February 17

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The seven founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary (13th cent.) religious

The seven holy founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary, all prosperous Florentine wool merchants, were born at the turn of the thirteenth century.
They were friends and belonged to a group of lay faithful who were particularly devoted to the Virgin Mary and dedicated to serving the poor and the sick. Probably close to the year 1240, they began to live together on the outskirts of Florence, in poverty, prayer and penance.
They soon adopted the rule of Augustine and moved to Mount Senario in search of greater solitude. Here the penitential community officially became the Order of the Servants of Mary, an order inspired by the way of life described in the summaries of the Acts of the Apostles, with a commitment to radical poverty, prayer and work.
Of the seven saints, the best known are Bonfiglio Monaldo, the first prior of Mount Senario, and Alessio Falconieri, who refused ordination to the priesthood and died on February 17, 1310 at over one hundred years of age. He was a witness to the definitive constitution of the Order of Servants in 1304.

A READING

In their humility, they had emptied themselves: strong as they were, they kept the root of love firmly planted in the commitment they had made, and so they could say with David, "I love you, O Lord, my strength." They were lifted up by their hope in eternal things, and made stronger still, they raised the banner of love at the moment of trial, so that they could exclaim with Job, "Even if my Creator should kill me, I will hope in him." Finally, they were consumed by love: at the height of their strength they touched love's summit, and even rejoiced at being beaten, so great was their joy in suffering for Christ.

(Legend on the Origins of the Order, 39)

PRAYER

Lord our God,
give us the ardent love of the seven holy founders
who, united in one heart and mind,
left everything for the sake of the Gospel
and lived in communion as brothers,
serving the Church community
of whom Mary is a figure and first fruit.
Through Christ our only Lord.

BIBLICAL READINGS
Sir 44:1-2.10-15; Eph 4:1-6.15-16; Jn 17:20-24

Janani Luwum and companions (d. 1977) martyrs

Janani Luwum was born in 1922 in Acholi, Uganda. His parents belonged to the first generation of Ugandese Christians, who had been converted by British missionaries. As a boy, Janani tended the family's sheep and goats with his brothers.
Because he demonstrated a strong desire to learn, he was given the opportunity to study and become a teacher. At the age of twenty-six he too became a Christian, and in 1956 he was ordained a priest of the local Anglican church. He was elected bishop of northern Uganda in 1969, and was nominated archbishop of Uganda five years later, when the dictatorial regime of general Idi Amin was already in power. Luwum began to speak out publicly against the brutality of the dictatorship, expressing the discontent of Uganda's Christians and large sectors of the population.
In 1977, as government-led massacres increased, the bishops' protests became sharper. On February 17, several days after Idi Amin received a severe letter of protest signed by all of the Anglican bishops, the regime announced that Luwum had been found killed in an auto accident, together with two Ugandese government ministers.
Shortly before his death, Luwum had answered his wife's pleas that he refuse to meet the dictator with the words, "I am the archbishop; I cannot run away. I pray that I might see the Lord's hand in whatever happens to me."

BIBLICAL READINGS
Sir 4:20-28; 2 Tim 4:1-8; Jn 12:24-32

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:
Janani Luwum, archbishop of Uganda, martyr

WESTERN CATHOLICS:
The seven founders of the Order of the Servants of Mary (Roman and Ambrosian calendars)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (9 amsir/yakkatit):
Barsauma (V sec.), father of the Syrian monks (Orthodox Coptic Church)
Proterius (d. 457), Patriarch of Alexandria and martyr (Catholic Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:
Johann Heermann (d.1647), poet of Slesia

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK-CATHOLICS:
Theodore of Tyro (d. ca. 306), great martyr
Romanus of Tarnovo (XIV cent.), monk (Bulgarian Church)