

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. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then 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. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

“Make disciples of all nations”

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Today we celebrate Saint Adalbert of Magdeburg (teacher of Saint Adalbert of Prague). Three pillars characterized his life: spiritual (monastic) renewal, missionary activity, and the institutional organization of the Church. A “man of spirit” and a “man of action”: there is no organization or evangelization without prayer. Pope Leo XIII, in this regard, is emphatic: “If we are not united to Christ, from whom our mission flows, everything we do will be in vain.”

The Apostles, before being sent out, worshipped Jesus Christ: in addition to Saint Matthew (cf. 28:17), this is highlighted in the writings of Saint Luke: “Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Lk 24:49) and, “You will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses (...) to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Ten centuries later, there were still distant lands to be evangelized: Saint Adalbert went there, risking his life. As a young man, he was connected to the chancellery of Saint Bruno of Cologne, brother of Emperor Otto I the Great, which brought him into the imperial circle. This would prove decisive for his future, as major missionary projects still depended heavily on the emperors' support.

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, as Princess Olga had requested a missionary from the Catholic Church. Due to pagan opposition, the mission had a dramatic outcome, and Adalbert was forced to return, demonstrating his humility and perseverance. In 966, he was promoted to abbot of the monastery of Wissembourg (in Alsace), and two years later, he was appointed archbishop of Magdeburg.

From this position, Adalbert acted as the “architect” of the Church in Central Europe, exercising the

“teaching office” proper to the priesthood (“teaching you to observe all that I have commanded you”): he promoted the institutional foundation for a far-reaching pastoral mission, training clergy and establishing ecclesiastical centers to revitalize evangelization. The results were not immediate, but his work laid the groundwork for the Christianization of Eastern Europe, earning him the title of “Apostle to the Slavs.”