

December 14

John of the Cross (1542-1591) priest

John of the Cross, the first Carmelite monk to join the reform of the Order begun by Teresa of Avila, died during the night of December 13, 1591 at the age of forty-nine.

Juan de Yepes Alvarez was born in Fontiveros, in Old Castile. His family was very poor, and he had a difficult childhood. To finance his education, he worked as a nurse in a hospital for plague victims. He then joined the Carmelites of Medina del Campo, and his superiors, noting his intellectual gifts, sent him to study at the famous University of Salamanca.

Because of his dedication to an extreme asceticism, which soon began to take its toll on his physical health, John had almost decided to leave the Carmelites and become a Carthusian when he met Theresa of Avila, who convinced him that the Carmelite Order could be reformed.

John founded a small and very poor community, but his superiors soon asked him to direct the intellectual and spiritual formation of the novices. His life became a pilgrimage from one community to another, during which he was often treated with hostility, sometimes insulted and humiliated, and rarely understood by his fellow Carmelites.

In this journey into the depths of humiliation, during which he spoke of experiencing abandonment even by God in soul's "dark night," John found the strength to invoke the "flame of love" of the Spirit. In poems and spiritual canticles, he wrote of the soul's sponsal union with God, which his spiritual experience had shown him to be the safe harbor awaiting those who trustingly follow the Lord in his paschal journey. For Catholics, John of the Cross is a doctor of the Church, and Anglicans remember him as a poet and teacher of the faith.

BIBLICAL READINGS

1 Cor 2:1-10a; Jn 15:9-17

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

John of the Cross, poet, teacher of the faith

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

John of the Cross, priest and doctor of the church (Roman and Ambrosian calendars)

Giusto and Abbondio (d. 238), martyrs (Spanish-Mozarabic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (5 kiyahk/tahsas):

Nahum (7th cent. BC), prophet (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:

Berthold of Ratisbon (d. 1272), popular preacher in South Germany

John Oldcastle (d. 1417), witness to the point of bloodshed in England

MARONITES:

Philemon, Apollonius and companions (3rd-4th cent.), martyrs at Antioch

Nimatullah al-Hardini (d. 1858), priest of the Lebanese Maronite order

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Thyrsus, Leucius and Callinicus of Apollonia (3rd cent.), martyrs

Philemon, Apollonius and Arrianus, martyrs