

Blessed Baptist Spagnoli of Mantua

Baptist, named after Saint John the Baptist, was born in Mantua, northern Italy, on 17th April 1447. His father – a civil servant to the Dukes of Mantua – was Spanish (hence his surname), and his mother Italian.

Baptist joined the Carmelite friars in Ferrara as part of a movement known as the Congregation of Mantua, which urged reform and renewal within the Order. Baptist made his religious profession as a Carmelite in 1464, serving in many positions of responsibility in the community, and performing diplomatic missions for the popes. Baptist was vicar general (superior) of his congregation six times, and in 1513 he was elected Prior General of the whole Carmelite Order.



Yet it is not so much for his administrative abilities that we remember Baptist, but rather for his ability to integrate these skills with the creative aspect of his character to become one of the great figures of the Italian humanist movement. Baptist was a gifted poet, and a superb Latin stylist. Imitating the ancient writer Virgil, Baptist wrote a series of poems called *The Eclogues*, which were used as a model of style in European schools for a century and a half after his death. He is the only Carmelite quoted in the works of William Shakespeare (*Love's Labour's Lost*, Act IV, Scene 2).

Much of Baptist's poetry contained moral teaching. He urged peace in the tumultuous Italy of his time, and wrote on the life of religious commitment. Baptist was a renowned humanist who brought his richly varied poetry into the service of Christ. He was a Carmelite, priest, teacher, administrator, diplomat, and poet. He used his God-given gifts, and let God use him for the service of others. He was a man who wasn't afraid to see and celebrate the beauty of our world.

Baptist died in Mantua on 20th March 1516. His feast day is 17th April.

PRAYER

God of all good gifts, help us to value the past, present, and future. May we see in each day the possibility to change ourselves and the world, and to realise the potential you have created for us. Help us to be gracious and generous in our encounters with others. May the prayers and example of Blessed Baptist of Mantua help us to influence others in a positive way, and to draw from them the very best of themselves. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.