April 12

Peter Waldo (ca. 1140-1217) witness

Very little information about Peter Waldo's life is available, and much of what we have is probably more legendary than factual. Still, it is enough to sketch the features of the churches that were brought into being by Waldo and his first companions, who were among the most convinced witnesses of radical faithfulness to the Gospel in medieval Western Europe.

Waldo was born around the year 1140, and became a prosperous merchant in Lyons and the father of a large family. Everything changed for him, according to his hagiographers, when he heard the Gospel's call to sell everything he had, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow the Lord alone. Leaving all of his belongings and his family, Waldo became a poor itinerant preacher of the Gospel.

Many responded to his call to live a simple life, similar to that of the first Christian communities. Waldo's companions came to be called the "poor of Lyons" or the "poor of Christ," and he was given the nickname Peter, after the leader of the apostles.

The Waldensians encountered opposition from many bishops because, unlike their contemporaries the Franciscans, they refused to seek an ecclesiastical mandate to authorize their preaching. Waldo was convinced that the Word judges the Church and makes all Christians its ministers, and not vice versa. Because of their refusal, the Waldensians were condemned by the Verona Synod in 1184.

Now considered excommunicated, they began to be persecuted by other Christians. In the sixteenth century they decided to join the Protestant Reformation, and entered into communion with the Reformed churches of Switzerland and France.

Peter Waldo probably died in Bohemia, where the "poor of Christ" were a sizeable community, in 1217. Today, most of the remaining Waldensian congregations are found in northern Italy, in the valleys that lead from the region of Piedmont to the French border. Their members number in the tens of thousands.

A READING

Since faith, according to the apostle James, "is dead without works," we have renounced the world, and as the Lord asks, we have given what we had to the poor so as to become poor ourselves and have no concerns about tomorrow. We will accept neither gold, nor silver, nor anything else except food and ordinary clothing. We have committed ourselves to observing both the counsels and the precepts contained in the Gospel.

From the *Profession of Faith* of Peter Waldo

According to the grace that has been given to us, and in obedience to the Lord's order that laborers be sent into the harvest, we decided to pray and to preach. In this way, we will begin the return to the primitive Church.

Durando de Osca, from the *Liber Antiheresis*

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

WESTERN CATHOLICS:
Zeno of Verona (d. ca. 372), bishop (Ambrosian calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (4 barmudah/miyazya):
Victor, Decius and Irene (4th cent.), martyrs (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:
Peter Waldo, witness to the faith in Italy

MARONITES:
Menas and Hermogenes of Alexandria (3th-4th cent.), martyrs

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:
Basil the Confessor (8th-9th cent.), bishop of Parios
Saba the Goth (d. 372), martyr (Romanian Church)