

Br. Willibrordus Penninx

Br. Willibrordus was born on May 12, 1874 in Mortsel Belgium and baptized Ludovicus Penninx. He received the habit on September 17, 1891 and did his first profession September 17th 1892 and final profession September 17th 1895. He was ordained to the priesthood on November 21, 1897.

In 1897 before his ordination, he was teaching in the Seraphic Seminary. In 1900 he was pastor at a German colony in Verviers. In 1902, he became lector of Sacred Eloquence in Antwerp. In 1903, he was appointed Guardian in Brussels where he was also lector of Sacred Eloquence. He then worked out of Verviers, Bruges, Izegem, Herentals and Leuven where he did a lot of preaching. He was valued at the same time as a multilingual preacher. For two consecutive years (1908-1909) he preached with great success the Solemn Octave in the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp. In 1910 and 1911, he conducted a series of German and French retreats in Alsace. In 1923, he made a round trip to Spain where he visited Burgos, Salamenca, Madrid, Avila, and on his way back he preached a retreat for the French fellow-friars in Le Mans, Angers, Dinard, Nantes, Calais, Breust and Versailles. Finally in 1924 and 1925 he preached a retreat for the Dutch friars in Velseroord (Ymuiden), in s'Hertogenbosch, in Langeweg, in Udenhout, in Tilburg, in Velp, and in Babberich. In between those special activities, he gave an incalculable series of Missions, Forty Hour Devotions and other retreats. On August 8th, 1925, he was appointed Director of the Theological Seminary in Izegem but in April 1927 he asked for his discharge in order to be able to leave for Blenheim, Ontario, Canada.

Br. Willibrordus may be considered the founder of our Canadian settlements. On April 25th, 1927, he was appointed the first candidate to leave for Blenheim Ontario Canada. Together with Br. Ladislaus they embarked on August 29th 1927 for Blenheim. Without delay they set to work arranging the divine services, visiting the Flemish farmers and inviting them to come to Church. Soon they had three times as many people attending Mass as they had before when Mass was once a month. In spite of their great success, they had a hard time in persuading the local Bishop to grant them permission for the Canonical Erection of their friary which was finally given on April 17th 1933.

With the arrival of Br. Polycarp on September 27th 1927 and Br. Damas on April 19th 1928 Br. Willibrordus was free to accept a new ministry. On August 18th 1928, His Excellence Msgr. Arthur Beliveau, Archbishop of St. Boniface, Manitoba, offered to our friars the parish of the Sacred Heart. He gave assurance that there were enough means of sustenance and at the same time gave the permission to establish a friary known in those days as a Monastery which was canonically erected on June 6th 1929.



May 02

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Towards the middle of October 1929, Br. Chrysostomus and Br. Marius came to St. Boniface. A few weeks later Br. Willibrordus left Canada seriously ill and came to Aalst at the end of July. He lived for another nine months. In April 1930 he received an Indult to celebrate Mass, seated, but he died after a painful sickness before he could even make use of the Indult. He died at the age of 55 after 35 fruitful years of religious life.

