



BLESSED MARGARET OF CASTELLO



Here is our first attempt at a quarterly supplement of *eLumen*, an internet initiative of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic, St. Joseph's Province, USA. This year we are introducing some Dominican Blesseds and Saints. *eLumen* has always sent the Friars' Calendars, with the Dominican Blesseds and Saints Calendars, along with its monthly newsletters. Now this year, 2012, we will have quarterly supplements highlighting specific Dominicans.

We have the honor to introduce Blessed Margaret of Castello, introduced by the Blessed Margaret of Castello Pro-Chapter, Lewiston, Maine. They meet at the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, in Lewiston. For more information on their chapter, and/or, Blessed Margaret, please contact: lewistonlaydominicans@gmail.com

Please use this hagiographical supplement as much as you can. Make copies for your chapters; send it to those whom might be interested. It is very appropriate to be used for ongoing formation. May it bring prayers, and healing, and encourage study. Let it become alive with the joy, and love, and the inspiration of Blessed Margaret of Castello.

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THE LIFE OF BLESSED MARGARET OF CASTELLO

Margaret of Castello was born in Italy about 1287, more than 100 years after the birth of St. Dominic. She was born to nobility in the Apennine Mountains of Italy, just southeast of Florence.

Her soldier father, Parisio, had stormed the fortress of Metola, capturing it in a military siege. As a local hero he and his bride Emilia set up household there and started their family. But the birth of Margaret was a blow to their pride.

Margaret was born facially disfigured, blind, and with spinal deformities, making her smaller than the usual size and unable to walk easily. Her parents were so ashamed, that they hid her from the general public. For about 13 years they imprisoned her in a cell next to a small church in the neighboring forest. Those within the castle walls who had become accustomed to her were aghast at Parisio's decision, but only the castle chaplain, Padre Cappellano, interceded. He was her religious instructor, and he told her parents that Margaret had remarkable intelligence, but even this did not persuade Parisio, who never loved his daughter from the start.

It appears that in exile, she continued to participate in the life of the sacraments and Mass with the chaplain, according to the book by Fr. William Bonniwell, O.P., *The Life of Blessed Margaret of Castello*. After 13 years of imprisonment, she was moved for about a year to an underground vault in a neighboring town, which her mother and entourage had fled to during another military skirmish. It was during this political unrest in Italy that history records that Pope Clement V moved to live in



Avignon, France, much to the dismay of Catholic Italians.

When life settled down once again, Emilia was interested in, and convinced her husband to take Margaret to the tomb of a Franciscan layman, where miracles were being touted. They traveled quite a way in hopes of a cure for Margaret only to be disappointed. They abandoned her there, to sleep in doorways and stables.

After a year as a beggar in the streets, she became known for her cheerfulness, kindness, and patience. She was adopted by the poor of the city into their humble homes—taken in for periods of time by different families. Bonniwell writes, “[I]t was in the homes of the poor that the blind girl experienced for the first time what her heart had hungered for during her life, and what her own parents had denied her: a warm welcome, sincere affection, and unselfish love.”

The families who took her in were mysteriously changed, some attaining more cheerful attitudes themselves, or they became materially improved. Stories of this ilk circulated and eventually a monastery of nuns became aware of Margaret and invited her to join them. The local bishop was able to find records of her baptism so as to allow her admission, but he never disclosed the identity of her abusive parents.

Margaret was very happy living there, diligently adopting the Rule of the monastery, which unfortunately, the other nuns had grown lax in following. She stood out in her piety, and for that she was met with hostility. The Prioress pressured her to adjust to their way of life, giving Margaret an ultimatum. However, her conscience was stronger than her need to fit in, and she was expelled.

After the dismissal, according to Bonniwell, “It was while Margaret was the object of almost universal contempt and ridicule that she met the



Blessed Margaret's
Sanctuary

Mantellate. Her favorite church was the Chiesa della Carita ... At this time the church was in the charge of the Dominican friars. For this reason it was also the headquarters of the Mantellate."

The Mantellate were lay women who were members of the Order of Penance of St. Dominic. (It developed into the Third Order of St. Dominic, and today they are known as Lay Dominicans, both men and women.) These women continued to live at home and to do good works in the community, but they bound themselves to a religious schedule of life and they wore the Dominican religious habit. It "consisted of a white tunic, with a leather belt, while over the head was worn a long, soft white veil in the shape of an oblong scarf. There was no scapular, but the members wore a black cloak or mantella, and it was this which gave rise to the popular names of these women—Mantallate." Young, unmarried females were not usually allowed to join this group of older, widowed women.

After becoming a Mantellata, Margaret lived with a well-to-do family who was fond of her, and eventually the lady of the house and her daughter also joined the Mantallate. Margaret's second and last place to reside was with a nobleman's family, even richer than the first. But she asked to live in the simplest room, not the one that was originally assigned to her. In her friendship with Lady Gregoria and her husband Venturino, she was able to engage them in her mission to improve prison conditions in the city.

Increasingly, apparent miracles would happen. For a friend who had developed a tumor on her eye, Margaret placed her hand on it. Bonniwell reports that a dependable medieval narrator said that "the tumor disappeared and [her] sight became perfect." Also, a fire that raged quickly through her benefactor's house and was not contained by the town's volunteers, was suddenly extinguished when her mantle was thrown on the blaze.

One time while ministering in the prison with Lady Gregoria, prisoners became agitated, and gasped in amazement as Margaret rose some 20 inches from the ground. "Her hands were still joined in the attitude of prayer, but her head was

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Prayer in Honor of Blessed Margaret of Castello

Father,

Your care extends to every
human person,
No matter what afflictions they suffer,
And you uphold the dignity
of every human life, regardless
of the false ways that the world
may calculate its value.
You gave us
Blessed Margaret of Castello
as a sign and a challenge.
You permitted your glory to shine
through her human weakness,
And called those around her to love her
despite her physical limitations.
Forgive us when we fail to defend
the least among us.

Through the intercession
of Blessed Margaret,
Give us grace to speak up
for the outcast
And to welcome those
who are rejected.
When this brief life is over,
Grant that we who have
welcomed all
our brothers and sisters,
May be welcomed by you into
the life that never ends.
We pray through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Pray the Rosary Daily

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now thrown back as if she were looking through the roof of the prison. ... Her face, normally ugly, was now transformed by a glorious radiant beauty that was not of this earth," reports Bonniwell.

Bonniwell also says, "During the last years of her life, she revealed to her confessor that whenever she attended Mass she could see Christ Incarnate at the altar." He continued to question her about this since she was blind. But she insisted, "[F]rom the Consecration until the Communion I do not see the priest, the crucifix, the missal, or anything else. But I do see Christ our Lord."

She died at age 33 in 1320. Her body was taken to the Cheisa della Carita. The local Mantallate and the Dominican friars participated in the funeral, as well as a multitude of people. The crowds protested the burial at the cloister, shouting that instead she should be buried at the church. The argument could not be settled quickly and the pallbearers grew tired of holding the bier with her shrouded body, and put it down. Meanwhile a man and his wife brought to the church their young crippled daughter, and placed her next to Margaret's body on the ground. They implored Margaret's intercession for her cure. Bonniwell writes that the left arm of Margaret was rising and reaching over and touching the girl who had never been able to walk, until she rose unaided to her feet. The cure decided the fate of her body's final placement—in the sanctuary of the church.

Numerous medieval documents sworn to before notary publics testify to permanent cures of the blind, the deaf, the lame, and those with other afflictions through imploring Margaret's intercession. Her fame spread. But then her popularity was suddenly overshadowed by the calamity of the Black Death, which devastated all of Italy and the rest of Europe for three years, killing several million people. It was not until 1609 that she was beatified, and April 13th became her feast day.

The incorrupt body of Blessed Margaret is in a glass sarcophagus at the School for the Blind, Citta de Castello, Italy.

From *The Life of Blessed Margaret of Castello*, by Fr. William R. Bonniwell, O.P.

BLESSED MARGARET'S SPIRITUALITY

A medieval biographer, according to Fr. William Bonniwell, O.P., reported that the day after Margaret became a Mantallata, she daily recited the 150 psalms of David, the Office of the Blessed Virgin, and the Office of the Holy Cross from memory. She interrupted her sleep at midnight to recite Matins and she gave up going back to sleep to enter into meditation and contemplation.

People came to recognize the tapping of her cane throughout the town, on her way to help the sick and the dying and also those who were discouraged by the trials of life. She ministered to those in prison and was able to help improve conditions for them with the help of the Mantallate.



Bonniwell also says, "From childhood she had always been devoted to prayer, but now she was being swept to the heights of contemplation every day. It was noticed that this profound contemplation was frequently induced whenever she was in the presence of great misery and suffering, for then her thoughts would instantly turn to the sufferings the Savior underwent on earth, and at once she would become—by reason of the intensity of her meditation—utterly oblivious of everything about her. This happened to her nearly every time she visited the prison. It was witnessed not only by the prisoners, but also by many reliable persons who gave sworn testimony concerning it."

Source: Fr. William Bonniwell, O.P.



*Blessed Margaret of Castello,
Pray for us.*

STATUS OF HER CAUSE FOR CANONIZATION

The holy death of Blessed Margaret of Castello occurred on April 13, 1320, when she was thirty-three years of age. After her death, more than two hundred miracles occurred in confirmation of her heroic sanctity.



The preliminary steps toward the cause of her beatification were undertaken by the Dominican Order, but at

various times it languished, until it was almost forgotten. During the sixteenth century, interest in her cause was rekindled after the discovery of her incorrupt body. On June 9, 1558, the bishop authorized the transfer of the Beata's (Blessed's) remains to a new coffin after it was noticed that the original one was rotting away.

The exhumation was undertaken in the presence of a number of official witnesses who were awe-stricken when the coffin was opened. While the clothing on the body had crumbled to dust, the body itself was found to be perfectly preserved, as though Margaret had just died. It was obvious that she had been a dwarf, her body measuring only four feet long. Her head was rather large in proportion to the rest of the thin figure. The forehead was broad, with the face tapering to the chin. Her nose was quite prominent, and her small, even teeth were serrated at the edges.



The witnesses noticed that the hands and feet of Blessed Margaret of Castello were small, that the right leg was an inch and a half shorter than the left (which caused her to walk with a limp) and that the arms were crossed in front of the body, with the left arm and hand being slightly raised without support. The body was thoroughly examined

by physicians, who declared that no chemicals had been used to preserve it.

Blessed Margaret of Costello had often been heard to say, "Oh, if you only knew what I have in my heart!" Inside her heart were found three pearls on which appeared to be carved religious symbols, and the images of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and St Joseph.



The body was re clothed in a fresh habit and was placed in a new coffin. Many miracles followed this ceremony, and the cause, which was undertaken with renewed interest, came to a successful conclusion on October 19, 1609, when the Church officially recognized Margaret's sanctity, pronouncing her a beata and designating April 13 as her feast day. <http://causesforjoy.blogspot.com/p/blesseds.html>

The body of Blessed Margaret, which has never been embalmed, is dressed in a Dominican habit, and lies under the high altar of the Church of St Domenico at Citta-di-Castello, Italy. The arms of the body are still flexible, the eyelashes are present, and the nails are in place on the hands and feet. The



Bl. Margaret's body under the high altar of the Church of St Domenico at Citta-di-Castello, Italy.

coloring of the body has darkened slightly and the skin is dry and somewhat hardened, but by all standards the preservation can be considered a remarkable condition, having

Status of Cause

Continued from previous page

endured for over six hundred fifty years.

"For my father and my mother have left me: but the Lord hath taken me up." *Psalm 26: 10*

From: *The Incorruptibles*, TAN Books



Margaret of Castello's cause had been re-examined in 2000 and, in the Diocese of Castello, Italy, a diocesan inquiry on her reputation and fame of sanctity is proceeding. At the conclusion of this phase, the cause will be studied and examined in Rome. Another miracle will be examined for the final Canonization Decree. This miracle to be examined is in a case from Silver Spring, Maryland! It has been studied by a medical doctor of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints but requires verification with more medical tests. If the miracle were upheld, it would be the one needed for her canonization. This is such good news!

Other major works to help spread devotion to Blessed Margaret are as follows:

- In 1999, a canonical recognition of the body of Blessed Margaret under the main altar of the Church of Saint Dominic in Castello took place.
- A small fragment has been taken from her body in order to prepare relics.
- Her biography was published in Polish in 2001 and in Italian in 2002.

- In 2003, her habit was discovered and has been given by the Dominican Order to the Shrine of Blessed Margaret at the Church of Saint Dominic in Castello.

The Dominican Curia has begun an aggressive campaign to raise funds to help defray the expenses of the cause. They are asking for \$40,000 to \$50,000. The summer of 2003 the guild raised over \$10,000 for this cause. Any money raised will go directly to further her cause of canonization. Could the chapters of the Dominican Laity consider raising funds for this cause? The money can be sent directly to the Dominican Curia or sent to the shrine here in Columbus. Most importantly, please pray for our efforts and all who are working so hard for Little Margaret's canonization.

<http://www.3op.org/stmargaret.php>



OP Moment

The Priests For Life movement has made Bl. Margaret of Castello their patron saint. If Margaret were born today, surely she would have been aborted. She was deformed, dwarfed, and blind. She is the patroness of all the unwanted.

Despite her infirmities and ill treatment, she was serene, courageous, and optimistic. She found strength in prayer, the Mass, the Eucharist, and her vocation as a Dominican. She is patroness of the Pro-Life Movement.