

MARY OF THE ANGELS (1661-1717)

Blessed (D)

Mary of the Angels was born in Turin on Jan. 7, 1661, the last of eleven children of the Count John Donatus Fontanella di Baldissero and of Countess Mary Tana di Santana. When she was fourteen, her father had already died; and she had to overcome resolutely the opposition of her mother in order to enter the monastery of the Discalced Carmelite nuns of St. Christine, which had been founded on April 30, 1639, by the princes Of Savoy. On Nov. 19, 1675, she gave up her name of Marianna and was clothed in the religious habit; on Dec. 26, 1676, she made her religious profession. Long years of indescribable sufferings, borne with heroic serenity, refined her spirit even to mystical transformation in God. The renown of her holiness imposed itself on the esteem and confidence of her sisters in Carmel and her fellow-citizens. She obtained papal dispensation to be elected prioress at the age of thirty-three, and was confirmed in the same office three more times. She was also entrusted with the office of mistress of novices; and in 1702 she founded a new Carmel at Moncalieri.

She revealed her charity for her neighbor and for her country by continual prayer, by her life of immolation, by her delicacy and care in receiving and consoling everyone. Members of royalty were among her admirers and confidants. She obtained from the Lord the end of the war and the liberation of Turin in 1696. Ascribing that grace to the intercession of St. Joseph, she had the joy of having him proclaimed a patron of the city, with a solemn triduum at St. Christine's. A few years later she turned to the Bl. Virgin to obtain again the liberation of Turin from the imminent danger of siege and invasion on the part of the French troops. On Sept. 7, 1706, the united forces of Duke Victor Amadeus and Prince Eugene of Savoy gained a decisive victory, as the blessed had foretold.

To celebrate this victory, the famous votive temple at Superga was built.

Mary of the Angels lived as a true daughter of St. Teresa of Jesus, zealously upholding the full observance of the rule and the counsels. She was distinguished by an unsullied purity – such as to be compared with St. Aloysius Gonzaga, to whom she was related on her mother's side – by her intense love of suffering, by her apostolic zeal, by her continual suffrages for the souls in purgatory, by a very tender devotion to the Bl. Virgin and to St. Joseph. She was enriched by God with extraordinary charisms. She died at Turin on Dec. 16, 1717, leaving behind many letters and some spiritual autobiographical accounts (unedited).

The canonical processes were begun in 1722. On May 5, 1778, Pius VI proclaimed the heroicity of her virtues; and on April 25, 1865, Pius IX declared her a blessed. Her body rests at Turin in the church of St. Teresa, the work of the architect Juvenal Delponce, under a magnificent altar, opposite the monumental chapel of St. Joseph, the masterpiece of Philip Juvara. Her liturgical feast is celebrated by the Discalced Carmelites on Dec. 16, with the rank of an optional memorial.

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John of Jesus Mary