

April 3

St. Benedict the African

1526–1589 • Sicily

Benedict was the son of slaves in Italy, though he had been born free. One day, a low and ignorant man yelled hateful words to Benedict, insulting the color of his dark skin. Those cruel words hurt Benedict. But then he remembered how cruel soldiers and the ignorant crowd had hurled insults at Jesus on the Cross. Jesus had not gotten angry or used His divine power to punish those who had insulted him. Instead, He not only forgave His enemies, He died for them.

And so Benedict decided to follow Jesus's example. He restrained his anger, even though he was hurt, and the low, ignorant man went away. A Franciscan hermit had witnessed Benedict's patience and forgiveness. He saw that Benedict had a holy soul. The hermit asked him if he, too, wanted to become a Franciscan and dedicate his life to the love and service of God. Benedict's heart filled with joy as he realized that God the Father was rewarding him by calling him to follow Jesus in a special way.

Benedict became a Franciscan friar and started off as the friary's cook. He loved the tastes and smells of the kitchen and serving food to his fellow friars, and cooking became a great joy for him. He did not stay a cook long, however, and soon became the master of the novices, which means that he looked after all young men that were new to the Franciscan community. Even though Benedict never learned how to read, he became known for his wise understanding and deep spirituality—so much so that he eventually became the superior of his religious community.

All throughout his advancements, Benedict's love for cooking remained. In his later years, he would return to the kitchen to cook for his fellow friars. In this, he followed Jesus's example; even though Jesus is the Son of God and God Himself, He served others when He was here on earth, even washing His Apostles' feet during the Last Supper. So Benedict served his fellow friars although he was their leader, performing the loving task of cooking their meals.

At the age of sixty-three, Benedict passed away in a holy death. He was so beloved by his community that the king of Spain ordered a magnificent tomb to be built for the humble friar who had followed Jesus's example all of his life. St. Benedict the African, help me to follow Jesus as closely as I can!

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