

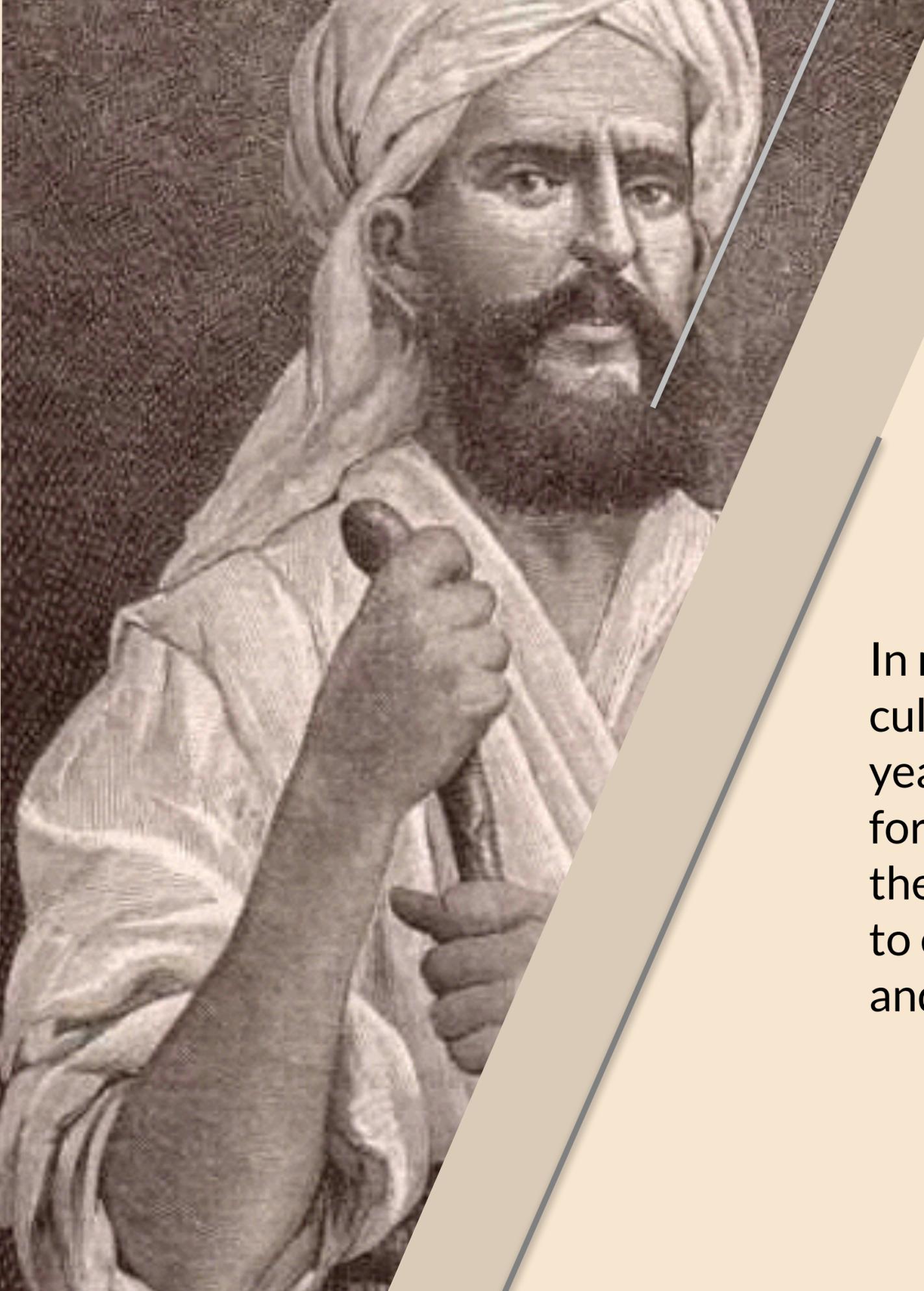


ST. JUSTIN DE JACOBIS

Justin de Jacobis, a Vincentian missionary with a great gift of holiness and understanding, learned from his founder St. Vincent de Paul one basic conviction: to follow God's Providence. It was Divine Providence that taught Justin how to deal with the people entrusted to him in his new mission.

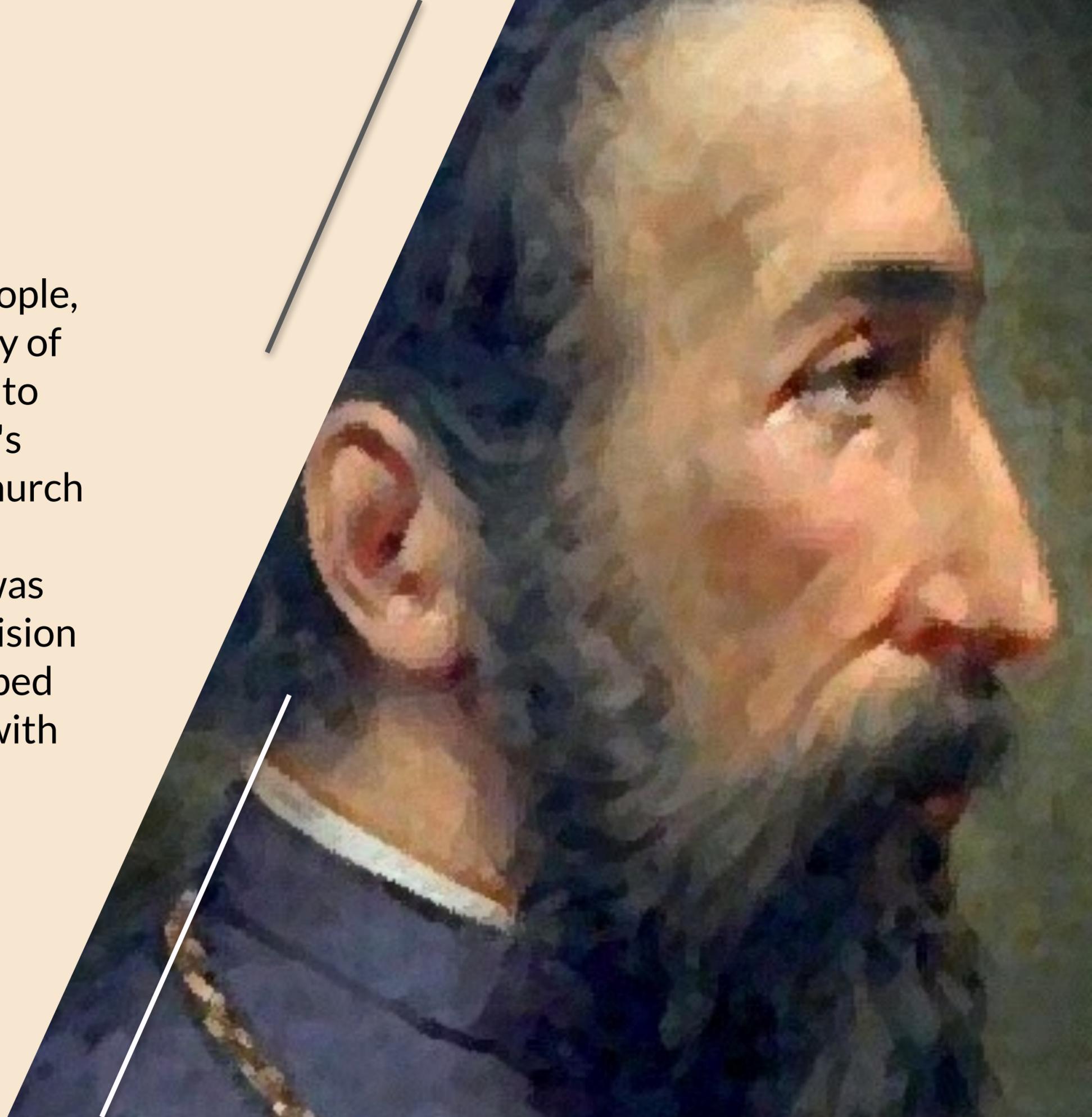
He was quite aware of the Catholic missionaries who for centuries had done their best to establish the Catholic Church in both Eritrea and Ethiopia, but without success. Justin asked God to inspire him with insight about how to win over the hearts and minds of the Ethiopian people. And Divine Providence responded, giving Justin a remarkable perspective on his new mission field's culture and traditions.

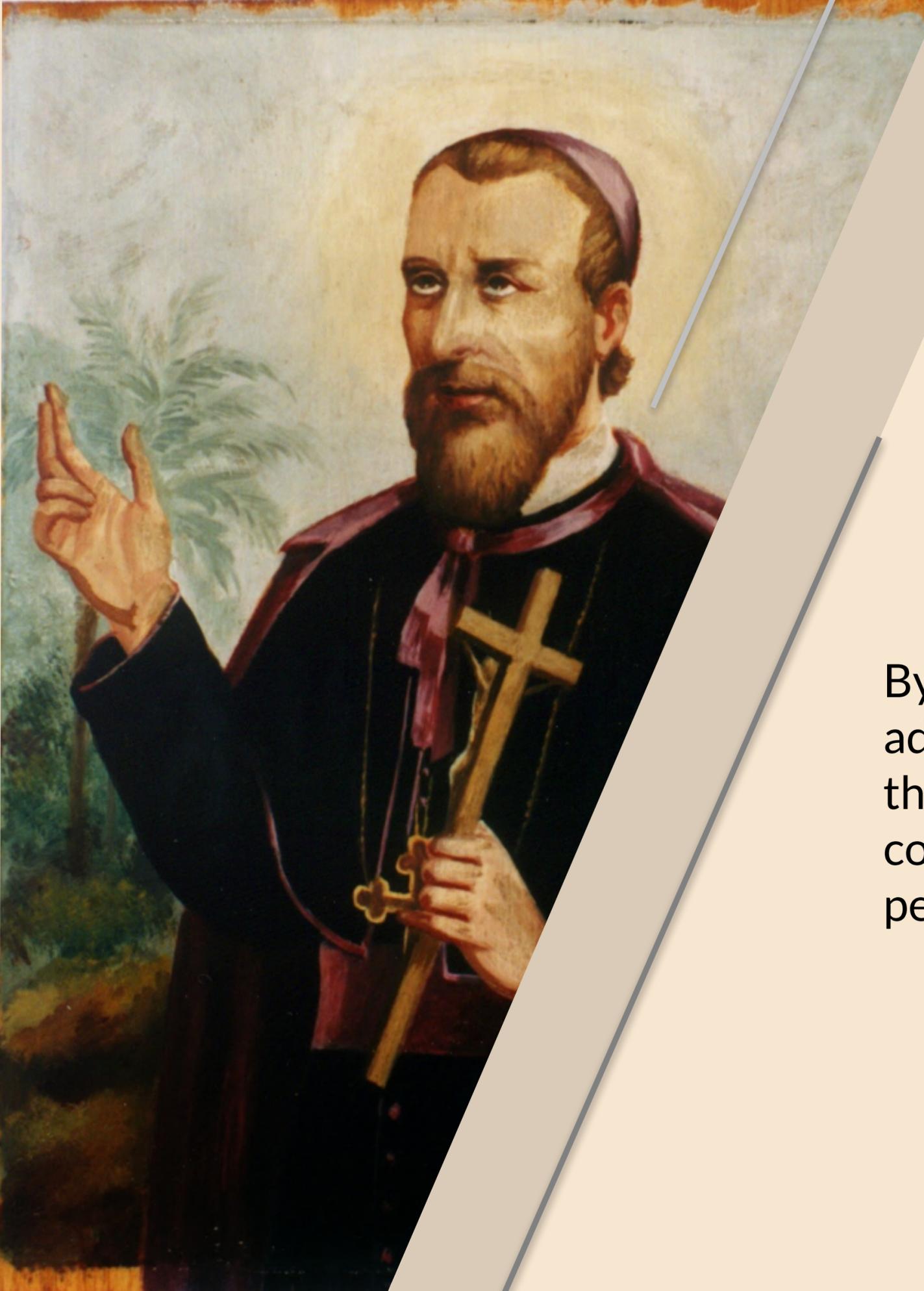




In many ways, Justin anticipated Vatican II's vision of culture and its importance by almost a hundred years. In St. Justin's time it was often difficult for foreign missionaries to accept and live the culture of their mission territory. Providence enabled St. Justin to embrace the traditions and culture of the people, and so announce to them the message of the Gospel.

By keeping his heart open to the people, Justin not only was able to win many of them over to him, but also was able to help them open their hearts to God's word. From then on the Catholic Church would become deeply rooted in the lands of Eritrea and Ethiopia. This was due in large part to the farsighted vision of St. Justin and his holiness. He hoped and labored for a Catholic Church with an Ethio-Eritrean face. In this, he succeeded where others had failed.

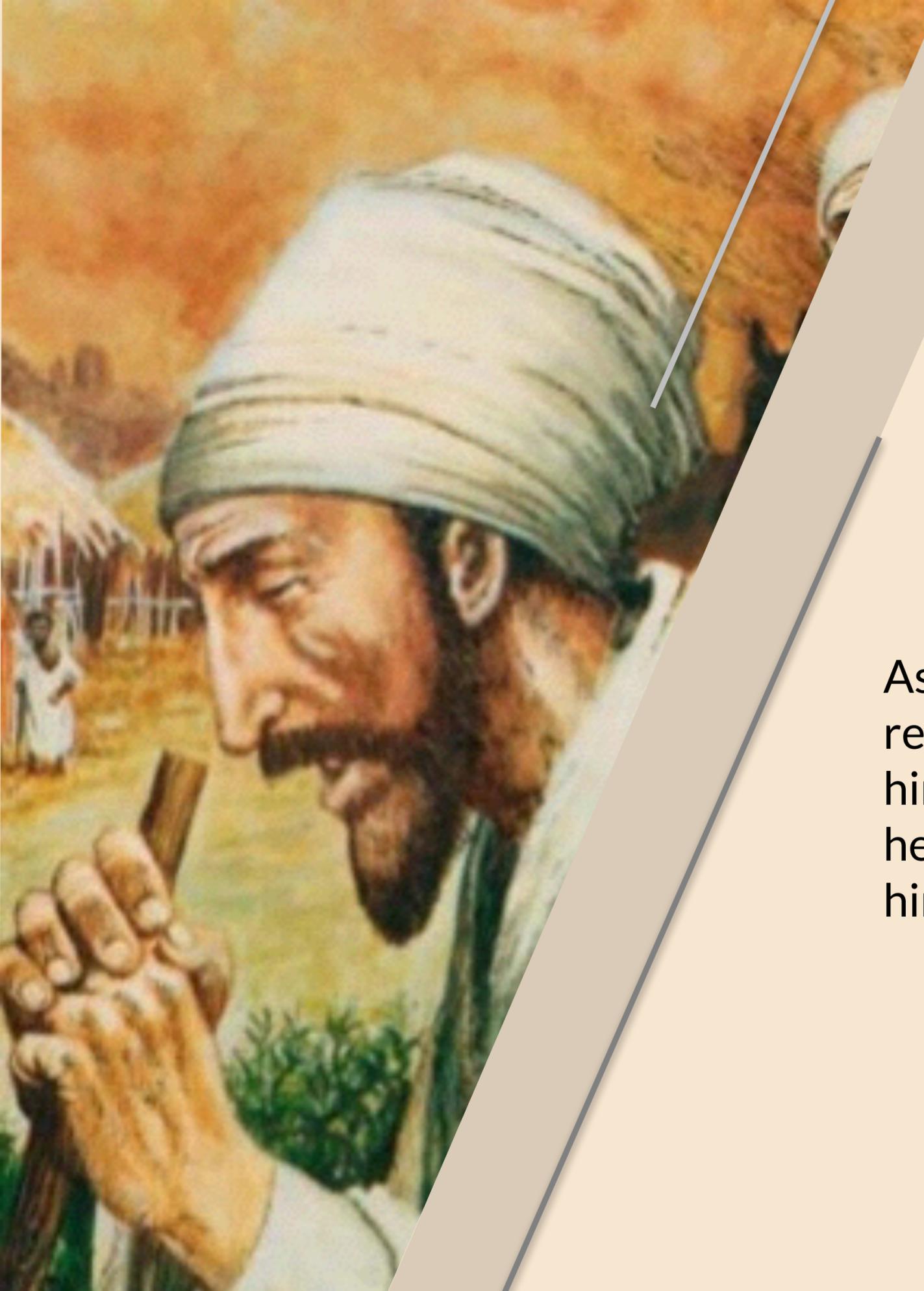




By assimilating all the positive value of his country of adoption, St. Justin was able to build the structure of the Catholic Church on solid ground. This small community would undergo harassment and persecution. But it would resist and survive.

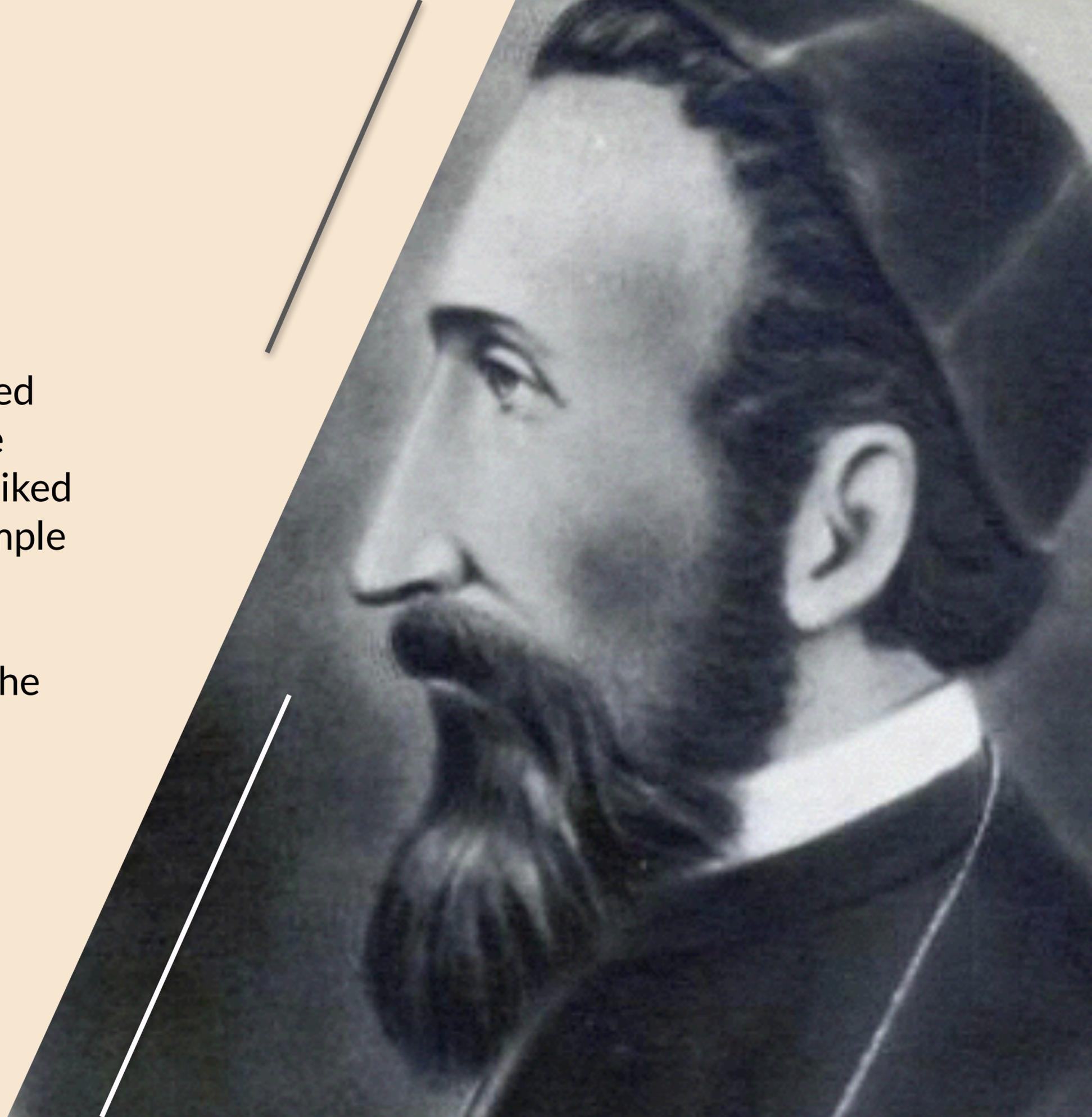
In his mission of evangelization, St. Justin traveled from place to place. When he decided to establish mission stations, he would entrust their administration to priests and seminarians, while he remained always on the move for new places and new people to evangelize.





As soon as he arrived in a new place, Justin would rent one or two “hidmos” (small local residences) for himself and for the people traveling with him. Then he would invite the poor and the common folk to visit him, to talk with him, and to pray with him as well.

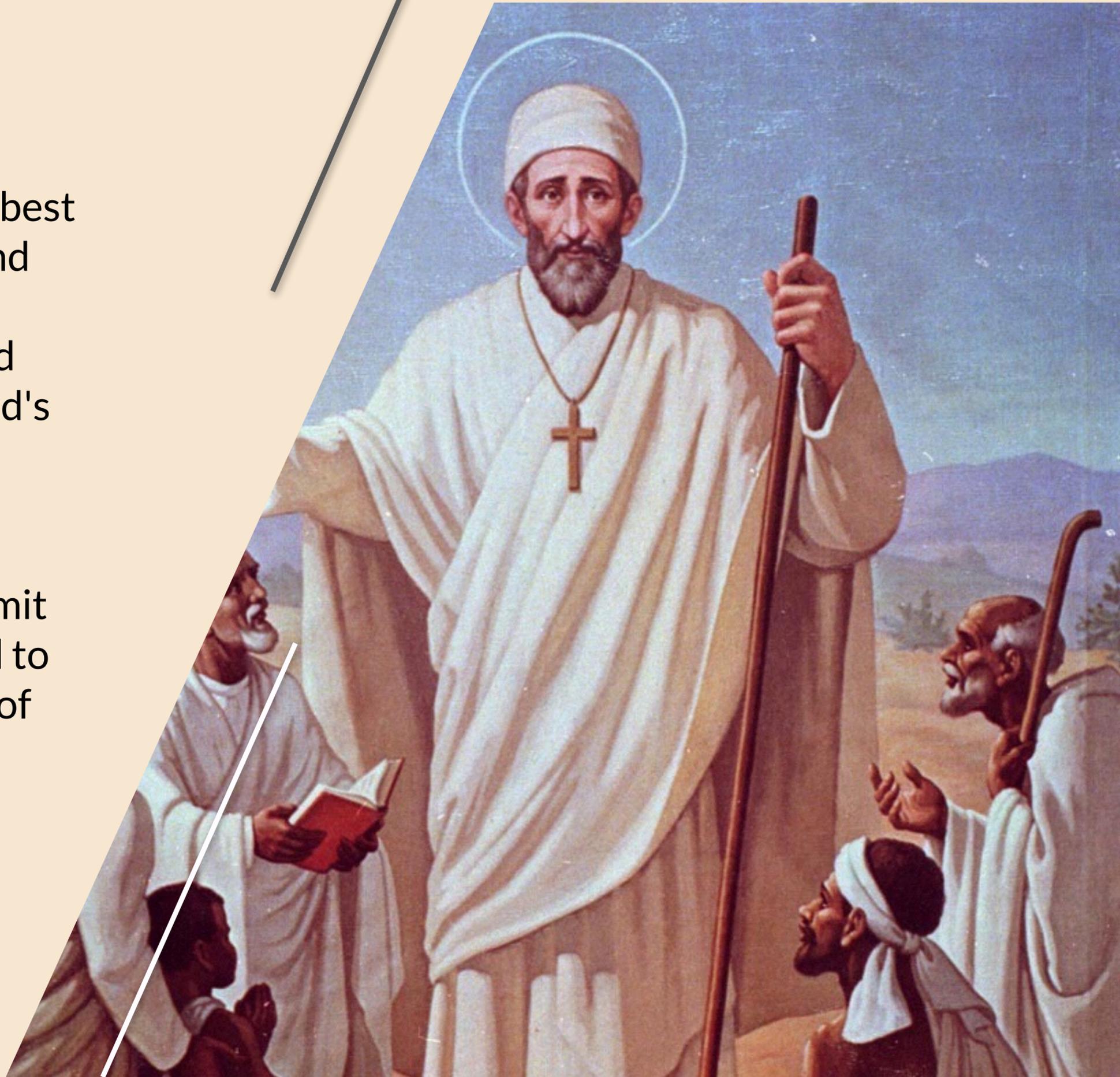
As a true man of God, Justin preached the Gospel message in such a simple way that people understood it, and liked him as well. His life was a living example to the people, and so he was able to change, slowly but surely, the unfair image that the people often had of the Catholic Church and of Catholics themselves.





During his twenty years of preaching the Gospel in Eritrea and Ethiopia, St. Justin covered thousands of kilometers visiting large and small villages. Wherever he went, he preached the Good News through words and deeds, and encouraged the small communities he founded to lead lives of integrity and fidelity to their beliefs. In this way, Justin's followers earned a good reputation as well as the respect of ordinary Orthodox believers. He was well accepted everywhere because of his great respect for the people.

Many foreign missionaries did their best to transplant the Gospel message and form both Eritrean and Ethiopian Catholics. Some were even martyred because of their response to the Lord's call. Yet they failed to establish the Catholic Church within the cultural context of Ethiopia and Eritrea. De Jacobis was determined not to commit the same mistakes, and was inspired to focus his energies on the formation of native clergy. Because of this, Justin succeeded where others had failed.

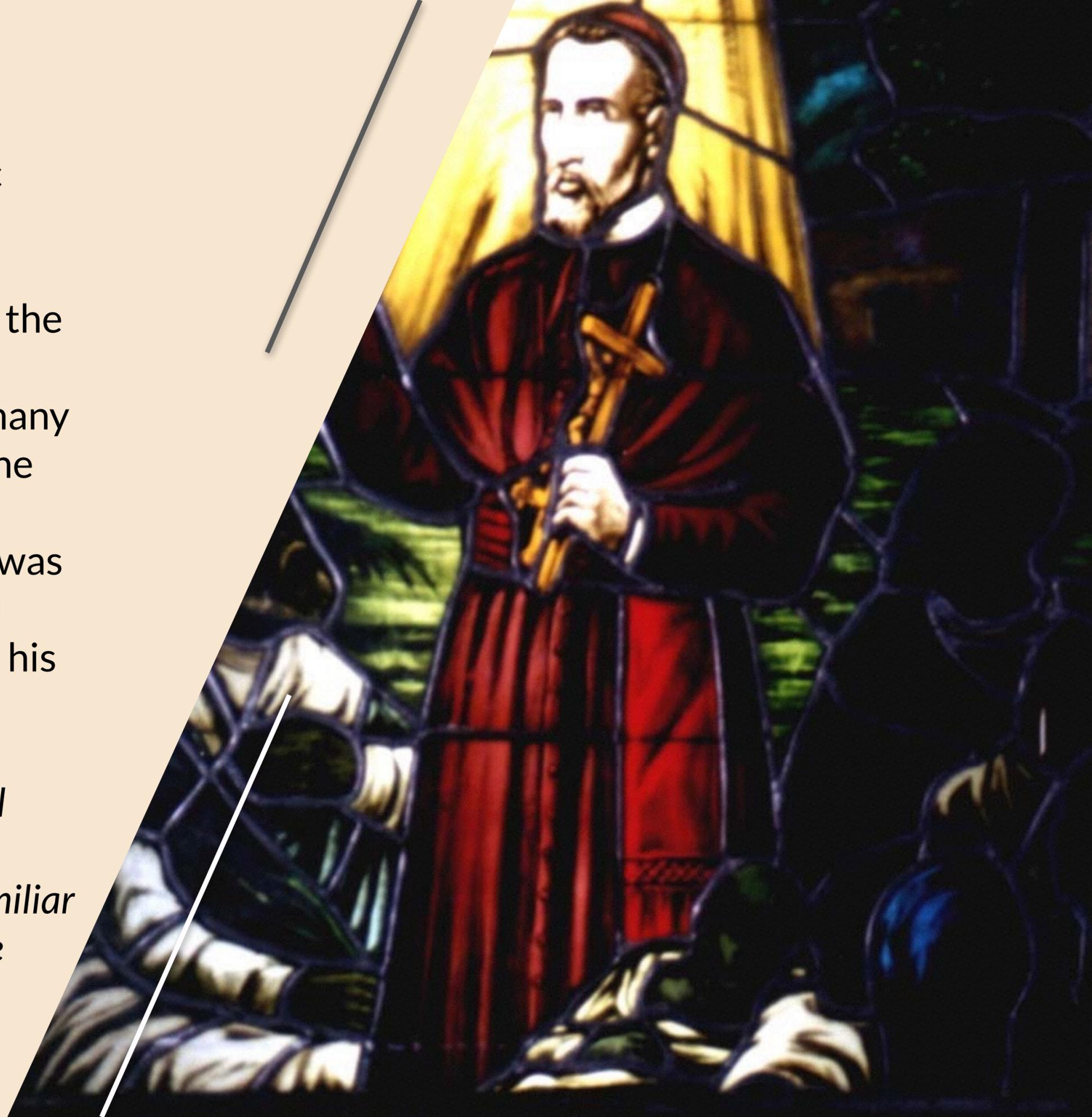




He is held in such high esteem that even today he is not referred to as “St. Justin,” but rather as “our father Justin de Jacobis” by both clergy and laity. This affectionate title is the expression of a deep-felt love for the man who brought them to the Catholic faith.

At the time of Justin de Jacobis' episcopal consecration, the Catholic Church (under Pope Pius IX) had committed itself to sending as many missionaries as possible throughout the world under the auspices of "Propaganda Fide." Unfortunately, many European missionaries did not see the need for establishing seminaries for indigenous clergy. Justin de Jacobis was one of the few who experienced and responded to this need. He wrote to his superiors:

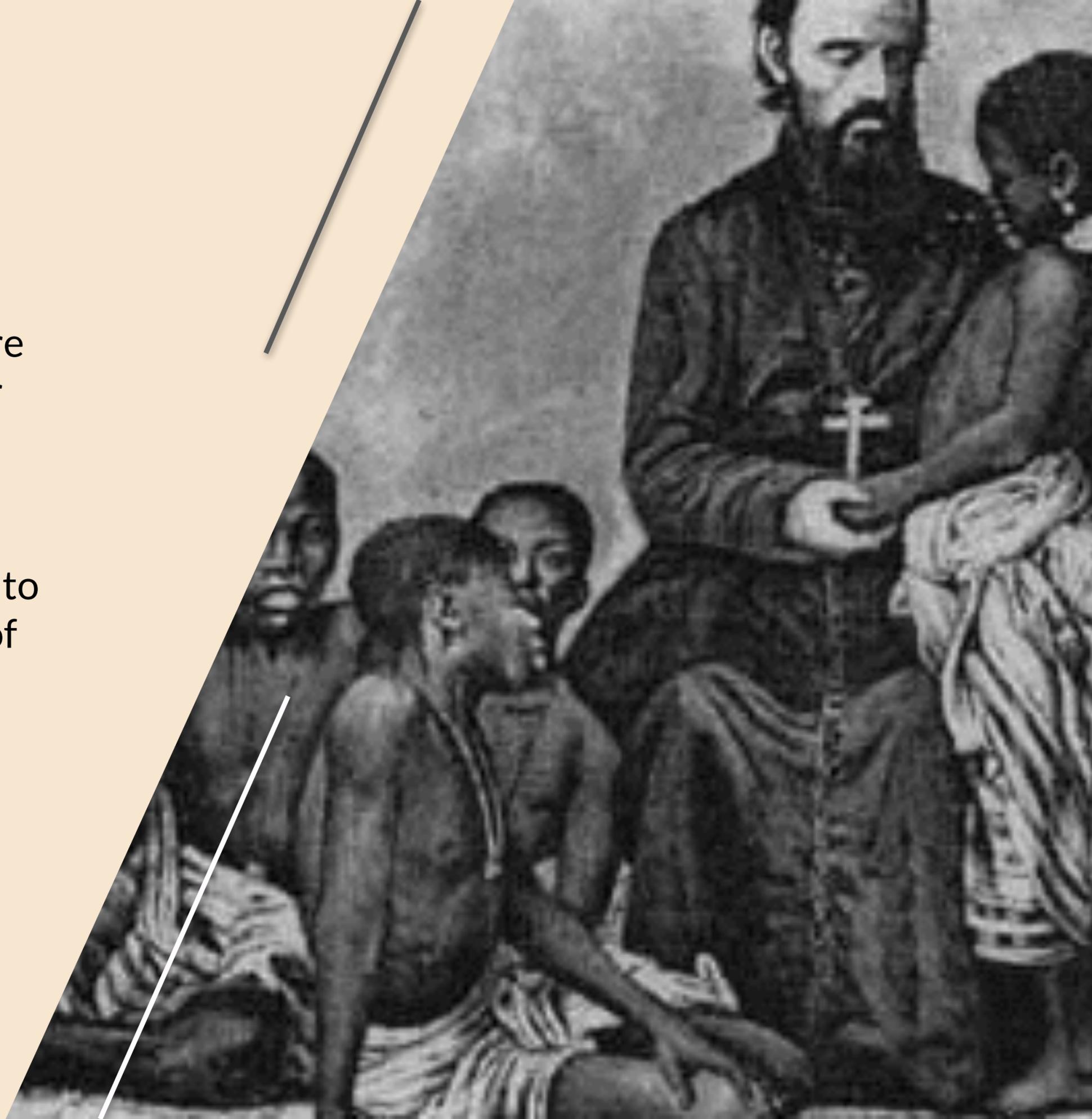
It is more fruitful and successful to deal with the native priests than with the European missionaries who are not familiar with the local and social cultures of the native people.





Impressed by their intellectual capacity, and their knowledge of their social context, De Jacobis dedicated himself totally to the formation of the native seminarians. The students became convinced of the dedication, love, and availability of their formator. Because of this mutual understanding and respect, the seminarians remained loyal, overcoming all sorts of obstacles and persecution. De Jacobis was able to lay down a strong foundation for the Church by training native priests, an idea that would only be fully appreciated and supported some hundred years after his death.

Many missionaries from abroad were convinced of the superiority of their own culture, and were not able to appreciate the culture of the people whom they were sent to evangelize. Despite their hard work, they failed to see the usefulness and practicality of forming local clergy. This attitude handicapped their success in evangelization.





On the last day of his life, 31 July 1860, just three hours before his death, Justin de Jacobis gathered his disciples around him and told them:

... Following the example of Our Lord who said good-bye to Our Lady and to his apostles, I say good-bye to you.... Drive far from your house all calumny and bickering, love one another, remain firm in the faith and above all, practice charity. Be the light of your people (Ethiopia).

He then called the seminarians to his bedside and said:

Since God has chosen you, be careful to follow the true path. I propose to you as your models the monks. They are good and they are the light which illuminates you. Follow their example.

from

[St. Justin de Jacobis: Founder of the
New Catholic Generation and Formator
of its Native Clergy in the Catholic
Church of Eritrea and Ethiopia](#)

by Abba Iyob Ghebresellasi, C.M.
Province of Eritrea

CONGREGATIO MISSIONIS

VINCENTIANA

