January 23

Menno Simons (1496-1561) witness

In 1535, in the German city of Münster near the Dutch border, a bloodbath put an end to a tragic attempt to establish the New Jerusalem by force. A extremist fringe group of the Dutch Anabaptist movement had planned the utopian project, which led to the vicious persecution of all those who declared themselves Anabaptist.
Anabaptism survived thanks to the intelligent work of Menno Simons, who led the movement, which had attracted many simple people who wanted nothing more than to do God's will, back to its roots in the Gospel.
Simons was born in Witmarsum, Germany in 1496 into a family of peasants. He became a Catholic priest, and as he practiced his ministry he found himself increasingly struck by the sincere faith of many of his faithful who were drawn to various currents of Reformation thought.
Simons underwent a severe vocational and existential crisis, and emerged from it with the conviction that he had to be a servant of God's Word. For him, this meant renouncing everything in the Church that could not be substantiated by the Word of God. He left the Church of Rome, and convinced that following Christ could only mean taking up his own cross, he risked death for twenty years, preaching the Word of God and calling for the restoration of an Anabaptist movement liberated from prophetic and eschatological frenzy and submitted to the primacy of the Gospel. Above all, Simons tried to bring about a genuine conversion in his own life in order to be more faithful to the Gospel message he preached daily.
Menno Simons died on January 31, 1561, after having contributed through his writings to the establishment of a church with ordained ministers, founded and subject to evaluation on the basis of Scripture. He is commemorated on January 23 by several evangelical churches.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

WESTERN CATHOLICS:
Babylas, bishop, and *the three young boys* (d. 250), martyrs (Ambrosian calendar)
Ildefons (d. 667), bishop of Toledo (Spanish- Mozarabic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (14 tubah/terr):
Archiledis the Roman, monk (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:
Menno Simons, witness to the faith in Frisia

MARONITES:
Clement of Ancyra (3rd-4th cent.)
Agathangelus (3rd-4th cent.), martyr
Sergius (d. 701), pope

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:
Clement, bishop of Ancyra, hieromartyr
Agathangelus, martyr
Theophan the Recluse (d. 1894), bishop of Tambov (Russian Church)