

In the Gospel story of Martha and Mary, Martha is busy and upset that she has no help. Mary is praised by Jesus for listening attentively. Life seems busier than ever, and we all need that quiet time with Jesus to stay focused on what is most important in life.

Saint Bruno was born almost a thousand years ago in Cologne, Germany.<sup>i</sup> He studied theology in France and returned to his homeland to be ordained a priest at the age of 25. Returning to France, he taught for 20 years in the school he had graduated from, soon becoming its director. In 1075, he was asked to serve as Chancellor for the Diocese of Reims during a period of upheaval. Bruno longed for a more contemplative life. He did not simply want to sit at the feet of Jesus as Martha did for an afternoon, he wanted to do it full time.

He made up his mind to give his worldly goods away and spend his time in prayer and solitude. Inspired by a dream, he sought the advice of Hugh of Grenoble, a holy man, who offered wise counsel. Bruno and a small group of men entered into monastic life.

After 6 years of leading this life of prayer, he was asked by Pope Urban II to help as an adviser during a period of critical reform in the church. After helping the pope for some time, he asked to return to his solitude and prayer in France. The Pope asked him to remain in Italy but granted his desire to return to the contemplative life.

With the help of a benefactor, Bruno, and his brother monks, established a major monastery in the wilderness of Calabria and became known as Carthusians. They lived close enough to come together for prayer twice a day but otherwise lived the solitary life of hermits. We might think of Jesus' 40 days in the desert when he fasted and prayed all alone. Severe self-discipline, poverty, and prayer nourished their spiritual life. On rare occasions, like a special feast day, they would gather together for a meal.

In this information age we take so many things for granted. We have access to all kinds of information via the internet. We can communicate with people around the world. We can listen to music, watch a movie online and print anything at will with the help of an internet connection and a printer. There are so many things to distract us, that we can easily lose sight of God and the need for quiet and solitary prayer. The world of a thousand years ago had none of this and still one could be distracted like Martha with the demands of daily life.

To live a solitary life of prayer still necessitated some work to support the monastery. Bruno and his brother monks copied books by hand. Although this was very labor intensive, there was no other way to reproduce a book, it fit with the quiet, meditative lifestyle of the monks. Guttenberg wouldn't invent the modern-day printing press until the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

St. Bruno died on October 6, 1101. In his last written words, he made a profession of faith of what he believed and what he had dedicated his life to. He emphasized the real presence Jesus in the Eucharist. "I believe in the sacraments that the Church believes and holds in reverence, and especially that what has been consecrated on the altar is the true Flesh and the true Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we receive for the forgiveness of our sins and in the hope of eternal salvation."<sup>ii</sup>

The Carthusian order numbers 320 religious today. They are spread in a number of small austere communities still living very close to the disciplines established by Bruno and his companions a thousand years ago. Their motto, "While the world changes, the cross stands firm."<sup>iii</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> [franciscanmedia.org/saint-bruno/](http://franciscanmedia.org/saint-bruno/)

<sup>ii</sup> [catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-bruno-founder-616](http://catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-bruno-founder-616)

<sup>iii</sup> Ordo, Paulist Press 2020