April 16

Benedict Joseph Labre (1748-1783) witness

On Holy Wednesday of the year 1783, Benedict Joseph Labre, a vagabond of God, died in Rome.
A native of the town of Amettes, in today's diocese of Arras in northern France, he received a modest education that allowed him to read the great spiritual texts of his time in Latin.
Benedict was very young when he sensed his calling to monastic life, but his vocational search was not easy. He was refused by several Carthusian monasteries because of his young age and poor health, and the Trappists, to whom he went next, felt he was unsuited for a traditional religious life.
Benedict did not give up, and after facing rejection and his own limitations he came to recognize his calling to a different, yet deeply evangelical form of witness. He became a pilgrim without a fixed address, in search of God's future city, and immersed himself in prayer, which never again left him. Carrying a sack that held nothing but the New Testament, a breviary, and The Imitation of Christ, he toured the major centers of Christian Europe.
At the age of twenty-eight he arrived in Rome and spent seven years there as a vagabond, wandering from one church to another and sleeping in the ruins of the Colosseum. He spent his days listening to pilgrims and the poor, making friends with heretics and unbelievers, and living, as he had dreamed of doing from his childhood, totally abandoned to God's merciful love.
At his death, the cry "The saint is dead!" rang out in the streets of Rome, and thousands of the city's poor and vagabonds ran to attend his funeral at the church of St. Maria dei Monti.
Benedict Labre, a vagabond for God and a follower of Christ in total poverty, gives witness at the heart of the Western Church to a paradoxical possibility of holiness, similar to that shown by the great "fools-for-Christ" of the Eastern churches.

PRAYER

God of hope,
you called the poor and humble Benedict Labre
to the itinerant life,
and he walked the streets like a beggar,
lost in your prayer
and filled with joy and love.
Show us how to love the foolishness of the Cross
so that we may also feel that we are pilgrims
on the road to the kingdom.
Through Christ our Lord.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:
Isabella Gilmore (d. 1923), deaconess

WESTERN CATHOLICS:
Engratia and 18 companions of Saragossa (3rd-4th cent.), martyrs (Spanish-Mozarabic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (8 barmudah/miyazya):
Agape, Irene and Chionia of Thessaloniki (d. 304), martyrs (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:
Sundar Singh (d. 1929), witness to the faith in India

MARONITES:
Benedict Labre; *Bernadette Soubirous* (d. 1879)

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:
Agape, Irene and Chionia of Thessaloniki and companions, martyrs