

BLESSED JUVENAL ANCINA, C.O.

1545-1604, BEATIFIED IN 1890 BY POPE LEO XIII; FEAST DAY: AUGUST 30



Giovanni Giovenale Ancina was born at Fossano in Piemonte, October 19, 1545. From an early age, he displayed his noteworthy intellectual gifts. After receiving his doctorate in medicine and philosophy at age 24, he came to Rome in 1575, where he studied theology under St. Robert Bellarmine at the Roman College. When Ancina took the theological examination required of candidates for the episcopacy, Pope Clement VIII called him the best prepared candidate he had ever heard of. Even Baronius, an intellectual heavyweight in his own right, called Ancina “a new St. Basil.”

Once in Rome, Ancina’s search to deepen his faith and to discern his vocation brought him to St. Philip’s Oratory in 1576. He wrote to his brother Giovanni Matteo that he “felt urged above all to humility.” Philip was a great discerner of souls, and he took his time nurturing Ancina’s vocation to the Oratory. In

1578 both Ancina brothers entered the Oratory; on May 9, 1582, Giovenale was ordained priest and Matteo deacon.

Giovenale Ancina became known for his preaching and teaching in the Oratory; his impressive handwritten theology lessons are still largely preserved. Of all of St. Philip’s disciples, Ancina is said to have most closely imitated his spiritual master; his devotion to Philip is illustrated by the affection expressed in his many letters from Naples. Philip had sent him to Naples at the request of Tarugi, who was establishing a new Oratory there. Ancina served in Naples for a decade with great apostolic zeal and tireless dedication.

About 1595, the year of Philip’s death, Ancina was recalled to Rome to replace Baronius as provost. The following year, Pope Clement VIII had to fill three vacant Episcopal sees, and Ancina was on the short list. He literally fled into the hills for five months, seeking to remain a simple Oratorian priest, but he could not avoid the assignment forever. In 1602, the pope ordered him to accept assignment as bishop of Saluzzo. At least he had the consolation of being ordained bishop in the Chiesa Nuova by Cardinal Tarugi himself.

Once he arrived in Saluzzo, Ancina instituted a diocesan seminary, made a pastoral visit of his diocese, and reached out to heretics; he is credited for the conversion of a grandson of Calvin, who became a Carmelite. His tenure as Bishop of Saluzzo is noted for the breadth and depth of its accomplishments in spite of its brevity, and especially for his holiness and simplicity of life. Ancina was known to sometimes spend several hours in ecstatic adoration, unaware of others around him. He lived a very austere life for a bishop, retaining only the luxury of his extensive library.

Unfortunately, this remarkable Oratorian's life and work were cut short when he was murdered by poisoning on August 30, 1604 by a dissolute friar whom he had rebuked for conducting an affair with a nun. This great disciple of St. Philip, close friend of St. Francis de Sales, and holy bishop, was beatified in 1890 by Pope Leo XIII.

Adapted from the biography of Ancina given in Italian on the website of the Procurator General, www.oratoriosanfilippo.org/ancina.html.

Also consulted: Butler's Lives of the Saints, entry for Blessed Juvenal Ancina, August 30, p. 319. Burns & Oates/Liturgical Press, 1998.