

June 20th: Saint Adalbert of Magdeburg, bishop and missionary

Gospel text (Mt 28:16-20): The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them (...). Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you (...).”

Saint Adalbert of Magdeburg, bishop and missionary (910-981)

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Today we celebrate Saint Adalbert of Magdeburg (teacher of Saint Adalbert of Prague). Three pillars characterized his life: spiritual renewal (monastic), missionary activity, and the institutional organization of the Church. A “man of the spirit” and a “man of action”: there is no organization or evangelization without prayer. In the tenth century there were still distant frontiers waiting to be evangelized: Saint Adalbert reached them, risking his very life.

As a young man, he was connected to the chancery of Saint Bruno of Cologne, brother of Emperor Otto I the Great. Renouncing court life, he entered the Benedictine monastery of Saint Maximin in Trier (958). In 961 he was consecrated bishop and sent to Kievan Rus', since Princess Olga had requested a missionary from the Catholic Church. As a result of pagan opposition, the mission ended dramatically. In 966 he was appointed abbot of the monastery of Wissembourg (in Alsace), and two years later he was named Archbishop of Magdeburg. From this position, Adalbert promoted the institutional foundations for a far-reaching evangelization, forming clergy and establishing ecclesiastical centers.

The results were not immediate, but his work laid the foundations for the Christianization of the lands of Eastern Europe, thus earning him the title of “Apostle of the Slavs.”