

Joseph Benedict Cottolengo (1786-1842) priest

Today Ambrosian-rite Catholics commemorate Joseph Benedict Cottolengo, a priest who founded the House of Divine Providence.

Born near Cuneo in northern Italy, Joseph Cottolengo, like many of his contemporaries who aspired to join the clergy, had a difficult time studying for the priesthood because of the closure of seminaries after the French Revolution. Joseph succeeded in being ordained at the age of twenty-five at the seminary of Turin, began intensive theological studies, and joined a Turinese congregation of priests who were also theologians. Soon, though, he understood that his true vocation lay elsewhere.

After a period of silent and difficult reflection, he found himself involved in the dramatic situation of a woman who needed medical treatment but had not been accepted by any of the area's hospitals, for various reasons. In 1827 Cottolengo began to create a center where every sort of patient 'refused' by society could be taken in - the poor, orphans, the mentally ill, the handicapped.

In the remaining fifteen years of his life, Joseph Benedict created one charitable organization after another. He founded the House of Divine Providence and started a religious congregation of priests, sisters and lay people dedicated to caring for society's marginalized ill. A true 'genius of good,' as Pope Pius IX called him, Cottolengo showed how faith's creative wisdom can find answers to every urgent appeal of the outcast and the abandoned.

Cottolengo died of typhoid on April 30, 1842. By that time, more than 6,500 patients had received treatment in the centers he had founded.

A READING

Practice charity, but practice it with enthusiasm! To do good to the poor you must, if necessary, dirty yourselves up to your necks: this is the charity you must practice.

Do not make anyone summon you twice: be attentive! Interrupt any other activity, however holy, and dash to the aid of the poor.

It is a beautiful thing to sacrifice one's health and even one's life for the good of our brothers who are abandoned or ill. They are our masters and our brothers; they are the pearls of the Little House.

And let us not be sparing with the poor, for what we have is all theirs, and we ourselves belong to them and not to others.

Joseph Benedict Cottolengo

BIBLICAL READINGS

Isa 58:6-11; Mt 25:31-46

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

Pandita Mary Ramabai (d. 1922), translator of the Scriptures

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

Pius V (d. 1572), pope (Roman and Ambrosian calendars)

Joseph Benedict Cottolengo, priest (Ambrosian calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (22 barmudah/miyazya):

Alexander I (d. ca. 344), 19th patriarch of Alexandria (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:

David Livingstone (d. 1873), missionary in Africa

MARONITES:

James, apostle

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

James, John's brother, apostle

Ephrem Mazqvereli the Great (9th cent.), bishop (Georgian Church)

Paisij of the Caves Monastery in Kiev (d. 1893), fool-for-Christ (Ukrainian Church)