

BLESSED JOHN MASSIAS

Among the illustrious children of Saint Dominic whose eminently holy lives and indefatigable labors in the service of God and their fellow man have shed luster upon their Order throughout the whole world, the servant of God, Blessed John Massias, occupies a distinguished place. Lima, Peru, whose name has been immortalized as the birthplace of Saint Rose, the first flower of sanctity to blossom forth in the New World, cherishes the memory of Blessed John and numbers him among her most illustrious subjects.

Blessed John, unlike his holy contemporary Saint Rose, was not a native of America. He was born in the town of Revera, Spain, in the year 1585. His parents, though of noble lineage, had suffered such reverses of fortune that they were reduced to a state of absolute poverty. What they lacked in worldly wealth, however, they possessed in a great degree in the practice of virtue and true piety. From them our saint derived that remarkable love for Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and for His immaculate Mother which in the years to come were to make him the recipient of so many divine favors.

His early life was spent in comparative solitude, for on the death of both his parents he was forced to seek employment as a sheep-herder. This occupation allowed him much time to devote to prayer and the contemplation of God's goodness and mercy towards mankind. Here, in the silence of the hills over which he wandered with his flock, the saints often appeared to him, consoling him in this exile and telling him of the wonders of heaven. Even the Blessed Mother of God, to whom he had a most affectionate devotion, frequently favored him with her presence. It is related that on one occasion when his flock had strayed from him and become lost, he suddenly came upon them, and to his great surprise found them being guarded by a beautiful lady. This lady who had come to his assistance at so opportune a moment, he himself tells, was none other than the Blessed Mother herself.

But Almighty God did not deign that His faithful servant should always remain in the solitude of this heavenly retreat; but wished him to go forth into the world to work for His glory and for the salvation of souls. Inspired with the holy desire of devoting himself entirely to the service of God and His Blessed

Mother, he set out for the city of Seville, where there flourished many convents of religious among whom he could enroll himself. Spain, however, was not to be the scene of his apostolic labors. Almighty God had made known to him the spiritual desolation of the New World, where until the coming of the white man Satan had reigned supreme. Filled with holy zeal for souls and burning with the ardor of a true apostle of the Gospel, he immediately prepared to leave for this far-off land that he might the sooner accomplish the holy will of his Divine Master. While waiting for the departure of some vessel bound for America, he spent much of his time in one of the churches attached to a convent of Friars Preachers. Here in the presence of his Eucharistic Lord he prostrated himself in humble prayer, beseeching Him to bless his holy undertaking. The friars witnessing the fervor of this young man, and often beholding him wrapped in ecstasy, besought him to become a member of their community. But the vineyard in which he was to labor was not in Spain but in America. He surrendered his will to God, and God rewarded the sacrifice a hundredfold.

On arriving in the New World he immediately set out for the city of Lima, Peru, then the most flourishing city of South America. Here, after two years of trial and bitter disappointments, the object of all his prayers was at last realized. On January 23, 1622, he was clothed in the holy habit of the Friars Preachers in the Convent of Saint Mary Magdalene and immediately entered upon a new life as a consecrated servant of the Most High God.

If the simplicity, devotion and whole-hearted trust in God had aroused the admiration of the people who had seen the poor shepherd boy in prayer, what can be said of the influence he exerted over those who dwelt under the same roof and were the daily witnesses of all those acts which he performed for the honor of God and for the reparation of sin! Not only was the holy life of this new religious the source of much edification to his fellow religious, but it became in time the incentive to others to lead lives of great sanctity. With such extreme severity did he treat his poor frail body that his superiors were forced to moderate his penitential practices. Like his holy Father Saint Dominic, he allowed himself only a little sleep, and when his weakened nature, exhausted by long vigils and fastings, compelled him to take a little rest, he knelt at the altar or before a picture of our Blessed Lady.

Three great devotions characterized the whole life of our saint. His love for Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament knew no bounds. And because he loved the Son of God he showed the most tender affection towards His immaculate Mother. The poor souls in purgatory were also the objects of his solicitude, and so efficacious were his prayers in their behalf that frequently they appeared to him begging him to intercede for them before their just Judge.

Not only were those who had departed this life the recipients of divine favors through his intercession, but also the poor of this world. They came to him in their infirmities and he ministered to them. He clothed them and gave them food; when they were sorrowful, he consoled them with sweet words of comfort. So perfectly did he fulfill all the works of mercy, both spiritual and temporal, that all who knew him venerated him as a saint even before his death.

At last, after many years spent in the vineyard of the Lord, Almighty God deigned to call His faithful servant to Himself. On September 16, 1645, he was seized with his last illness. Calling the community about him, he recommended his soul to their prayers, and having been fortified by the sacraments of the Church, quietly slept in the Lord, repeating those beautiful words of the Royal Psalmist: "In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum."

The veneration in which he was held by all was manifested in a wonderful degree after his death. Thousands flocked to view his remains, many touching them with rosaries and other sacred articles. Many miracles were ascribed to his intercession. Often the simple application of his relics resulted in immediate cure from some grave illness. In the year 1648 the Archbishop of Lima, the Cathedral Chapter and the Friars Preachers of the Province of Peru petitioned the Sovereign Pontiff that the process for the beatification of their illustrious subject and brother might be begun. This petition was granted. After a careful examination into all the details concerning his life, and the truth of the miracles ascribed to his intercession being ascertained, he was declared blessed and numbered among the saints of the Church by the Sovereign Pontiff, Gregory XVI. His feast is celebrated throughout the whole Order of the Friars Preachers and in the dioceses of Palencia and Lima on October 3.

—William McClory, O. P.