

Prayer to the Holy Name - St. Bernardine of Siena

Jesus, Name full of glory, grace, love and strength! You are the refuge of those who repent, our banner of warfare in this life, the medicine of souls, the comfort of those who mourn, the delight of those who believe, the light of those who preach the true faith, the wages of those who toil, the healing of the sick. To you our devotion aspires; by you our prayers are received; we delight in contemplating you. O Name of Jesus, you are the glory of all the saints for eternity. Amen.



St. Bernardine of Siena, 1380-1444

This is a prayer of devotion to and delight in the Holy Name of Jesus. The name of a person is equivalent to their identity. Although the name of Jesus was common at the time Jesus lived on earth, and means 'Yahweh saves', it has attracted veneration from earliest times. The Gospel of Matthew provides a specific meaning and intention for the name Jesus (as the one who 'saves his people from sin') and indicates that it was selected by Heavenly guidance. For centuries, Christians have invoked the Holy Name, and have believed that there is intrinsic power in the name of Jesus. The monogram of the Holy Name, IHS, is derived from the Greek word for Jesus. St Paul states: 'That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth' (Philippians 2.10). The feast of the Holy Name is celebrated on the day of the Circumcision of the Lord, 3 January. St Bernardine popularised this devotion, and carried the monogram, IHS, with him on his preaching tours.

When he was 20, the plague was at its height in his hometown, Siena. Sometimes as many as 20 people died in one day at the hospital. Bernardine offered to run the hospital and, with the help of other young men, nursed patients there for four months. He escaped the plague but was so exhausted that a fever confined him for several months. He spent another year caring for a beloved aunt (her parents had died when he was a child) and at her death began to fast and pray to know God's will for him.

At 22, he entered the Franciscan Order and was ordained two years later. For almost a dozen years he lived in solitude and prayer, but his gifts ultimately caused him to be sent to preach. He always travelled on foot, sometimes speaking for hours in one place, then doing the same in another town. He followed St Francis' admonition to preach about 'vice and virtue, punishment and glory'. He had boundless energy and joy as well as a solid holiness.

Especially known for his devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus, Bernardine devised a symbol—IHS, the first three letters of the name of Jesus in Greek, in Gothic letters on a blazing sun. This was to displace the superstitious symbols of the day.

At Bologna, Bernardine preached mightily against the evils of gambling. As was the custom, a huge bonfire was made in the public square, to be a holocaust consuming all the instruments of vice—playing cards, dice and the like. A manufacturer of playing cards complained that Bernardine was taking away his livelihood. The saint told him to start making the symbol IHS, and he made more money than ever before. General of a branch of the Franciscan Order, the Friars of the Strict Observance, he strongly emphasized scholarship and further study of theology and canon law. When he started there were 300 friars in the community; when he died there were 4,000. He returned to preaching for the last two years of his life, and died while travelling, on 20 May 1444. He is credited with reviving the faith in Italy, and known by the title of 'the Apostle of Italy' for his efforts. His feast day is 20 May.