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Table of Contents

<i>Letter of the Master of the Order – St. Margaret of Città di Castello</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Biography of St. Margaret of Città di Castello</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Presentation of the Postulator General.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Spirituality of St. Margaret of Città di Castello</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Hymn to St. Margaret of Città di Castello..</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>The Cult of St. Margaret of Città di Castello in the Dominican Order</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>The Cult of St. Margaret of Città di Castello in Italy</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>The Cult of St. Margaret of Città di Castello in the Philippines.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Foundress of a Dominican Sisters' Congregation in the Philippines on the Road to Beatification.....</i>	<i>11</i>

Letter of the Master of the Order – St. Margaret of Città di Castello



Prot. 74/18/547 Margherita di Città di Castello

Rome, 24 April 2021

*Even if my father and mother
forsake me, the Lord will take me
in.
(Psalm 27:10)*

To all Provincials and Vice Provincials, To All Members of the Dominican Family

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With gratitude to God, the *Giver of all good things*, I am pleased to announce the imminent canonization (*equipollent canonization*) of our sister [Margaret of Città di Castello](#) (*Margherita della Metola – 1287-1320*).

The life story of the newest saint of the Dominican Family is both *heart-rending* and *heartwarming*: she was born blind, had a deformed spine, one malformed arm, one leg shorter than the other, kept hidden from prying eyes throughout her childhood, and later abandoned by her parents. She was adopted by a devout and loving family and became a Dominican tertiary (*mantellata*). Though she seemed in need of corporal works of mercy due to her physical condition, Blessed Margaret did inspiring corporal works of mercy: she nursed the sick, consoled the dying and visited prisoners. She was like that poor widow in the parable who gave generously even if she had almost nothing (Luke 21:1-4). Blessed Margaret was blind but she saw the goodness in people; she was born with structural leg length discrepancy, but she *walked with grace*, because she knew that she was walking

humbly in God's presence. Blessed Margaret loved with a magnanimous heart even if she was unloved as a child. Truly, she was a "wounded healer", a person with disability who enabled people to become better, a rejected one who welcomed the dejected; indeed, she was a beautiful image of God's transforming love.

The veneration of Blessed Margaret as a holy woman of God was confined within Italy and the [Dominican Order](#) until the 19th century. Thanks to the members of the Dominican family who promoted her example of holiness, she became known and venerated not only in [Umbria and the Marches in Italy](#) but also in the United States of America and the [Philippines](#).

At the request of the Order, lay faithful and religious men and women from all over the world, and of cardinals and bishops, Pope Francis has approved the *equipollent* canonization of Blessed Margaret on 24 April 2021. I am grateful to the Postulation of the Order, which, from the time of br. Innocenzo Venchi, O.P. to br. Gianni Festa, O.P., has worked with great dedication and diligence for the elevation of our beautiful and blessed sister Margaret to sainthood.

Some of you might wonder – we have already so many saints, and our liturgical calendar is almost full of feasts and memorials, why do we continue to promote causes for sainthood? We do so because, as br. Gianni never tires reminding us, "the holiness of these brothers and sisters is a visible sign of the vitality and relevance of the Order!" The canonization of Margaret of Castello represents for all of us a renewed confirmation that *Dominican life*, in all its fullness and richness, is truly a *path to holiness*.

Thus, I ask the Prior Provincials and Superiors of the Dominican Family to circulate this letter, together with the accompanying brief [biography](#) of the new saint, to your respective communities, especially in the houses of formation. In particular, I encourage you to join us in [prayer](#), on a date to be announced later, when, in Città di Castello, the official ceremony for the inscription of Blessed Margaret in the book of Saints will take place within the Eucharistic celebration, which will be presided over by Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

May St. Margaret of Città di Castello intercede before the Lord for the whole Dominican Family. ■

Br. Gerard Francisco Timoner III, O.P.
Master of the Order of Preachers

Biography of St. Margaret of Città di Castello



Margaret was born around 1287 in the castle of Metola, in Massa Trabaria (on the border between Umbria and Marche), not far from Mercatello del Metauro, in the territories of the Church. Her father Parisio was the lord of the castle and was called 'cattano' (captain), a title that had already belonged to his ancestors; her mother's name was Emilia. But the child was born blind and deformed, and her noble and rich parents could not bear a disgrace that offended the family's pride. So the father locked up his daughter in a cell next to the castle church so that the "shame" would remain hidden from the eyes of the world. The little girl accepted this decision without rebellion and kept her serenity intact. She spent her early childhood in solitude, devoting herself to prayer and contemplation, in communion with God, in profound quietness and peace of mind.

After a short stay in a castle on the Metauro river, which had become necessary due to military upheavals in the region, her parents took her to Città di Castello, to the tomb of James (†1292), a lay Franciscan monk who had died recently in a state of sanctity. They hoped that he would be able to heal their daughter, but the long-awaited miracle did not happen. Having failed in this extreme attempt", the fourteenth-century biographer recounts, "they abandoned her in Castello, 'without

pity, alone, without providing for her, deprived of all human help’.

For some time the helpless girl led a stray life, begging for bread, then found refuge in the small town monastery of St Margaret. But this was only a brief interlude, because her conduct of life, the very strict asceticism she observed and her admonitions aroused the envy of the nuns. Unable to compare with her unrivalled example, the nuns banished her from there as well, with many insults and offenses. After this umpteenth betrayal, Margaret was finally taken in by a deeply pious married couple, Venturino and Grigia, who reserved a small room for her in the upper part of their home, so that she could freely devote herself to prayer and contemplation. Their generosity was to be rewarded by Margaret, who placed her exceptional charisms at the service of her adoptive parents and their circle of relatives and friends. She devoted herself to the formation and Christian education of the children of her benefactors, was a gentle and authoritative guide for many people who turned to her for advice and comfort, and on more than one occasion protected her friends from grave dangers. She also cared for the poor and wretched of the city. Despite being blind and crippled, she managed to be a compassionate sister to all the unfortunate.

In Grigia and Venturino’s house the girl spent the rest of her short and simple life, dividing her time between prayer, contemplative life and active charity. She always fasted, hardly ever slept, and when she did doze off she lay on the floor and never on the bed. By sharing in the sufferings of Jesus, Margaret felt bound to her heavenly Bridegroom, identified with him, and this life of union gave her ineffable security and joy. After putting on the habit of penance of the Preaching Friars, she went daily to their church, where she made her daily confession and participated with great devotion in the Eucharistic celebration. Often, he had wonderful raptures during the mass. When her illness worsened, she summoned the friars to receive the ecclesiastical sacraments, gave thanks to God and died in perfect serenity of spirit on 13 April 1320: Margaret was 33 years old. ■

Presentation of the Postulator General



[...]

With my hands I touch the walls
But with my soul the truth,
My fingers dark for me
But God, a flare.

What is distant I feel to be close
When I think, I believe I define;
My body sitting in today,
My soul wavers in the infinite.

Graceful things from the air
Come for my orchestrations.
I hear only birds’ wings
But I see the wings of angels.

Sometimes I sing without a voice,
Just as I think without speaking
The blindness God has given me
Is a way of giving me light.

If I proceed along the way
My pathways are two:
One, where I am walking,
The other, the truth in which I am.

In me there is, at the bottom of a well,
An opening of light towards God.
There, at the very bottom,
An eye made in heaven.

*Fernando Pessoa, Sono un sogno di Dio,
Magnano (BI), Qiqajon, p. 53*

This lyric poem by the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, seems to be the perfect expression of the Christian, spiritual experience of Blessed Margherita della Metola (the town of Mercatello sul Metauro) or of Città di Castello. Hers was a short

life, passed in the evocative surroundings of the Massa Tribaria and Tifernum (the old name for Città di Castello), though contemplation of their beauty was denied her because she was blind from birth until her death, in 1320. These verses which, in the development of their light quatrains, aim at the theological depth of the obstructed relationship between outer blindness and inner light/gaze, seemed to me to be particularly apt for a commentary on the text of the two *legendae* which, in different ways and variations, insist on the stylistic element of “providential blindness”: she was blind, but she saw the light.

I recall only a few of the passages in which the author of the *Vita lunga* remarks, with theological perspicacity and scriptural inspiration, on the deprivation of sight as an “intervention of Providence” (Pessoa writes: “The blindness God has given me/Is a way of giving me light”): “In fact she was born without bodily eyes so as not to see the world, but she took her fill of the divine light because, while on the earth, she could contemplate only heaven”¹. When her parents took her to Città di Castello to pray that she be healed by a Franciscan friar who had recently died in odor of sanctity, they were to be disappointed, because: “[...] the Lord, having already illuminated her mind with the wish to contemplate the heavenly realities, did not want to satisfy them – he who knows all secrets – so that she should not be deprived, by the sight of earthly things, of the vision of heavenly things”²; and once, left (or abandoned) alone and mendicant in the streets of the Tifernum town, “[...] she who was considered abandoned was at once welcomed by God, [and] while separated from the

world was illuminated by the eternal light, that her mind might be raised to meditate more freely on the eternal realities”³. At a later point in the text, the hagiographer raises his voice to proclaim Margherita’s teaching charism, which was, yes, a feminine teaching, humble and delicate, but undoubtedly evangelical in tone: “Blessed blind woman, I say, who never saw the things of this world and who so quickly learned heavenly things! Happy disciple, who deserved to have such a master, who without books taught Holy Scripture to you, blind from birth, who teach even those who can see”⁴. Despite being able to see nothing”, nevertheless with that “eye made in heaven” (Pessoa), she contemplated the Invisible made visible, the Incarnate, God made man, present in the Eucharist. “In Church, when the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was consecrated and throughout the time when the sacred mystery was celebrated, she claimed that she saw Christ incarnate⁵ and that she could see nothing else going on (*actualiter*). It is no wonder that he who had deprived her of any sight of earthly things wanted to show himself only to her pure gaze, so that in an earthenware vessel of little value divine mercy should shine forth”⁶. Like Christ who gave himself up for love of humanity, so Margherita did with her own life, apparently insignificant and superfluous to worldly “eyes”, a “life of gift”.

The metaphor of the “earthenware vessel”, taken from St Paul (“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken;

¹ Vita lunga della Beata Margherita (Recensio major, BHL 5313az), in P. Liccardello, *Le vite dei santi di Città di Castello nel Medioevo*, Selci-Lama, Editrice Pliniana, 2017, p. 251.

² Ibid., p.253.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p.261

⁵ Anne Lécu, a Dominican Sister who has worked for years as a doctor in French prisons, recalling the martyrdom of Father Jacques Hamel – killed by two militant members of fundamentalist Islam on 26 July 2016 while he was celebrating Mass in the church of St Etienne du Rouvray in Normandy – offers an unusually effective summary of theological expression on the vital bond between the person who takes part and believes in the Eucharist and Christ as really present in the bread and wine: “The Eucharist, inasmuch as it is a summary of the most ordinary life of the believers, is the place where we are configured to Christ and where, by the grace of those who participate, the world is configured to Christ, incarnate, crucified, risen”. Anne Lécu, Valerio Lanzarini, *Una vita donata*, Magnano (BI), Qiqajon, 2018, p.6.

⁶ Vita lunga della Beata Margherita, cit., p.261.

Br. Gianni Festa, O.P.
Postulator General

struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” – 2Cor.4:7-10) cannot fail to remind us of a famous passage from the Apostle which sheds ample light on the meaning of Margherita’s life and holiness: “For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Once more, as I have often happened to recall in other institutional and/or more official venues, I am aware of an inner, deeply felt need to say again, with inspired conviction, that the newness of the fame of holiness and the vigour of the cult of Margherita are not to be attributed to a sort of artificial discovery or archaeological recovery of a mediaeval Blessed, but rather to a manifestation of the Spirit of God that works in history and that mysteriously, and often invisibly, ferments the dough of humanity with the yeast of its surprising dynamism. The fact is that the fame of Margherita’s holiness and her cult have never ceased, and if, until the 19th century, they were for the most part confined to Italy and within the Dominican Order, they have spread with unforeseen growth, thanks to the religious, men and women, of the Dominican Family, all over the world. Our little Margherita still lives in the hearts and prayers of many of the faithful, not only in Umbria and the Marches, but also in the USA and in the Philippines. The present vitality of her cult, the extraordinary spread of her fame in countries far distant from Città di Castello or Metola, the freshness of her pathway of perfection and the exemplary nature of her poor life bear witness to the fact that still today Margherita can speak to the hearts of thousands of men and women, because in her they recognise a sister, one of their own, one of those humble, blessed creatures whom one day, exulting in the Spirit, Jesus indicated as the only keepers of true wisdom: “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will” (Luke 10:21). ■

Spirituality of St. Margaret of Città di Castello



Margaret of Città di Castello led a simple and hidden life, divided between her domestic cell and the church, a life made up only of penance and prayer, of attention to the unfortunate and of hard-working but humble daily charity. But his *Legenda*, precisely in the etymological sense of “something to read”, brings us back, in all its essentiality and clarity, to an original truth of Christianity, to that ancient blessing (Mt 18, 1-10) which, by reversing the roles, delivers the divine lesson to the poor, the little ones, and not to the great of the world (Lk 1, 51-53).

Ubertino da Casale understood this: the great Franciscan spiritual was a man of great learning, but he wrote that Margaret had been more of a teacher to him than many learned theologians and speculatives. At a time of serious spiritual crisis, the little virgin of Città di Castello had enlightened and sustained him, giving him the strength to continue his work. It was she, in fact, who had taught him the way to truly know, love and imitate the life of Jesus, to follow in his footsteps.

But Margaret’s spiritual greatness was also well understood by the inhabitants of Città di Castello, who immediately after her death asked that she be buried in the church: they considered her a saint even before any official recognition. As was customary in such circumstances at the time, her body was prepared for embalming, and it was then that three small stones were found in her heart, with three faces depicted: the icons of Mary, Joseph and

the Child Jesus, the members of the Holy Family. At that moment, the secret of the supernatural joy that Margaret had never lost in the face of the hardest trials of her life was revealed: blindness, illness and repudiation. The poor orphan of Metola had not really been such, because the Lord had never abandoned her, and she had known how to fill the emptiness of the absence of her earthly family with the little crib that had always inhabited her heart.

It is precisely a three-lobed heart that would have permanently accompanied the image of the beata from Tifernate, an iconographic attribute that would have made her immediately recognizable even in the long processions of Dominican saints and blessed, all dressed in black and white, all holding the lily in their hands.

The small crib, almost a testamentary bequest, was the message delivered by Margaret: her spiritual eyes had been able to see in her own condition of abandonment and marginalization – almost a “remnant” of society – the very face of a God who for love of man had renounced power and glory and had lowered himself to enter into contingency, temporality and finiteness. The crib and the cross were the places that God, in his Son, had chosen to reveal himself to the world; before the glory of the Resurrection Jesus had had to really experience, in his own flesh, vulnerability, humiliation and suffering. For this reason Margaret welcomed her own pain as the sign of a special election, and lived in a beatitude of love that is the very life of God in his Trinitarian relationship. In the long wording of her *Legenda*, the key word is *paupertas*, which is not only deprivation of goods, but also social marginalization, precariousness, uncertainty. This was not a condition that Margaret had freely chosen, but just as she accepted illness, abandonment and the betrayal of men with joyful detachment, so she welcomed poverty as a gift that allowed her to be fully assimilated into Christ.

Thus, the initial condition of the poor and marginalised girl is reversed. As in the *Magnificat*, the gift of wisdom corresponds in the blessed girl to the annihilation of all human power and good, the clarity of doctrine corresponds to bodily blindness, the luminous grace of the word corresponds to ignorance, and the power to perform miracles corresponds to the lack of means and instruments. For this reason, the poor and illiterate girl who knows nothing about books, but has received

everything from God, becomes an appreciated spiritual teacher, she exercises a charisma of doctoring, and sometimes of prophecy, even if her testimony remains more domestic, private, linked to the circle of her friends and spiritual daughters.

Margaret was a great mystic, along the lines of those extraordinary female figures who in the fourteenth century, in a period of terrible crisis in the history of the Church and Europe, knew how to be “true priests of their cities”, in the sacrifice and total offering of themselves, repeating, with a disarming literalism, the evangelical figure of substitution. If, as Thomas Aquinas had taught, Christ is the man “for others”, who came into the world for the redemption of mankind, these women of penance took on the same role as Christ to obtain the salvation of souls. Theirs was a work limited to humble gestures, but extremely significant in terms of the meaning of Christian commitment in history, an action that does not rely on power and money, but is carried out in helping those who suffer in body and spirit; women who knew how to love and preserve their spiritual freedom and the hope of the Gospel even in the face of the most difficult trials and oppression. This is the mark that Margaret left, and for this reason she has never been forgotten. ■

Hymn to St. Margaret of Città di Castello



Ray of Sun

*The mountains of the Marches
Your native territory
Where Faith embraced and kissed you
With the baptismal water,
Hail you and proudly name you
The fairest of our flowers,
The loveliest of blossoms,
Saint Margaret!*

*No ray of sunshine entered
To light your sightless pupils,
But down from Heaven in splendour
Came incandescent glory
To fill your contemplation
With ecstasy and wonder
At God made man among us,
Saint Margaret!*

*Rejected and abandoned,
You put your trust in Jesus:
A melody from Heaven
Led you along his pathway.
Teach us to ask his guidance
On life's uncharted journey,
Following your example,
Saint Margaret!*

*You were a prudent virgin
Who waited for the bridegroom,
Your lamp of steadfast virtue
That shed its light around you
Flooding you with the glory
Of Christian expectation,
Still burns as we salute you,
Saint Margaret!*

IDI n°609, April 2021

*We come to you in prayer,
In humble supplication,
That still you will protect us
From sin and from defilement,
So that one day in Heaven
We may remain for ever
Praising the Lord Eternal,
Saint Margaret! ■*

The Cult of St. Margaret of Città di Castello in the Dominican Order



The cult of Margaret initially flourished in the places that had been the theatre of her earthly life: Città di Castello, where the Dominican cloistered woman died and her sacred remains are still preserved, and the villages of the Metauro Valley (La Metola, Mercatello and Sant'Angelo in Vado), where she spent her early years. If this was the original womb of a memory tenaciously cultivated in the dioceses of Umbria and Marche, a decisive role in the promotion of the cult was played by the Order of Preaching Friars, who from the beginning of the fourteenth century made Blessed Margaret the symbol of their pastoral presence in Città di Castello, and of the strong bond that the local convent had with the citizens.

But the Dominican Order also favoured the spread of the devotion of the Blessed from the original humus to a wider public. Without obliterating the patronal values of a cult deeply rooted in the communities to which they belonged, the Preaching Friars enhanced a model of female holiness charged with universal resonance and capable not only of lasting through time, but also of imposing itself at a supraterritorial level. This is demonstrated by the twentieth-century flourishing of the

Margaretite cult in the United States and the Philippines. Considered in its entirety, the dossier of literary and iconographic sources, mainly attributable to Dominican patrons, allows us to reconstruct the path of a memory characterised by a singular diachronic resistance in its double articulation between the particular and the universal.

The first testimonies date back to the years between the 14th and 15th centuries and are placed under the aegis of Fra Tommaso da Siena, known as Caffarini. As head and vicar of the Italian mantellate, he was charged by the Master General to work to obtain the recognition of the Order of Penance, or Third Dominican Order, from the Apostolic See, a task to which he dedicated himself in the years 1400-1405. Complementary to this objective was his commitment to obtaining the canonisation of Catherine Benincasa, the most famous Dominican cleric, whom the observant wing of his religious family had chosen as the symbol of the reform. In the convent of S. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice, where he lived from 1395 until the year of his death in 1434, he set up a *scriptorium*, a forge for copying and distributing the *legendae*, in Latin and the vernacular, of the holy women who had served in the Order of Penance, and worked to obtain canonical recognition of their way of life. Caffarini's interest therefore represented a qualitative leap from a cultic point of view, because it favoured a broadening of the horizons of devotion to Margaret even outside the original niche of Typhera. The Blessed became officially part of the synastry of the Order, as a universally valid model of tertiary holiness.

The Sienese friar's propaganda efforts were not limited to written testimonies, but also had a corollary in artistic patronage. This apologetic programme was to find its most pregnant iconographic transposition in the important altarpiece by Andrea di Bartolo (already known as the Master of the Dominican Effigies), conserved in the Accademia Museum in Venice, but coming from the Dominican monastery in Murano. In the prestigious gallery of the polyptych Margherita occupies a place alongside the 'tertiaries' Giovanna da Firenze, Vanna da Orvieto, Caterina da Siena and Daniella da Orvieto. These older representations also have a "founding" value of the image of the blessed, already fixed in its essential

elements. If she too, like the other penitents, wears the Dominican habit, and holds in her hands the lily (symbol of virginity) and the cross, the peculiar sign of the beata of Typhera is her heart. This attribute would permanently accompany her iconographic figure and make her immediately recognisable even in group representations, such as the famous predella in the National Gallery in London, in which Fra Angelico celebrates the triumph of the Dominican family, already projected into paradise glory. The complete insertion of Margaret in the Order's Sanctuary is confirmed by a remarkable painting from the convent of St. Dominic in Città di Castello, where she is depicted together with Margaret of Hungary and Agnes of Montepulciano. Although she has a rayed nimbus, the Perugian artist Ludovico di Angelo Mattioli does not give her any less dignity than the two holy nuns, recognisable respectively by the royal crown placed on the ground and the lamb. Margaret is holding her heart in her hand, but it is worth noting that this attribute is enriched here by an important detail: three stones are clearly engraved on it, an allusion to the precious finds that were discovered during the autopsy carried out immediately after her transit.

The beatification at the beginning of the 17th century gave an incentive for the promotion of the cult and thus also for the elaboration of the literary memory and artistic representation. However, in this period, the friars' initiative also led to numerous attestations outside the Umbrian-Marches niche, not limited to the Italian and European area. Thanks to their vast missionary network, Margaret also reached the New World, as shown by some works of art found in Mexico and Peru.

In the twentieth century, it was again the Dominican initiative that spread the cult to the United States and the Philippines. The biography of Father Bonniwell, O.P., which offered a moving portrait of *Blessed Margaret of Castello*, also known as *Little Margaret*, was an effective means of promotion in English-speaking countries. In recent years, the growing popular devotion has found a formidable echo in the digital communication circuit. It is also worth noting that it is in this context that a kind of reinvention of the image has taken place.

Overseas iconography presents a slightly different face of the blessed, perhaps less idealised than Renaissance and Baroque portraiture: in the contemporary *posters*, depictions inherited from the

past coexist with attempts to offer up-to-date representations, closer to today's sensibility, but always alluding to a special *maternity* of Margaret towards abandoned childhood. In addition to her blindness and her Dominican habit, the iconographic attribute that makes her immediately recognisable is no longer her heart, but her cane, an allusion to her disability, but also to her role as guide on the journey of faith. ■

The Cult of St. Margaret of Città di Castello in Italy



After her death on 13 April 1320, Margaret's remains were transferred to the Church of Charity, officiated by the Preachers, with a great crowd. The girl was well known for her exemplary conduct and charismas, and already in life the inhabitants of Città di Castello had venerated her as a saint. For this reason, the citizens spontaneously requested that she be buried in the church. A particularly intense moment of collective participation occurred when the body, as is customary in such cases, was prepared for embalming with perfumed aromas. The friars then decided to place the heart in a small golden tabernacle in the sacristy so that it would remain exposed to public veneration. It was then that, while carving a vein, three small stones were found in which were engraved the images of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the members of the Holy Family, who had never abandoned the little orphan girl.

Even before official recognition by the Church, Margaret was acclaimed a saint by the people. The hagiographic case of the beata from Tifernata is part of a wider phenomenon that affected many cities in central Italy at the end of the Middle Ages, where there was a massive expansion of the catalogue of saints, both men and women, often

from the lay world and also from the popular classes of urban society. Margaret was a city patron saint also in the oldest and deepest sense of this term. In this light, one can also read the re-assumption of classic values and contents of the sacred function, such as the thaumaturgic power, the incorruptibility of the body, the immediate and spontaneous flourishing of miracles around the tomb. Like other civic cults at the end of the Middle Ages, in the case of the Dominican Virgin, spontaneous popular devotion was supported by the municipal magistrates, who provided public funds for the embalming of the body and the celebration of the funeral. At a later stage, the cult of the Virgin was stabilised and the city ordinances stipulated the regular participation of the authorities and the offering of gifts on her feast day. Some documents show that at the end of the fourteenth century devotion to Margaret had not waned, and thanks also to the conspicuous donations made to her, the Preaching Friars were able to build the great basilica of St. Dominic, the church to which the mortal remains of the Blessed were transferred in 1424.

The first official recognition of the cult by the Apostolic See took place at the beginning of the 17th century. On 19 October 1609 Pope Paul V granted Città di Castello the right to celebrate the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary with an office and mass. This measure was taken on the basis of the results of the investigation of a commission chaired by Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino. The following month the Pontiff, with the favourable opinion of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, authorised the Order of Preachers to use three lessons, already signed by the Cardinal, in the liturgical office on the day of the Blessed Virgin's death. In 1675 Pope Clement X, adhering to the request of the Master General Fr.

He authorised Mass and the Office in all the Order's churches. Three years later, his successor Clement XI extended this concession to the dioceses of Urbania and S. Angelo in Vado.

On 19 January 1987, to coincide with the seventh centenary of her birth, the request was forwarded by the heads of the Umbrian Bishops' Conference, while the following year the bishops of Città di Castello and Urbino-Urbania-Sant'Angelo in Vado asked the Congregation for Divine Worship to confirm Margaret's title as 'Patroness of the Blind and Marginalised'. But an important fact must be

stressed. These initiatives, started in the places that had traditionally been involved in the cult, were now also supported by a new great devotional pole, the United States, where a crusade for Margaret's canonisation was launched. This movement of Catholics linked to Dominican spirituality found an authoritative foothold in the American bishops, who addressed postulatory letters to Pope John Paul II for the opening of the cause. Finally in the year 2018, after the conclusion of the Diocesan Inquest (25 September 2004 which produced six authenticated and sealed volumes of the enquiry into the cult, miracles and reputation for holiness of Blessed Margaret of Città di Castello) the Holy Father Pope Francis, at the request of the Master of the Order, Br Gerard F. Timoner III, Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti and Bishops Domenico Cancian, Giovanni Tani and Renato Boccardo, granted the equivalent canonisation. ■

The Cult of St. Margaret of Città di Castello in the Philippines



The Encounter Between the Two Pearls

“For my father and my mother have left me but the Lord has taken me up” (Ps 26:10). How can an unwanted person of the late 13th century be able to inspire Filipinos of the 21st century? How can a person whose *locus nativitatis* is almost 6,600 miles away—basically the other side of the world—reach as far as Asia in the Philippines to become her *locus devotionis*? Indeed, God moves in mysterious ways “for [His] thoughts are not [our] thoughts, neither [our] ways [His] ways,” declares the Lord” (Is 55:-8-9). The encounter between Bl. Margaret of the City of Castello (ca. 1287-1320) and the Filipino people could be ages apart but the devotion was only formally promoted by Filipino Dominicans in 1987.

The origin of Bl. Margaret in Italy and her *cultus* in the Philippines could be miles apart but the devotion persists since then, and becomes more vibrant today. Such encounter is ages apart, miles apart, worlds apart, but it endures the vicissitude of time and space.

Since the 1980s, the *Acta Capituli Provincialis* of the Dominican Province of the Philippines stipulates a specific person who is tasked to promote the devotion to Bl. Margaret of the City of Castello. The devotion is evident in the liturgical life of the Province. Beginning in the Novitiate, the study of the *Vitae Fratrum Ordinis Prædicatorum* has been an essential part of the initial formation of the Dominicans: “Another essential resource for us is the example, the teaching, and the prayers of the saints [and *beat*] of the Order of Preachers” (RFG, 27). The life and ministry of Bl. Margaret has been a part of the study and spiritual readings of the brothers.

In the Central Seminary (CS) of the University of Santo Tomás, *Bukluran Kanlungan*, one of the groupings in the CS, decided to take Bl. Margaret of the City of Castello as their patroness at the start of Formation Year 2018-2019. A seminarian once said: “We see her as a refuge of the neglected, the abandoned, the sick which reflects the values that we would like to imitate in our *Bukluran* (*kanlungan* means ‘refuge’).” Every evening, after the *Angelus* (or *Regina Caeli*), the seminarians pray the ‘Prayer for the Canonization of Bl. Margaret of the City of Castello’ before her small image. Every year a Mass in honor of their patroness is celebrated by the entire Seminary community.

The *Dominican Laity in the Philippines* holds dear the devotion to the saints and blessed of the Order as one of the chief sources from which they draw strength to advance in their proper vocation (cf. *Rule*, II §10). Two chapters of the Dominican Laity were placed under the patronage of Bl. Margaret. Likewise, the *Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic* promotes the devotion towards all the saints and blessed of the Order, as well as the imitation of their example as stipulated in their rule. Therefore, the study of the life and ministry of Bl. Margaret and devotion to her could be a source of their sanctification especially that the *Lives of Dominican Saints* is part of the recommendations for the topics for their continuing program of formation.

The *Novena Prayer in honor of Bl. Margaret of the City of Castello* is prayed devotedly every Thursday at 5:30 pm at the Santo Domingo Church in Quezon City followed by the Eucharistic celebration. The processional images of Bl. Margaret are used in different parts of the Philippines especially in Quezon City, Manila, Marikina, and Pampanga. The copperplate engraving of *Beata Margarita de Castelo* by Carlos Borromeo in Fr. Francisco Gainza, O.P.'s *Milicia de Jesucristo: Manual de los Hermanos y Hermanas de la Tercero Orden de la Penitencia de Santo Domingo*, published in Manila in 1859, is believed to be her earliest depiction in the Philippines. Furthermore, Bl. Margaret has been popularly depicted during the 'March of Saints' on November 1, when children and adults are dressed as saints.

A number of organizations and institutions have been placed under her tutelage: Pro-Life Philippines, Bl. Margaret of Castello Movement, Bl. Margaret of Castello School, Bl. Margaret of Castello PWD Ministry in Santisimo Rosario Parish-UST, and the Bl. Margaret of Castello Chapel in *Tahanang Walang Hagdanan*⁷

Abandoned and neglected, Margaret was the *Hidden Pearl* who ministered to the abandoned and neglected. Challenged by the times, the Philippines is dubbed as the *Pearl of the Orient* whose resiliency allows herself to rise above the challenges. The encounter between the two pearls is an attestation of the devotion to Bl. Margaret of Castello in the Philippines. ■

Fr. Louie Coronel, O.P.

Foundress of a Dominican Sisters' Congregation in the Philippines on the Road to Beatification

In the district of Molo, Iloilo City, Philippines, there lived a very a pious, wealthy and generous couple- Don Ignacio Arroyo and Doña Maria Pidal Arroyo. They repeatedly expressed to the Most Rev. James P. McCloskey, Bishop of Jaro their desire to

contribute to the establishment of a religious congregation in the diocese. They not only pledged part of their wealth to provide for the foundation, but offered wholeheartedly most of all their only daughter, Maria Beatriz del Rosario Arroyo, who was already a perpetually professed member of the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena in Intramuros, Manila.



Venerable Rosario of the Visitation – Foundress Dominican sisters of the Most Holy Rosary of the Philippines

On July 24, 1925 the formal permit for the foundation of the Congregation, formerly known as the Beaterio del Santisimo Rosario, was issued by the Sacred Congregation of Religious to Bishop McCloskey. The bishop of Jaro wanted the Congregation to educate the youth of the diocese, to take care of the orphans and the sick, and to teach Christian Doctrine to the people.

The Arroyo family residence in Molo, became the cradle of the new religious foundation which until now houses the Motherhouse of the Congregation. On February 18, 1927 four Dominican Sisters of the Dominican Sisters of Siena came to Molo, Iloilo City to form the nucleus of the Congregation. They were under the spiritual guidance of the Father Provincial of the Dominican fathers of the Most Holy Rosary of the Philippines; the Congregation later became officially affiliated to the Order of Preachers in January 16, 1959. The Mill Hill Fathers, the Augustinian Fathers and the Diocesan Clergy also helped in the spiritual and temporal affairs.

In 1947 when the then archbishop of Jaro, Most Rev. Jose Ma. Cuenco encouraged the sisters to engage in the apostolate of education in rural areas, Sisters were sent to school and congregational schools started to open in the Archdioceses of Jaro and Capiz. Soon schools were opened too in the Dioceses of San Jose de Antique and Bacolod. In

⁷ Tahanang Walang Hagdanan, Inc. (TWHI) (literally, a house without stairs) is a non-stock, non-government organization, which provides services to persons with disabilities (PWD) in the Philippines.

1964, the Diocese of Honolulu, Hawaii asked for some teaching Sisters to administer diocesan-owned schools. In the early 70's the Diocese of Tagum, Davao del Norte asked for the same. In 1982, a mission in Kenya was opened to take care of handicapped children.

In October 7, 1985, the Congregation was granted the Pontifical Right Status.

96 years later, the Sisters are present 42 houses in Philippines, USA, Kenya and Italy with 238 professed members and two Regional Houses (Hawaii Region and Mindanao Region) preaching and collaborating in the areas of education,

catechetical instruction, retreat ministries and health services of the Church.

With many people attesting the sanctity of the Foundress, fifty years after her death, a formal petition was made for the opening of the cause of her beatification. On October 7, 2009 a Diocesan Inquiry for the Causes of Beatification and Canonization was opened and on June 12,

2019, a decree on the heroic virtues of the Venerable Mother Rosario of the Visitation was promulgated by the Church. ■

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