

## HOFBAUER (ST CLEMENT)

Clement Maria Hofbauer was born Johannes ‘Hans’ Hofbauer on 26 December 1751 at Tasswitz, in southern Moravia (Tasswitz is now known as Tasovícenad Dyjí in the Czech Republic), to a Bohemian-German family of devout Catholic faith.

The ninth of 12 children, he was not yet seven years old when his father died. He learnt the baker’s trade at Znaim, a small town near Tasswitz. Then he worked in the Premonstratensian monastery at Kloster Brück (now Znojmo), where he could also attend school. For some time, he lived as a hermit near his own town, and then at Quintiliolo, close to Tivoli, near Rome. He attended courses in philosophy and theology at the Vienna University. In 1784, he entered the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in Rome, taking the religious name Clement. On 19 March 1785, he made his religious profession and he was ordained probably ten days later, on 29 March. He spent some months in Frosinone, where he completed his theological instruction. In autumn 1785 he and his compatriot Thaddeus Hübl were sent north to attempt a new foundation of the Congregation beyond the Alps.

In February 1787, Clement arrived at Warsaw and began his apostolate in a little church dedicated to St Benno, on the banks of the Vistula. He soon transformed the church, which had been almost abandoned, into a lively centre of pastoral activity. He instituted a kind of ‘perpetual mission’ with daily public celebration of the Eucharist (in Polish, German and sometimes French), the celebration of the sacraments and many devotional practices. He promoted an ambience in which to worship solemnly, attaching a great value to liturgical music and singing. In the midst of political upheaval, the church was always well maintained and decorated with flowers, liturgical vestments and furnishings were of good quality, and everything was well prepared. Clement also began a novitiate and an international study house, and proceeded to found the first houses of the Congregation in southern Germany and Switzerland.

Since he himself was orphaned of his father, he was very sensitive to the problems of children and youth. To that end, he opened a school and an orphanage. Moved by a practical sense, he sought the active collaboration of the laity, and so founded the Oblates of the Most Holy Redeemer, for the defence of the faith and customs, and in particular for the dissemination of good books. He also established a Congregation of Sisters, at once contemplative and active, entrusting to them the education of the youth, and assistance to the poor and the sick.

After his group of Redemptorists was expelled from Warsaw in 1808, on the orders of Napoleon, Clement moved to Vienna, where he worked first in the Italian National Church (of the Friar Minors), and then, in 1813, as confessor to the Ursuline Sisters and a preacher in their church. Under his direction, the church of the Ursuline convent became the hub of religious life in Vienna. It became a centre of the reform of sacred preaching in the Austrian capital. Clement frequently repeated the maxim: ‘Preach the Gospel anew’. Clement considered helping the dying and the poor to be an important part of the priestly ministry. He also developed an intense personal apostolate, above all to students and professors. He frequented the cultured milieu of the city, in particular the ‘Romantic Circle’ of Vienna, which included famous writers, politicians, professors, priests, and so on.

The important characteristics of Clement’s spirituality were his unshakable faith in God and total trust in Divine Providence, a spirit of prayer and contemplation, deep devotion to Mary, fidelity to the Church and the Pope, and love for the Founder and the Congregation of Redemptorists. Speaking of faith, he would affirm: ‘For my part, I do not know how to conceive that it is possible to live

without faith: a person without faith resembles a fish which has been taken out of its natural environment'. Another time, he declared: 'Of course, I am a great sinner, a miserable man, yet I possess a treasure that God has given me, the treasure of faith, a faith so strong that I would never exchange it for anything else. I am a Catholic from head to toe.' He often thanked God for the gift of his faith and religious vocation: 'My God, I thank you for my holy baptism, for my vocation to the true Catholic faith, for my vocation and religious state, and I pray that you will permit me to live and die in your grace'.

Clement's love for the Church and the Pope was deeply rooted. When preaching, he often said: 'Whoever does not honour the Holy Father, does not even honour the Holy Church, our Mother. He who does not pray for his parents is a perverse child, and he who does not pray for the Holy Father is a bad Christian.'

Clement died on 15 March 1820 and was buried in the Romantic cemetery in Maria Enzersdorf, close to Vienna. His tombstone simply said: '*Fidelis servus et prudens*' (Faithful and wise servant). In 1862, his mortal remains were transferred to the Redemptorist church at Maria Stiegen in Vienna.

He was canonised by Pius X on 20 May 1909. In 1913, he was proclaimed patron of bakers and in 1914 the secondary patron of Vienna.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS:**

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### **REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

1. Clement was moved by an immense pastoral passion and tried new ways of ministering, but it was all motivated by a genuine love for the neighbor, above all for the poorest and abandoned. What does he teach us by the example of his life and how can his apostolic method help us to promote 'apostolic charity' in our communities and in our Congregation?
2. Clement was very devoted to St Alphonsus and was a tireless propagator of the Congregation, to which he brought a spirit of universality. What does it mean to be a Redemptorist according to the spirit of St Clement?

3. How well do we know the history of the Congregation, and the life of our saints and beati?

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