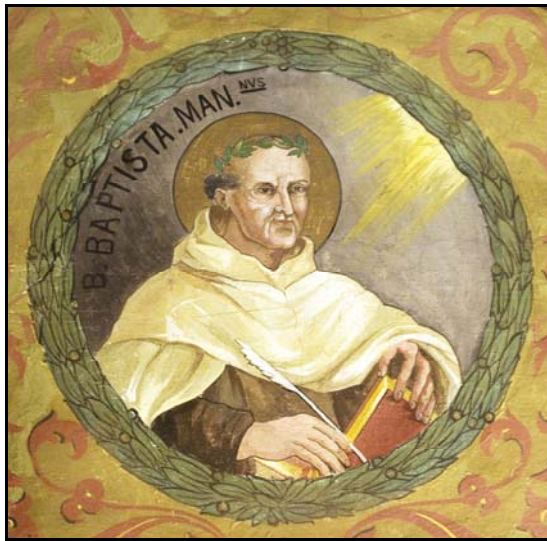


## Blessed Baptist Spagnoli of Mantua



A fresco of Blessed Baptist in Saint Albert's International Centre (CISA) in Rome.  
He is shown wearing the laurels of a poet.

On 17<sup>th</sup> April the Carmelite Family celebrates the feast of a medieval Carmelite friar, Blessed Baptist Spagnoli of Mantua.

Baptist was born in Mantua (Mantova in northern Italy) on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1447. His father, Peter Modover, was a Spanish nobleman assigned to the Mantuan court (hence Baptist's nickname of 'Spagnoli' or 'Spaniard'). As a youth Baptist joined the Carmelite Friars of the Congregation of Mantua (a reform movement within the Order) at Ferrara, some 50 miles away. He made his religious profession in 1464 and served in many positions of responsibility in the community; he was vicar general of his congregation six times, and in 1513 was elected prior general of the whole Carmelite Order. In his own time Baptist was a renowned humanist 'who brought his richly-varied poetry into the service of Christ'. His abilities as a poet are referred to by William Shakespeare in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Baptist used his friendship with scholars as an opportunity of encouraging them to live a Christian life. He died in Mantua on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1516, and his body is venerated in the cathedral there. Revered as a holy man since the time of his death, his cult was confirmed by the Pope in 1885.

We print here an extract from Blessed Baptist's treatise *On Patience* (Book 3, Chapter 32)...

You will find that the reading of sacred scripture is a great and powerful remedy against bodily suffering and depression of mind. In my opinion, there is no other writing, no matter how eloquent and stylish it may be, that can bring such peace to our minds and so thoroughly dissolve our cares as sacred scripture can.

I speak from personal experience: for there have been times when I was beset with anxieties, the worst of which came from the experience of my own weakness, and if on such occasions I sought relief in the scriptures, the hopes and desires that led me there were never disappointed. The word of scripture proved to be a solid bulwark against my anxieties and a relief to my troubled spirit.



I have often wondered why the scriptures have this persuasive power, why they have such a powerful effect on those who listen to them, and why they lead us to the commitment of faith and not to the mere forming of opinion. The response of faith does not happen because of a reasoning process, because scripture does not offer one; and it is not a matter of literary style or artistic merit, because scripture does not use these devices; nor does it use soft words to persuade us.

The real reason that scripture has this persuasive power is that it comes from First Truth. Surely there can be no other explanation for such conviction. It seems as though scripture has an inherent authority that compels us to believe. But on what base does this authority rest? None of us has seen God preaching, writing, teaching – and yet we believe as though we had seen, and realize that what we read comes from the Holy Spirit. One reason for believing may well be that the truth contained in scripture is very solid truth, even though it is not as clear as we might wish. All truth has an inherent power to win our acceptance: the greater the truth, the greater its power.

So why is it then, that not all believe the good news? My reply is that not all are drawn by God. However, there is no point in arguing further. We believe in sacred scripture to the degree that we accept in our hearts God's divine inspiration.