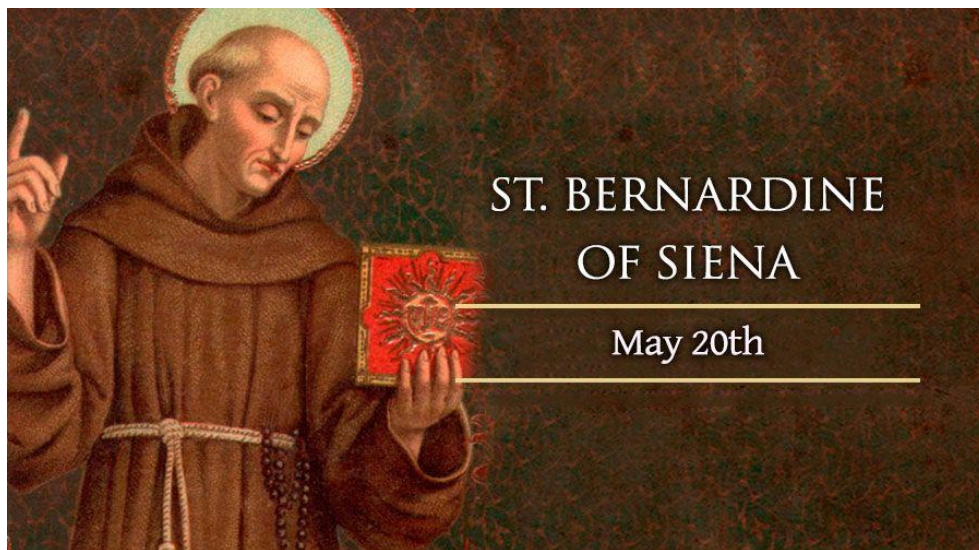


**REGIONAL FORMATION: SUMMER STUDY ON FRANCISCAN
SAINTS**

ST. BERNARDINE OF SIENA



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A summer saint to emulate: Saint Bernardine of Siena's Story

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Several years ago, my wife and I were fortunate to take a tour of Italy with a priest from the Jefferson City Diocese. Sienna really fascinated me; I readily saw the lasting effects of St. Bernardine's call to promote the holy name of Jesus through a symbol 'IHS' (see the extra pictures attached).

Most of the saints suffer great personal opposition, even persecution. Bernardine (1380-1444), by contrast, seems more like a human dynamo who simply took on the needs of the world. The Pope called him the greatest preacher of his time, journeying across Italy, calming strife-torn cities, attacking the paganism he found rampant, attracting crowds of 30,000, following Saint Francis of Assisi's admonition to preach about "vice and virtue, punishment and glory." Compared with Saint Paul by the pope, Bernardine had a keen intuition of the needs of the time, along with solid holiness and boundless energy and joy. He accomplished all this despite having a very weak and hoarse voice, which miraculously improved later because of his devotion to Mary. At age 22, he entered the Franciscan Order and was ordained two years later. For almost a dozen years he lived in solitude and prayer, but his gifts ultimately caused him to be sent to preach. He always traveled on foot, sometimes speaking for hours in one place, then doing the same in another town.

Especially known for his devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus, Bernardine devised a symbol—IHS, the first three letters of the name of Jesus in Greek—in Gothic letters on a blazing sun. This was to displace the superstitious symbols of the day. The devotion spread, and the symbol began to appear in churches, homes and public buildings (see collage of Sienna pictures). Bernardine's holiness, orthodoxy, and intelligence were evidence of his faithfulness to this calling of his. He turned down the Pope's invitation to become a bishop. He finally relented to become General of the Friars of the Strict Observance, a branch of the Franciscan Order. Bernardine strongly emphasized scholarship and further study of theology and canon law. When he started there were 300 friars in the community; when he died there were 4,000. He returned to preaching the last two years of his life, dying while traveling.

Virtues and fruits evident in his life:

He was bound up with a great love for chastity and a tender love for Mary. For us, too, a devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary will be a special means of preserving the love of chastity

and of being protected against all dangers. Bernadine displayed ardent sentiments of piety towards God, and a tender devotion to his blessed Mother. Noted by his contemporaries was his spirit of humility and meekness. While he conducted himself with meekness, he was friendly to all; he would nevertheless grow extremely angry if decency was violated.

His life influences and guides my secular Franciscan vocation.

He was modest, humble, and devout; and took great delight in prayer, visiting churches, serving at mass, and hearing sermons, which he would repeat again to his companions with an admirable memory and gracefulness of action. As a young man he had a great compassion for the poor. A most sincere humility always appeared in his words and actions; and he tried to conceal the talents with which God had enriched him. May we enliven our personal energy with holy joy like Bernardine. We ask him to guide us in our daily prayer and study as we model our lives on Francis to serve others in the holy name of Jesus.