

Medallion H

BLESSED JAMES OF BITETTO

INSCRIPTION

BLESSED JAMES OF BITETTO, OF SLAVONIAN DESCENT, BECAME SO INFLAMED WITH THE PASSION OF JESUS THAT, FLEEING THE WORLD, HE DEVOTED HIMSELF TO FOLLOW HIM THROUGH MOUNTAINS AND CAVES WITH GREAT PENANCE, BLOSSOMING LIKE A MYSTICAL MOSAIC BRANCH, NOT ONLY IN VIRTUE BUT ALSO IN MIRACLES. HAVING BECOME A PHOENIX OF HEAVEN, HIS SOUL FLEW TO ETERNITY, AND HE LEFT US HIS INCORRUPT BODY. HE DIED IN 1686.

James Varingez of Bitetto, also known as "Illyrian" from Illyria, the ancient Roman province that included Zara, the city where he was born in the early 1400s. According to tradition, his parents raised him according to Christian principles. Following some merchants from his hometown, he arrived in Puglia, in Bitetto, where, attracted by Franciscan spirituality, he decided to enter the convent as a lay brother. For several years he moved to Bari and Cassano, then returned to Bitetto, where the plague was rampant, and he devoted himself to caring for and assisting the sick.

After spending two years in Conversano, he returned permanently to Bitetto, where he died in 1496.

His day was dedicated to prayer, apostolate, and the humblest of works. His begging allowed him to meet many people, listen to their problems, and comfort them with words of faith. In the convent, he was attentive and available to serve the community: he was a cook, porter, gardener, and sacristan. Whenever possible, he would retire and pray in solitary places, which, with a sacred image, he transformed into chapels.

In 1700, Pope Clement XI declared him Blessed. On December 19, 2010, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints promulgated the decree on his heroic virtues.

When Fra Giuseppe painted the fresco, Brother James was not yet Blessed, so he does not have a halo. Someone probably changed the "F" for "frate" (brother) to a "B" for "beato" (blessed) in the 1700s.

The two attributes of the friar are easily recognizable: the staff of his pilgrimage, which sprouted after his death, and the Franciscan crown for his devotion to Mary.

IT IS SAID THAT...

While Blessed James was praying in front of the chapel of the Virgin, a hare, chased by greyhounds and hunters, took refuge under his habit. After escaping danger, Blessed James held the hare in his arms, caressed it, and, after blessing it, set it free.

"Build a road from the city to the convent," Blessed James told the Duke of Atri. And, since there were no restrictions, the road was ready by the following night.

Before he died, Blessed James planted his broomwood staff in the small citrus grove, which grew and became a majestic tree. The trunk of that tree, now dry, is still in its place.



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