

February 18

Fra' Angelico (ca. 1400-1455) religious and iconographer

In 1455 Fra' Giovanni di San Domenico, a Dominican better known today as the artist Fra' Angelico, died in the Roman convent of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva.

Fra' Giovanni, called Guido di Piero before he became a Dominican, was born at the turn of the fourteenth century near Florence, into a very poor family. At a young age he entered the Company of St. Niccolò, a Florentine guild, where his precocious and extraordinary talent as a painter was quickly recognized.

Admired by his companions because of his kindness and unpretentious manner, Guido felt the need to contribute, through the gift of his entire life, to the evangelical renewal that had become an imperative in the 15th-century church. He entered the Dominican convent of Fiesole, which belonged to the progressive wing of the Order, and served his contemporaries as a silent and discreet preacher, a theologian, and a poet. But it was in his paintings above all that Fra' Angelico harmonized the discoveries of Renaissance art with the purity of heart of a true seeker of God.

Michelangelo said that because of his artwork he "deserved heaven, so that he could contemplate all of the beauty he had depicted on earth."

In 1438 Fra' Angelico moved with three other Dominicans, also painters, to the Florentine convent of St. Mark, where he was later named prior. Here he and his companions left one of the purest and most sober expressions of Renaissance religious art.

Called to Rome by the first humanist popes, Fra' Angelico died in the convent of the Dominican superior general. Legend has it that at the moment of his death, a tear ran down the cheek of each of the angels Fra' Angelico had painted.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

Patrick (d. ca. 461), bishop (Ambrosian calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (10 amsir/yakkatit):

James, son of Alphaeus, apostle (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:

Martin Luther (d. 1546), reformer at Wittenberg

MARONITES:

Leo the Great (d. 461), pope and confessor

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Leo, pope of Rome

Theodosius (d. 1696), archbishop of Chernigov (Russian Church)