

SANCTITY IN THE DOMINICAN ORDER

In this Seventh Centenary Year of the death of the illustrious founder of the Order of Friar Preachers, it is meet not only to sing the praises of that mighty athlete of Christ, but also to eulogize those generations of men and women, renowned for their sanctity, who rejoice in calling St. Dominic, Holy Father. God has manifested His glory through the magnificent gifts of holiness and learning with which He has endowed so many wearers of Dominic's chaste white habit. Some of his sons, men of great power, have worn the tiara, and have ruled the dominions of the Church with wisdom; others like Thomas of Aquin and Albert the Great have set a new standard for thought in philosophy and theology; a great number by contributions from their pens have shed an undying lustre on various branches of learning, especially Scripture, Canon Law, History and Literature; many talented in music have arranged inspiring melodies adapted to the words of the Old and New Testaments; not a few sculptors and artists have left immortal monuments to their skill and genius; while those who were rich in virtue, whose lives were studies in the mirrored excellence of the soul are computed by the thousands. These distinguished sons and daughters of the saintly Guzman gained glory, and were lauded mightily in their day. Nor did their greatness perish with them. They that came after them down through the centuries have perpetuated their names, and their merits continue to be related. Even those whose names have passed from the memory of man, have not lived in vain, for they were all men of mercy whose godly deeds have not failed; the good things they did, live on, and we, their posterity, reap an abundant harvest from the seeds which they have sown.

Here we are especially interested in that numerous company of martyrs, confessors, virgins and widows, who have been favored by the Church with the enviable title of saint or blessed. Three hundred Dominicans are enrolled in one or the other of these two classes of God's special friends. The names of fourteen are inscribed in the catalogue of saints, while two hundred and eighty-six are recorded among the blessed. The following summary briefly sets forth the number of those now beatified or canonized according to the century in which they lived, the

office appointed to be said in their memory, and the nation which gave them birth:

Thirteenth century, 85; fourteenth century, 21; fifteenth century, 27; sixteenth century, 12; seventeenth century, 114; eighteenth century, 7; nineteenth century, 34. Total, 300.

Martyrs, 208; Confessors, 64; Virgins, 22; Matrons, 3; Widows, 3.

Italy, 67; France, 8; Spain, 40; Germany, 6; Hungary, 50; Poland, 2; Portugal, 3; Belgium, 1; Peru, 2; Natives of Japan and China, 121.¹

The number to whom the Saviour has communicated His sacred stigmata establishes for the Dominican Order another claim for sanctity. Besides a pious Dominicaness now living in Madrid, Spain (whose name for obvious reasons cannot be published), one hundred and thirty-four of her fellow religious have had impressed upon their bodies marks corresponding to the wounds that Christ received.² Another fact worthy of note is that the bodies of St. Louis Bertrand, Blessed Margaret of Castello, Maria Bartalomeo Bagnesa, Sebastian Maggi, and Sibyllina Biscossi are at the present time incorrupt.

Space will not permit us to give a sketch of the life of each Blessed. We mention the names of a few chosen at random. They represent interesting contrasts of character found in those called to be saints, and bear witness to the truth that "there is no respect of persons with God" (Col. III, 25). Blessed Margaret of Hungary is noted for her regal lineage. She was the patroness of many princesses. The daughter of a king, she refused to leave her cloister to marry the ruler of Bohemia although a Papal dispensation had been obtained for her to do so. Her antithesis in worldly estate is presented to us in the person of Blessed Sibyllina, a woman of lowly birth, uneducated and blind. She rose to a height of sanctity as exalted as her rank in the social world was humble. Known to have left the place of her abode only twice in sixty-four years, many domestic servants became devoted to her, establishing a confraternity in her honor. The fact that her body remains still incorrupt is taken as a special proof of a virtuous life. The

¹ *Catalogus Hagiographicus Ordinis Praedicatorum*—By Innocentius Taurisano, O. P. Rome, 1918. (Bl. Isnard—Beatified by Benedict XV, Jan. 20th, 1920, has been included by us.)

² *El Santisimo Rosario*—November, 1920, page 667.

Church today pays equal homage to the memory of Blessed Aegidius and Blessed John Massias. This is a seeming paradox. The former was a nobleman, highly educated and besides being a cleric, was especially conspicuous for his knowledge of philosophy and medicine. He led a worldly life in his youth, going so far as to sell his soul to the devil, writing the contract in his own blood. Warned in a vision of the fearful fate awaiting him if he persevered in sin, he began a life of prayer and penance, eventually becoming as famous for his sanctity as he had been notorious for his iniquity. Blessed John Massias was born of practically indigent parents. He was untutored in the arts and sciences, but from his earliest years was endowed with extraordinary grace and was preserved in such probity of life and purity of heart as to permit Holy Mother Church to say upon his death that he had passed to his eternal reward with his baptismal innocence unsullied.

Blessed Albert of Bergamo entered the Order after the death of his wife. He was famed for the patient and silent way in which he had borne the vexatious domestic persecutions of his spouse. Though Blessed James of Ulm became a skilled worker in stained glass, this proved no obstacle to his becoming distinguished for virtue. Among the beatified, Martin of Porres holds a unique place because of his being a negro. The color of his skin, however, was not indicative of the quality of his heart. His love of neighbor, especially the sick and the abandoned, was most ardent. Kindness to dumb animals led him to such an extreme that he could not bear to see even rats or mice killed. The story of Blessed Lucy of Narni has a singular appeal. She was the beloved and respected prioress of a convent at Viterbo, and was favored by God with the sacred stigmata and wonderful visions. Despite these indications of holiness she was accused of imposture and witchcraft and was deposed. After suffering in silence for thirty-eight years, she died. It was only after death that her heroic and suffering sanctity was appreciated.

Blessed Imelda offers a charming study in child sanctity. At the early age of nine she entered the Dominican Convent near Bologna. The one great desire of her life in those young days was to receive within her breast her sacramental God. Custom had established the age of twelve as the proper time for little ones to receive First Holy Communion, and the convent chap-

lain would not listen to a suggested deviation from this rule. Frequently did the child beseech her confessor for permission to approach the divine banquet table, only to be repulsed. On May 12th, 1245, the community partook of the Eucharist in a body, leaving Imelda alone in her choir stall. Her frail body shook with emotion, tears flowed down her babe-like face, and with a voice that trembled with grief she asked to be fed upon the Body of her Lord. No attention was paid to her. The Mass came to a close. The religious left the choir. But Imelda remained behind un comforted. Suddenly a sweet fragrance of roses filled the air, and was seemingly wafted throughout the monastery. The nuns tracing its source returned to the chapel, and there to their dismay beheld a Sacred Host suspended in the air above the head of the weeping maiden. The priest who had just celebrated Mass came, paten in hand, and with holy impatience awaited developments. The Host slowly descended, rested on the paten, and from the hands of the chaplain Imelda received her Eucharistic God. The transport of love which took possession of her little heart at this longed-for moment was too great for a finite being. She died from sheer joy, and made her thanksgiving for First Holy Communion among the angels in Heaven. She was beatified by Leo XII, December 20th, 1826. A confraternity for First Communicants of widespread popularity has been established in her honor. The last Eucharistic Congress held in Bergamo passed a resolution petitioning for her solemn canonization. Mention must also be made of the miraculous powers of intellect obtained by Blessed Albert the Great through the intercession of the Immaculate Mother of God. Beset with trying intellectual difficulties in youth, he was transformed through her power into a genius and became the preceptor of the illustrious St. Thomas of Aquin.

Over and above the great number of Dominicans upon whose sanctity the Church has set the infallible seal of her approval, there are thousands of others who for generations have been enshrined in the hearts of men. Pius IX affirmed that: "From the midst of the family of the Friars Preachers, as from a mine replete with riches, there cease not to come forth, men renowned for their sanctity. Truly the Almighty has wrought great things in favor of that Order, and has enriched it with saints." "Do not ask me," Clement X once said, "how many saints the Order of St. Dominic has given to Heaven; count, if you can, the stars

which gleam in the firmament, and then you will know the number of saints among the descendants of St. Dominic." Notable among these worthy sons of our Holy Father are innumerable martyrs. The capitular Fathers gathered at Valencia ordered a catalogue to be made of the brethren who had won the crown of martyrdom during the century dating from 1234 to 1335. When the entries were counted this roll of honor was found to include 13,370 names. The sixteenth century, an age of a mighty religious cataclysm, demanded the life blood of 26,000 of St. Dominic's children in defence of the true faith. Each decade of years since the inception of the Order has given an increase to the multitude already inscribed among the martyr-sons of Dominic.³

Who will number those of noble Guzman's posterity who have made a sacrifice of their lives on the altar of duty; those myriads of toilers in the Lord's vineyard, missionaries, confessors, professors; men and women caring for the sick, teaching, or doing the more humble chores of the house; and last but not least those heroic nuns bound with convent walls engaged perpetually in reciting the Rosary, or adoring our Eucharistic King, thus drawing down from Heaven the power by which their brothers in pulpit and confessional captivate souls and turn them towards God. True these slaves to duty in the various activities of the Order suffer not a martyrdom of blood, yet they spend their lives and are spent just as efficaciously for the cause of faith.

To St. Thomas Aquinas it was revealed that few if any of his brethren would fail to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. And who was better able to determine whether or no such revelations be worthy of communication to others? May we not then compute the number of those who have attained sanctity through the observance of the rule and constitutions of the Dominican Order by a record of its members? It would be a giant task if not an impossible one to fix precisely how many persons have worn the chaste habit of St. Dominic. In the year 1245 the Order embraced more than 30,000 religious. An actual census taken of the First Order alone, early in the eighteenth century, contained the names of approximately 40,000.⁴ Based upon these

³ Les Freres Precheurs—H. M. Iweins, O. P. 2nd edition, Louvain, 1905.

⁴ Census made by 15th successor of St. Dominic—R.R. P. Antoninus Cloche.

figures we may safely estimate that no less than 600,000 Dominicans have lived, labored and passed to their reward before the advent of this generation. As to the number of members of the Second and Third Order who have found the rule of St. Dominic a guide to holiness, we will not venture to say, since they may be counted only by the millions.

The Dominicans of the present are laboring hard to perpetuate and to increase the purest treasure they possess,—the spotless reputation for sanctity built upon the achievements of the past.

—Bro. Raphael M. Burke, O. P.

