

John Gualberto (d. 1073) monk

John Gualberto, a monk and catalyst for monastic reform at his community of Vallombrosa, died in 1073 in Passignano, near Florence.

Very little is known about his life before he entered the monastery of San Miniato in Florence. Yet no sooner had he chosen monastic life than John became a key figure in the struggle against one of the most insidious evils that afflicted the church of his time: simony, the underhanded practice of using money to acquire positions of prestige in the church. For the rest of his life, John never stopped preaching against this evil.

He encouraged the clergy to return to the purity and poverty preached in the Gospel, and he was equally convinced that the monasteries of his time needed to become more focused on life within the community, and more faithful to the Rule of St. Benedict.

After visiting a number of communities in the Romagna region of Italy in search of a suitable place to pursue his ideal, Gualberto decided to join two hermits of Vallombrosa. With them he founded a new monastery that was more cenobitic in character than other contemporaneous experiments of monastic reform in central Italy.

John felt that the new commandment to love others should be at the center of the Christian monk's life, since it is upon the foundation of this commandment alone that communion can be built up in a cenobitic community.

The last words John spoke before he died were about Christian love and the role of the abbot, who presides over the fulfillment of Jesus' great commandment in the community of brothers.

BIBLICAL READINGS

Lev 19:1-2.17-18; Eph 6:10-13.18; Lk 6:27-38

Nathan Söderblom (1866-1931) pastor and ecumenical witness

Nathan Söderblom, who served as Lutheran archbishop of Uppsala, died in 1931 of a heart ailment.

He was born in 1866 in Trönö, in the Swedish countryside, and was baptized Lars Olof Jonathan. His strong personality bore traces of both his father's spirituality, which had been influenced by German pietism, and his own education in theology and the history of religions, which he pursued in academies where liberal theology was the prevailing trend.

His tranquil career as a religious historian in Uppsala was unexpectedly interrupted when he was named the city's Lutheran archbishop, to the surprise of many. Söderblom committed himself to a double mission, which he would pursue for the rest of his life: the promotion of world peace and the quest for Christian unity.

Söderblom received the Nobel Prize in 1930, in recognition of his peacemaking work. His efforts to encourage dialogue among the Christian churches led in 1925 to the creation of the Life and Work committee, which brought Orthodox and Protestant delegates together for the first time.

After participating in the first session of Faith and Order in 1927, Söderblom was the first to hypothesize the creation of a world council of churches, and in the years that followed he worked to make his idea a reality. He is rightly considered the father of the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

John Gualberto, abbot (Monastic calendar)

Nabor and Felix (d. ca. 303), martyrs (Ambrosian calendar)

Martiana, virgin and martyr (Spanish-Mozarabic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (5 abib/hamble):

Peter and Paul, apostles

LUTHERANS:

Nathan Söderblom, bishop in Sweden

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Proclus and Hilary of Ancyra (2nd cent.), martyrs

Synaxis of the saints of Tver' (Russian Church)