

into the sought after advisor of nobles and servants, into the learned spiritual teacher who knew how to pronounce the word that pointed to the hidden Christ, as the true mystics and contemplatives of the Mystery know well how to do.

He was proclaimed Blessed on September 21, 2013 in Bergamo, Italy by Pope Francis.



BROTHER THOMAS WITH A FEW OF HIS CAPUCHIN FRIENDS

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Blessed Thomas Acerbis of Olera

(1563 – 1631)



Confessor

Blessed Thomas Acerbis of Olera

Little is known about the birth of Thomas Acerbis at the end of 1563 in Olera, a small village at the mouth of the Serio River, and of his childhood. The child of peasants and shepherds, until age seventeen he was also a peasant and shepherd who helped his parents in their work. Illiterate because the small village lacked a school, he decided to become a Capuchin and was received in the order on September 12, 1580 at the friary of Santa Croce di Cittadella in Verona, Italy, becoming a lay Friar of the Province of Venice. Although a lay Friar, he was able to learn how to read and write. Living in the school and the choir, his remarkable qualities and above all his virtues came to light during the three years of formation.

He made his religious profession on July 5, 1584 and was charged with the delicate and essential service of questing (begging) in Verona. He carried out this task until 1605 when he was transferred to Vicenza where he was assigned the same task. There he remained until 1612 before moving to Rovereto from 1613 to 1617. He then went to Padua in 1618 and was assigned as the porter of the friary, and in 1619, a few months after his arrival at the friary of Conegliano, he was sent to be part of the new Province of North Tyrol at the request of Archduke Leopold V of Habsburg. In the same year he reached Innsbruck, where he was once again assigned to questing. At the time Austria was the "bridgehead" for the Catholic reform and above all the 'Catholic reconquest' of the German lands.

Obedience and humility made him the 'questing brother' for almost fifty years; love for souls made him a 'tireless apostle' in proclaiming the Gospel. To everyone he met, he spoke of the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. He taught the faith to all, both little and the great. He asked everyone, both the great and the humble, to commit themselves to love. A true apostle, many "were astounded, and it seemed humanly impossible that a simple lay Friar should speak, as he spoke, in such an elevated way about God." His commitment was a fire of love. "Everywhere he spoke of the things of God with such spirit and devotion that everyone was put in awe and wonder."

At the same time, he invited all to seek peace and forgiveness; he visited and comforted the sick; he listened to and encouraged the poor; reading consciences, he denounced evil and facilitated conversions. In order to obtain from God what he envisioned for those he met, he would stay awake at night in prayer, scourging his body, imposing fasts and austerities upon himself for the salvation of others.

Brother Thomas was also a promoter of vocations to the consecrated life. In Vicenza he sponsored the erection of the monastery of the Capuchin Poor Clare's, built at Porta Nuova in 1612 – 1613. At Rovereto he sought from the commissioners of the city a Poor Clare monastery, which was then built in 1642. There he met and guided the thirteen-year-old Bernardina Floriani, who would become the mystic Venerable

Giovanna Maria Della Croce. In Tyrol he was the spiritual guide of the poor of the Inn Valley, catechist, and promoter and defender of the Tridentine decrees for a true Catholic reform. Starting in 1617 he was a friend and spiritual director to the scientist Ippolito Guarinoni of Hall, court physician in Innsbruck. There are many letters written to the archduchesses Maria Cristina of Habsburg and Eleonora, sister of Leopold V. Brother Thomas was also the spiritual guide to Leopold and his wife Claudia de Medici. He had frequent meetings with Leopold and his wife at their palace and there were many correspondence between them.

To everyone he met, he taught the "high wisdom of love" that "one learns from the precious wounds of Christ," urging them to take refuge in "happiness in suffering." He also counseled Archbishop Paris von Lodron, Prince of Salzburg and he was also the spiritual director of Emperor Ferdinand II, staying at his side during the Thirty Years' War (1618 – 1648). During his stay in Vienna (1620 – 1621), Brother Thomas favored the conversion to the Catholic faith of Eva Maria Rettinger, widow of George Fleicher, count of Lerchenberg, who then entered Nonnberg Abbey as a Benedictine nun and became abbess. Still in Vienna, in 1620, he drafted the "moral concepts against the heretics," published posthumously in *Fire of Love*. The source of his writings is revealed wherein he states: "I have never read a syllable of books: but I strive to read the suffering Christ."

Love of Our Lady in his writings recognizes, among other things, her Immaculate Conception and Assumption. He made three pilgrimages to the Holy House of Loreto (1623, 1625, 1629), recalling that "arriving at that Holy House, I seemed to be in paradise." To his friend Ippolito Guarinoni he pointed out a location near Hall, at the Volders bridge on the Inn River, wherein a church dedicated to the Immaculate Conception could be built. In 1620, the foundations were laid after many criticisms and difficulties had been overcome, the church was completed in 1654. It was the first church on German-speaking land dedicated to the Immaculate Conception and St. Charles Borromeo. Even today it is considered an Austrian national monument.

Many who were present at his death, which came on May 3, 1631, considered it a 'death of love.' He was buried on Sunday, May 5, in the crypt of the Chapel of Our Lady in the Capuchin church in Innsbruck.

Every historical period has its own difficulties and struggles. Brother Thomas of Olera lived in a complex society, full of contradictions and violent clashes, but also in a fascinating time that let shine through and shed light on the passion of man and his desire either to assert himself or to let God assert and show himself, visibly and tangibly. The Capuchin Order had entrusted questing to Brother Thomas, the 'seeking' for the subsistence of the Friars and the poor of the friary; grace transformed him