

A STUDY OF “THE SAINTS THROUGH THE CENTURIES”

By Richard Thornton

SAINT PETER DAMIAN (1007-1072) – ELEVENTH CENTURY

Documents reveal that Saint Damian’s parents died shortly after his birth. Maybe because he was orphaned and had been treated so poorly by one of his brothers, Saint Damian was very good to the poor. It was the ordinary thing for him to have a poor person or two with him at the table with his meals and he liked to minister personally to their needs.

Saint Damian escaped poverty and the neglect of his own brother when his other brother, who was a Priest, took him under his wing. He brother sent him to very good schools and Saint Damian became a professor.

During these days Saint Damian was very strict with himself. He wore a hair shirt under his clothes, fasted vigorously, and spent many hours in study and prayer. Soon he decided to leave his teaching and give himself completely to prayer with the Benedictines. The monks he chose to join, lived out their devotion to the Cross of Christ through a rigorous rule of life. They lived mainly on bread and water and prayed all 150 psalms daily.

Saint Damian was so eager to spend time in prayer that he slept so little that he soon suffered from insomnia. He found that he had to use better judgment in taking care of himself. When he was not praying he studied the Holy Scriptures diligently. Saint Damian became deeply versed in the Bible and the writings of earlier theologians. The leaders of other monasteries sought his help in building up their monks in holiness.

The Abbot of his monastery commanded that when he died, Damian should succeed him. Abbot Peter Damian founded five other hermitages. He encouraged his brothers in a life of prayer and solitude and wanted nothing more for himself. The Holy See periodically called on him to be a peace-maker or trouble-shooter between two abbeys in dispute or a cleric or government official in disagreement with Rome.

Pope Stephen IX made Damian a Cardinal-Bishop. He worked hard to wipe out simony (the buying of Church offices), and encouraged his Priests to observe celibacy and urged the diocesan clergy to live together and maintain scheduled prayer and religious observance.

He wrote many letters, about 170. We also have 53 of his sermons and 7 biographies that he wrote. He preferred example and stories rather than theory in his writings.

On Feb. 21, Catholics honor Saint Peter Damian. In his Sept. 9, 2009 general audience on the saint, Pope Benedict XVI described him as “one of the most significant figures of the 11th century...a lover of solitude and at the same time a fearless man of the Church committed personally to the task of reform”.

Saint Peter Damian was celebrated as a saint after his death in many places associated with his life. In 1823, Pope Leo XII named him a Doctor Of The Church.