

FRANK OF SIENA (Francis Lippi, d. 1291) Blessed

Born at Grotti, Italy, in an undetermined year of the XIII century, Frank had as parents the nobles Matthew and Dorothy. He spent the first years of his life in the military, not excluding its vices. He captured Sarteano from the Orvietani, but was blinded; to regain his sight, he made a vow to amend his life and make a pilgrimage to Campostella. When he obtained the requested grace, he fulfilled his vow and then went on pilgrimage to Rome and to St. Nicholas of Bari. On his return to Siena, he heard a sermon of the blessed Dominican, Ambrose Sansedoni, and consequently decided to enclose himself in a small cell, where he remained for five years in the exercise of great penances. In recompense for an act of charity towards a poor woman, he received from heaven a tree loaded with gold pieces. He increased the austerity of his life and became a Carmelite lay brother, dwelling in a solitary cell near the chapel of Our Lady. He overcame numerous diabolical temptations, enjoyed frequent apparitions of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin and of the angels, and also had the spirit of prophecy. He died on April 11, 1291. After fifty years his body was exhumed and part of the remains were carried to Cremona.

These are the principal items of the first extensive Life that we have and that was transcribed, in the second decade of the XVI century, by the English Carmelite John Bale (in Ms. 73 of the Bodleian Library of Oxford). We do not know if this is the same Life to which the Catalogue of Carmelite Saints alludes. This Catalogue, in the version known to us today, goes back to the first years of the XV cent. In this latter Life the blessed is called Frank or Francis of Siena, and he is said to be buried in the Carmelite convent of Cremona. In 1590 the Dominican Gregory Lombardelli published a life of the blessed (and all the later authors have borrowed from Lombardelli) with many additions and variations (some of these taken from the Life of the Servite Blessed Francis of Siena who died in 1328). Among these additions are the family name of Lippi and the name of his mother, Calidonia Gabrielli; the minute description of the misdeeds of his youth and his having gambled his eyes (a sin punished by God with blindness); other pilgrimages (also to the Holy House of Loreto!); temptations, miracles, and his death on Dec. 11; the permission for his cult on the part of Pope Clement V in 1308; and the distinction between Frank and Francis, of whom the former was buried in Siena and the latter in Cremona.

The confusion between two personages, which probably occurred a short time before Lombardelli wrote, was even further accentuated later. The Francis buried at Cremona at first became only a great preacher, but then also a martyr, having been killed because he inveighed against the vice of bestiality or blasphemy. The date of Francis' death, however, varies: 1257, 1291, 1389 and 1375. There are certainly two bodies, or at least two skulls, as found in official exhumations both at Siena and at Cremona. We are still far from being able to give a definitive answer to the whole question. At Siena there are still preserved some iron instruments of penance: a mesh vest, a headband, a collar, a small ball (which Bl. Frank kept in his mouth and which has become his iconographic symbol), and part of a chain with which he scourged himself.

Both Frank and Francis enjoy the title of blessed; but only Frank has had a liturgical office in the Carmelite breviary. It was introduced in 1672, after Pope Clement X, in 1870, had authorized his cult in the diocese of Siena and in the Carmelite Order. In the latest liturgical reform his name no longer appears in the Carmelite calendar. Confraternities were erected in his honor; especially famous were those of Spain during the XVII century.

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