasized frequently during the recent Year for Priests, may only avoid the danger of activism — acting, that is, without remembering the profound motives of his ministry — if he attends to his own inner life.

In speaking to priests and seminarians in the Cathedral of Brindisi, St Lawrence's birthplace, I recalled that "the time he spends in prayer is the most important time in a priest's life, in which divine grace acts with greater effectiveness, making his ministry fruitful. The first service to render to the community is prayer. And, therefore, time for prayer must be given true priority in our life... if we are not interiorly in communion with God we cannot even give anything to others. Therefore, God is the first priority. We must always reserve the time necessary to be in communion of prayer with Our Lord" (*Address of Benedict XVI to priests, deacons and seminarians of the Archdiocese of Brindisi*, Cathedral of Brindisi, 15 June 2008).

Moreover, with the unmistakable ardour of his style, Lawrence urged everyone, and not only priests, to cultivate a life of prayer, for it is through prayer that we speak to God and that God speaks to us: "Oh, if we were to consider this reality!", he exclaimed. "In other words that God is truly present to us when we speak to him in prayer; that he truly listens to our prayers, even if we pray only with our hearts and minds. And that not only is he present and hears us, indeed he willingly and with the greatest of pleasure wishes to grant our requests".

Another trait that characterizes the opus of this son of St Frances is his action for peace. Time and again both Supreme Pontiffs and Catholic Princes entrusted him with important diplomatic missions, to settle controversies and to encourage harmony among the European States, threatened in those days by the Ottoman Empire.

The moral authority he enjoyed made him a counsellor both sought after and listened to. Today, as in the times of St Lawrence, the world is in great need of peace, it needs peaceful and peacemaking men and women. All who believe in God must always be sources and artisans of peace.

It was precisely on the occasion of one of these diplomatic missions that Lawrence's earthly life ended, in 1619 in Lisbon, where he had gone to see King Philip iii of Spain, to plead the cause of the Neapolitan subjects oppressed by the local authorities.

He was canonized in 1881, and his vigorous and intense activity, his vast and harmonious knowledge, earned him the title of *Doctor Apostolicus*, "Apostolic Doctor". The title was conferred on him by Bl. Pope John XXIII in 1959, on the occasion of the fourth centenary of his birth. This recognition was also granted to Lawrence of Brindisi because he was the author of numerous works of biblical exegesis, theology and sermons. In them he offers an organic presentation of the history of salvation, centred on the mystery of the Incarnation, the greatest expression of divine love for humankind.

Furthermore, since he was a highly qualified Mariologist, the author of a collection of sermons on Our Lady entitled “Mariale”, he highlighted the unique role of the Virgin Mary, whose Immaculate Conception and whose role in the redemption brought about by Christ he clearly affirms.

With a fine theological sensitivity, Lawrence of Brindisi also pointed out the Holy Spirit’s action in the believer’s life. He reminds us that the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity illumines and assists us with his gifts in our commitment to live joyously the Gospel message.

“The Holy Spirit”, St Lawrence wrote, “sweetens the yoke of the divine law and lightens its weight, so that we may observe God’s commandments with the greatest of ease and even with pleasure”.

I would like to complete this brief presentation of the life and doctrine of St Lawrence of Brindisi by underlining that the whole of his activity was inspired by great love for Sacred Scripture, which he knew thoroughly and by heart, and by the conviction that listening to and the reception of the word of God produces an inner transformation that leads us to holiness.

“The word of the Lord”, he said, “is a light for the mind and a fire for the will, so that man may know and love God. For the inner man, who lives through the living grace of God’s Spirit, it is bread and water, but bread sweeter than honey and water better than wine or milk.... It is a weapon against a heart stubbornly entrenched in vice. It is a sword against the flesh, the world and the devil, to destroy every sin”.

St Lawrence of Brindisi teaches us to love Sacred Scripture, to increase in familiarity with it, to cultivate daily relations of friendship with the Lord in prayer, so that our every action, our every activity, may have its beginning and its fulfilment in him. This is the source from which to draw so that our Christian witness may be luminous and able to lead the people of our time to God.

To special groups:

I am pleased to greet the members of the Catenian Association from England, the students of the combined Choir of St Anne and St Ib Schools, and the many university students present here today. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, especially the pilgrims from England, Ireland, Denmark, Indonesia, the Philippines and the United States, I invoke God’s abundant Blessings.

I also extend an affectionate greeting to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Dear friends, the Lenten Season is a favourable opportunity to express in daily life, in accordance with the different situations in which each person lives, the same sentiments of the Saviour who gave his life for us on the Cross, finding comfort and support in his sacrifice, offered for the salvation of the whole of humanity.

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