

Bl. Jacopone da Todi

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Fuente: Catholicsaints.info

Italian noble from the Benedetti family of Todi. Successful lawyer at Bologna, Italy. Married to Vanna di Guidone in 1267; she considered Giacomo too worldly, and did penance for him. In 1268, Giacomo insisted she attend a public tournament against her wishes; the stands in which she sat collapsed, and Vanna was killed. The shock of this event, and his discovery of her penance for him, caused a radical change in Giacomo. He gave his possessions to the poor, dressed in rags, and became a Franciscan tertiary. His former associates called him Jacopone – Crazy Jim; he embraced the name.

After ten years of this penance and abuse, Giacomo tried to join the Franciscans; his reputation as Crazy Jim preceeded him, and he was refused. To prove his sanity and intentions, he wrote a beautiful poem about the vanities of the world; it swayed the Franciscans, and he joined the Order in 1278. He refused to be ordained, and spent time writing popular hymns in the vernacular.

Jacopone suddenly found himself a leader in a disturbing religious movement among the Franciscans. The Spirituals, as they were called, wanted a return to the strict poverty of Francis. They had the support of two cardinals and Pope Celestine V. The two cardinals, however, opposed Celestine's successor, Boniface VIII, and due to the wrangling in the Vatican, Jacopone was excommunicated and imprisoned at age 68. Jacopone acknowledged his error, but was not released until Blessed Benedict XI became pope five years later. Jacopone accepted his imprisonment as penance. He spent his last three years giving himself to completely to spirituality, weeping "because Love is not loved," and writing, including the famous Latin hymn, Stabat Mater.