



St. Felix of Cantalice

Born: 18 May 1515 Cantalice, Italy

Died: 18 May 1587 Rome, Italy

Venerated: in Franciscan Order

Beatified: 1 October 1625 by Pope Urban VIII

Canonized: 1712 by Pope Clement XI

Feast: May 18

Patronage: Spello

Born to pious peasants, he was a shepherd in his youth. At age nine he was hired out as a shepherd and farm hand at Cotta Ducale; he worked there over twenty years. A pious youth and man, Felix spent his free time in prayer.

Having little education, Felix had a friend read him the lives of the early Desert Fathers; they left him torn - he wanted to live as a hermit, but feared he would give in to temptation if he had no superior. He sought entrance to the Capuchins; they were hesitant, but finally accepted him as a lay brother in 1543 at Anticoli, Italy near Rome. Sent to Rome in 1547 as questor for the community; he stayed there the rest of his life.

Felix's reputation for holiness spread quickly. He could not even read, yet theologians consulted him on spirituality and Scripture. Sinners on the street would hide from him when it became obvious he could see their sins, and knew their hearts. Felix preached in the street, rebuked corrupt politicians and officials, and exhorted young men to stop leading dissolute lives. Once during Carnival, a time of open vice in the streets, Felix and Saint Philip Neri organized a procession of Capuchin friars right into the middle of the revellers; Fra Lupo, a well-known Capuchin preacher, spoke to the crowds, and Carnival ended for the year.

Felix worked with the children of Rome; his inherent simplicity and lack of education made him rather childlike, and children trusted him. He composed simple teaching canticles, and had the children gather in groups to sing them as a way to teach them catechism. The canticles became well-known and popular, and while Felix was begging for his house, Roman citizens would invite him in to sing for them; he saw these invitations as opportunities to teach, and always jumped at them.

During the famine of 1580, the city fathers asked the Capuchins for the loan of Felix as a fund raiser; he was tireless in the work. His friend, Saint Philip Neri, considered Felix the greatest saint then living. Saint Charles Borromeo sought Saint Philip's help to draw up the constitutions of the Oblates of Saint Ambrose; Philip referred him to Felix as a the best advisor.

Felix slept little, ate what came to hand, attended Mass every morning. He had a great devotion to Our Lady, frequently prayed the rosary, and was sometimes swept away in ecstasy, unable to finish the prayers. Received a vision of the Virgin Mary during which he was allowed to hold the Christ Child in his arms. Acclaimed a saint by the people of Rome immediately after his death.