



Blessed Bartolo Longo

From Priest of Satan to Apostle of the Rosary

Bartolo Longo was born on February 11, 1841 in Latiana, Italy. His father was a well-to-do physician and man of culture. His mother was a devout woman who always saw to it that her children prayed the family rosary every night. Bartolo derived his great love of Mary from her. As a young boy, Bartolo was lively, intelligent and at times a mischievous lad. He loved music, played the piano and flute and was the conductor of the school band. During the 19th century, Italian universities became hotbeds of resistance. A wave of anti-clericalism swept through the universities. Bartolo studied law and received his law degree in 1864 at the age of 23. He graduated from the University of Naples, the alma

mater of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Alphonsus Liguori.

During his studies in Naples, Bartolo's faith weakened, as he came under the influence of friends who were involved in the occult. He attended séances and eventually was ordained a priest in a satanic cult. He took on such severe fasts, that he endangered his health. He became depressed and nervous and seemed to hear the voice of his dead father: "Return to God! Return to God!"

During this time, he publicly derided the Church, priests and anything connected with the Faith. The Satanic sect that he belonged to, ridiculed priests, bishops, and the rites of the Catholic Church. The experiences that Bartolo underwent in this sect were so horrible that Bartolo went into a state of insanity for a short period of time. His family prayed hard and long for Bartolo.

Our Lady chose a good friend of the young lawyer to help redirect his shattered life. His name was Professor Vincente Pepe, who taught near Naples. Bartolo would talk to him about his activities in the satanic cult. Vincente was disgusted at what he heard and his angry reproach stung Bartolo. The young lawyer came to admit that he was mentally confused. He very much needed support of God-loving people. Vincente introduced Bartolo to a learned Dominican priest, one trained in the philosophy and theology of St. Thomas Aquinas. His name was Fr. Alberto Radente, O.P., who was chosen by Mary to be the friend, confessor and spiritual director of the young lawyer. The Dominican helped Bartolo withdraw from the satanic cult. He gave the lawyer, a comprehensive review of theology and prepared him for the reception of the sacraments. This great Dominican priest prayed earnestly and even fasted for Bartolo Longo.

Fr. Radente professed him into the Third Order of St. Dominic on March 25, 1871, after explaining to him the history of the Order, founded by St. Dominic and confirmed by Pope Honorius III in 1216. The Pope stated at this time that Dominicans would be "Champions of the Faith and True Lights of the world." This new lay Dominican lawyer was now bent on repairing his past. He visited a séance for the last time, holding a medal of Mary and cried out: "I renounce spiritism because it is nothing but a maze of error and falsehood." He then went to student parties and cafes denouncing spiritism and proclaiming his faith in Christ and the Church. Fr. Radente said to him: "If you are looking for salvation, propagate the Rosary. It is the promise of Mary. He who propagates the Rosary shall be saved." This young lay Dominican lawyer was destined by God to become one of the greatest modern apostles of the Rosary. In prayer, Bartolo said to Mary: "I shall not depart from this earth without first displaying before you, the triumph of your Rosary."

Bartolo went to the Valley of Pompeii in 1872, which was to be his area of work. He was determined to evangelize the people of Pompeii by means of the Rosary as his spiritual Father; St. Dominic did in southern France in the early 13th century. There is the Dominican tradition that in 1208, in the Chapel of Notre Dame in Prouille, France, Mary appeared to St. Dominic and said: "Wonder not that until now you have obtained so little fruit by your labors; you have spent them on barren soil not yet watered with the dew of divine grace. When God willed to renew the face of the earth, He began by sending down on it the fertilizing rain of the Angelic Salutation. Therefore, preach my Psalter, composed of 150 Angelic Salutations and 15 Our Fathers, and you will obtain an abundant harvest of souls." Pope Leo XIII confirmed this tradition over and over. Since the days of St. Dominic, the Rosary has been the special charism of the Dominican Order. The Catholic Church looks to the Dominicans as official promoters of the Rosary. Bartolo Longo was destined to be a true light to the world, a true Dominican in the spirit of St. Dominic.

At the age of 44, Bartolo married Marianna de Fusco on April 7, 1885. They were married in the private oratory of the vicar general of the Archdiocese of Naples. Bartolo's dear friend, Pope Leo XIII, encouraged the couple to get married.

Bartolo was an avid writer. His words were: "O God! In one hand, you placed the Rosary, in the other, a pen." Of the Rosary he wrote:

"The entire Rosary has the beauty of reproducing the theological thoughts concerning Mary; they are reproduced in the entire dialectic of truth and deduction. Marian theology and the Rosary are two poems that are united into one, two hymns forming one hymn, two magnificent temples, two cathedrals of thought and piety that come together as one... Here in the Rosary, piety speaks in the language of theologians. Here meditation rises to the heights attained by scholars. Here prayer dwells where the scholars are brought to a halt. Marian theology and the Rosary are therefore similar to two temples having at the same height their pinnacles and spires. The people of God in the Church have found the Rosary, its Book of Psalms. The clergy have the Divine Office, the people have the Rosary. Like The Divine Comedy, the Rosary is a trilogy: it recalls the joys, sorrows, and triumphs of Jesus and in perfect symmetry, for each part it has five chants, and each chant in turn is an episode. The Rosary could very well be called the poem of human redemption. The Rosary is a poem that takes its lively but simplistic hues from the pure palette of the Gospel; while at the same time it draws its logical ties, its harmonious responses, and its entire intimate dialectic from the highest theology." Bartolo Longo ended his long and fruitful life on October 5, 1926, at the age of 85. His last words were "My only desire is to see Mary, who has saved me and who will save me from the clutches of Satan." In his last will and testament he declared: "I wish to die a true Dominican tertiary in the arms of the Queen of the Rosary with the assistance of my Holy Father St. Dominic and of my mother St. Catherine of Siena." His death was followed by miracles and he was beatified by Pope John Paul II on October 26, 1980. This Marian pope greatly admires Blessed Bartolo Longo and called him Man of Mary on the day of his beatification. On that occasion, 50,000 people cried out at St. Peter's in Rome, "Blessed Bartolo, pray for us."

By Robert Feeney

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