



*Prayers for the Week Ahead*

WEEK BEGINNING 25<sup>TH</sup> MAY

# Monday 25<sup>th</sup> May



St Pope Gregory VII

The 10th century and the first half of the 11th were dark days for the Church, partly because the papacy was the pawn of various Roman families. In 1049, things began to change when Pope Leo IX, a reformer, was elected. He brought a young monk named Hildebrand to Rome as his counselor and special representative on important missions. Hildebrand was to become Gregory VII. Three evils plagued the Church then: simony—the buying and selling of sacred offices and things; the unlawful marriage of the clergy; and lay investiture—kings and nobles controlling the appointment of Church officials. To all of these Hildebrand directed his reformer’s attention, first as counselor to the popes and later as pope himself. Gregory’s papal letters stress the role of the bishop of Rome as the vicar of Christ and the visible center of unity in the Church. He is well known for his long dispute with Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV over who should control the selection of bishops and abbots. Gregory fiercely resisted any attack on the liberty of the Church. For this he suffered and finally died in exile. He said, “I have loved justice and hated iniquity; therefore, I die in exile.” Thirty years later the Church finally won its struggle against lay investiture. The liturgical feast of Saint Gregory VII is celebrated on May 25.

### **Reflection:**

The Gregorian Reform, a milestone in the history of Christ’s Church, was named after this man who tried to extricate the papacy and the whole Church from undue control by civil rulers. Against an unhealthy Church nationalism in some areas, Gregory reasserted the unity of the whole Church based on Christ, and expressed in the bishop of Rome, the successor of Saint Peter.



Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> May

St. Philip Neri

Philip Neri was a sign of contradiction, combining popularity with piety against the background of a corrupt Rome and a disinterested clergy: the whole post-Renaissance malaise.

At an early age, Philip abandoned the chance to become a businessman, moved to Rome from Florence, and devoted his life and individuality to God. After three years of philosophy and theology studies, he gave up any thought of ordination. The next 13 years were spent in a vocation unusual at the time—that of a layperson actively engaged in prayer and the apostolate. As the Council of Trent (1545-63) was reforming the Church on a doctrinal level, Philip Neri's appealing personality was winning him friends from all levels of society, from beggars to cardinals. He rapidly gathered around himself a group of laypersons won over by his audacious spirituality. Initially, they met as an informal prayer and discussion group and also served poor people in Rome.

At the urging of his confessor, Philip Neri was ordained a priest and soon became an outstanding confessor himself, gifted with the knack of piercing the pretences and illusions of others, though always in a charitable manner and often with a joke. He arranged talks, discussions, and prayers for his penitents in a room above the church. He sometimes led "excursions" to other churches, often with music and a picnic on the way.

### **Reflection**

Philip's life melts our rigid, narrow views of piety. His approach to sanctity was truly catholic, all-embracing, and accompanied by a good laugh. Philip always wanted his followers to become not less but more human through their striving for holiness.

Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> May



St. Augustine of Canterbury

In the year 596, some 40 monks set out from Rome to evangelize the Anglo-Saxons in England. Leading the group was Augustine, the prior of their monastery. Hardly had he and his men reached Gaul when they heard stories of the ferocity of the Anglo-Saxons and of the treacherous waters of the English Channel. Augustine returned to Rome and to Gregory the Great—the pope who had sent them—only to be assured by him that their fears were groundless.

Augustine set out again. This time the group crossed the English Channel and landed in the territory of Kent, ruled by King Ethelbert, a pagan married to a Christian, Bertha. Ethelbert received them kindly, set up a residence for them in Canterbury and within the year, on Pentecost Sunday 597, was himself baptized. After being consecrated a bishop in France, Augustine returned to Canterbury, where he founded his see. He constructed a church and monastery near where the present cathedral, begun in 1070, now stands. As the faith spread, additional sees were established at London and Rochester.

Labouring patiently, Augustine wisely heeded the missionary principles—quite enlightened for the times—suggested by Pope Gregory: purify rather than destroy pagan temples and customs; let pagan rites and festivals be transformed into Christian feasts; retain local customs as far as possible. The limited success Augustine achieved in England before his death in 605, a short eight years after his arrival, would eventually bear fruit long after in the conversion of England. Augustine of Canterbury can truly be called the “Apostle of England.”

*Hail Mary...*

Thursday 28th May



ST. BERNARD of MENTHON  
Patron of Skiers

*St. Bernard of Menton*

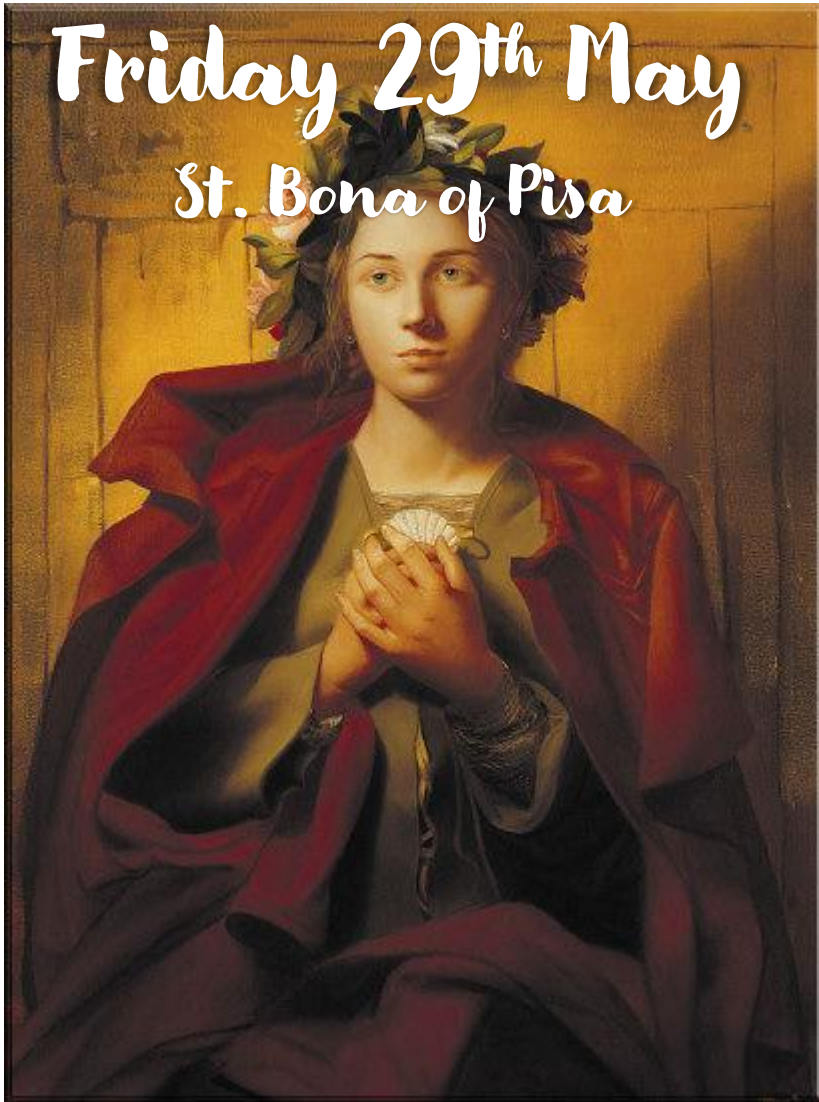
Bernard of Montjoux was probably born in Italy. He became a priest, was made Vicar General of Aosta, and spent more than four decades doing missionary work in the Alps. He built schools and churches in the diocese but is especially remembered for two Alpine hospices he built to aid lost travelers in the mountain passes named Great and Little Bernard, after him. The men who ran them in time became Augustinian canons regular and built a monastery. The Order continued into the twentieth century. He was proclaimed the patron saint of Alpinists and mountain climbers by Pope Pius XI in 1923. He is sometimes fallaciously referred to as Bernard of Menton and the son of Count Richard of Menton, which he was not. His feast day is May 28th.

Bernard became patron and protector of skiers because of his four decades spent in missionary work throughout the Alps.

*Hail Mary...*

Friday 29<sup>th</sup> May

St. Bona of Pisa



St. Bona of Pisa was born in 1156 in Pisa, Italy. She was the child of a single mother. She was told that her father had vanished during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. As a child she was very pious. In a vision while praying before the crucifix, Jesus reached out his hand and touched her. By the age of ten she had become an Augustinian tertiary. (A tertiary is a lay member of a monastic order).

In another vision she learned that her father was still alive and fighting in the Crusades in Jerusalem. St. Bona decided to make a trip to Jerusalem to find her father. After finding him she returned home, only to be captured by pirates on the Mediterranean Sea! Countrymen came to her rescue and she eventually arrived home safely.

St. Bona was appointed the official pilgrimage guide by the Knights of St. James. She made nine trips to Spain and Santiago de Compostella, always leading a group of pilgrims. On her final trip she became very ill. She died at the age of 51 after returning home from the pilgrimage.

Pope John XXIII named her the patron saint of flight attendants, travel guides, couriers and travellers.

*Hail Mary...*

Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> May

St. Joan of Arc

Burned at the stake as a heretic after a politically-motivated trial, Joan was beatified in 1909 and canonized in 1920. Born of a fairly well-to-do peasant couple in Domremy-Greux southeast of Paris, Joan was only 12 when she experienced a vision and heard voices that she later identified as Saints Michael the Archangel, Catherine of Alexandria, and Margaret of Antioch.

During the Hundred Years War, Joan led French troops against the English and recaptured the cities of Orléans and Troyes. This enabled Charles VII to be crowned as king in Reims in 1429. Captured near Compiègne the following year, Joan was sold to the English and placed on trial for heresy and witchcraft. Professors at the University of Paris supported Bishop Pierre Cauchon of Beauvais, the judge at her trial; Cardinal Henry Beaufort of Winchester, England, participated in the questioning of Joan in prison. In the end, she was condemned for wearing men's clothes. The English resented France's military success—to which Joan contributed.

On this day in 1431, Joan was burned at the stake in Rouen, and her ashes were scattered in the Seine River. A second Church trial 25 years later nullified the earlier verdict, which was reached under political pressure.

Remembered by most people for her military exploits, Joan had a great love for the sacraments, which strengthened her compassion toward the poor. Popular devotion to her increased greatly in 19th-century France and later among French soldiers during World War I. Theologian George Tavard writes that her life “offers a perfect example of the conjunction of contemplation and action” because her spiritual insight is that there should be a “unity of heaven and earth.”

Joan of Arc has been the subject of many books, plays, operas and movies.

*Hail Mary...*