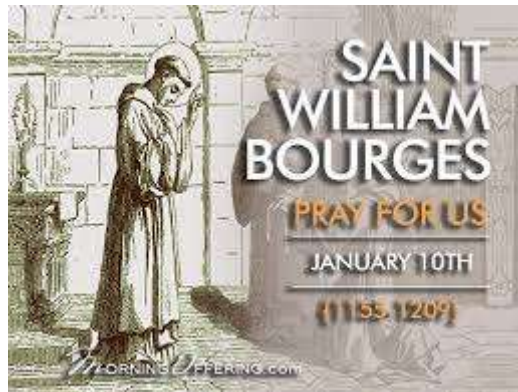


St William Bourges



William Berruyer, of the illustrious family of the ancient counts of Nevers, was educated by Peter the hermit, archdeacon of Soissons, his uncle by the mother's side. He learned from his infancy to despise the folly and emptiness of the riches and grandeur of the world, to abhor its pleasures, and to tremble at its dangers. His only delight was in exercises of piety and in his studies, in which he employed his whole time with indefatigable application. He was made canon, first of Soissons, and afterwards of Paris: but he soon took the resolution of abandoning all commerce with the world; and retired into the solitude of Grandmont, where he lived with great regularity in that austere order, till seeing its peace disturbed by a contest which arose between the fathers and lay-brothers, he passed into the Cistercian, then in wonderful odour of sanctity. He took the habit in the abbey of Pontigny, and shining as a perfect model of monastic perfection, was after some time chosen prior of that house, and afterwards abbot, first of Fontaine-Jean, in the diocese of Sens, (a filiation of Pontigny, founded in 1124, by Peter de Courtenay, son of king Lewis the Fat,) and some time after, of Chaalis, near Senlis, a much more numerous monastery, also a filiation of Pontigny, built by Lewis the Fat in 1136, a little before his death. St. William always reputed himself the last among his brethren. The universal mortification of his senses and passions, laid in him the foundation of an admirable purity of heart, and an extraordinary gift of prayer; in which he received great heavenly lights, and tasted of the sweets which God has reserved for those to whom he is pleased to communicate himself. The sweetness and cheerfulness of his countenance testified the uninterrupted joy and peace that overflowed his soul, and made virtue appear with the most engaging charms in the midst of austerities.

On the death of Henry de Sully, archbishop of Bourges, the clergy of that church requested his brother Eudo, bishop of Paris, to come and assist them in the election of a pastor. Desirous to choose some abbot of the Cistercian Order, then renowned for holy men, they put on the altar the names of three, written on as many billets. This manner of election by lots would have been superstitious, and a tempting of God, had it been done, relying on a miracle without the warrant of divine inspiration. But it deserved not this censure, when all the persons proposed seemed equally worthy and fit, as the choice was only recommended to God, and left to this issue by following the rules of his ordinary providence, and imploring his light, without rashness, or a neglect of the usual means of scrutiny; prudence might sometimes even recommend such a method, in order to terminate a debate when the

candidates seemed equally qualified. God, in such cases, is said sometimes to have miraculously interposed.