

ST. JOSEPH OF COPERTINO

BY

THE REV. ANGELO PASTROVICCHI, O.M.C.

TRANSLATED AND ADAPTED INTO ENGLISH BY

THE REV. FRANCIS S. LAING, O.M.CAP.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH IN 1918 BY B. HERDER BOOK COMPANY

Nihil Obstat

Fr. Aloysius, O. M. Cap.

Fr. Felix M., O. M. Cap.

Censores Deputati

Imprimatur

Fr. Ignatius, O. M. Cap.

Minister Provincialis

Nihil Obstat

F. G. Holweck

Censor Librorum

St. Louis, 27 April 1918

Imprimatur

✠ Joannes J. Glennon

Archbishop of St. Louis

St. Louis, 29 April 1918



tradidi.com

© 2024 Tradidi. All rights reserved. While the text of this work is in the public domain, this edition's formatting, design, and any additional materials are protected by copyright.

Printed on 26 August 2024

SKU: 144

MARIAE IMMACULATAE,

“REGINAE ORDINIS MINORUM”
(Pius X, 8 September 1910)

“MATRI BONORUM STUDIORUM”
(Pius X, 16 May 1906)

Contents

Preface	i
1. The “Supernal Vocation”	1
2. As Gold in a Furnace	9
3. Fellow-Citizen of the Seraphic Francis	15
4. Caught Up Into Paradise	21
5. Good Odor of Christ	31
6. Evangelical Perfection.	45
7. In His Life He Did Great Wonders	55
8. Glorified in the Sight Of Kings.	67
9. My Life Is “Hid With Christ in God”	71
10. A Saint’s “Paradise”	79
11. Obtaining the Prize	87
12. The “Memory of an Admirable Saint”	93

Preface

“Some persons derive most benefit from reading the lives of the saints in which the supernatural and the extraordinary abound. They delight to see the wonderful display of the power of Divine grace in so frail a creature as man. These biographies, that are written more for our admiration than for our imitation, strengthen our faith in the supernatural, and inspire us with a great confidence in the goodness and power of God. And certainly in these days we need to stimulate and strengthen the life of faith and trust in Providence.”¹

The rapturous flights of St. Joseph of Copertino have hardly a parallel as to frequency and duration in the lives of the saints. What is related of Christina Mirabilis, who lived 1150-1224, has been suspected of exaggeration,² but our saint, “having lived in more recent times, this his miraculous characteristic could easily be established in an authentic manner.”³

¹ Cardinal Vaughan, *The Young Priest*, London, 1904, p. 108.

² A. Kaufmann, *Thomas von Chantimpré*, Cologne, 1899, pp. 41-43.

³ J. Görres, *Die christliche Mystik*, Regensburg, vol. II, p. 539.—Daumer, a one-time bitter enemy of Christianity, regards these miraculous facts as well established by reason of the “mistrust and suspicion to which St. Joseph was subject during life ... and the severity with which the ecclesiastical enquiry concerning him was conducted.” Apropos of Fr. Pastrovicchi’s biography he writes: “It appears to be in keeping with fairness and the general rules of historical criticism to accept the results of such an investigation.” (Christina Mirabilis, etc., pp. 7, 38).— Note the following words of Norman Douglas, a Protestant, in the *North American Review* (vol. CXCVIII, July, 1913, pp. 100-107: A Pioneer of Aviation): “... it

Father Pastrovicchi wrote his life of St. Joseph on the occasion of the beatification of the saint, 1753. Pope Benedict XIV, to whom the work is dedicated, wished that for each fact related the episcopal and apostolic processes should be cited. This was done. Father Suyskens remarks that the caution of citing the official documents was well employed. “Since the words of the Psalmist, ‘God is wonderful in His saints’ (Psa. 67:36), were verified in a singular manner in the life of St. Joseph, it was fitting that the extraordinary facts of his life should be attested in such a manner that credence could not be denied them.”⁴

Father Gattari regards these miracles⁵ as wrought in support of the doctrine of the Real Presence, the authority of the

may be urged that a kind of enthusiasm for their distinguished brother monk may have tempted the inmates of his convent to exaggerate his rare gifts. Nothing of the kind. He performed flights not only in Copertino, but in various large towns of Italy, such as Naples, Rome, and Assisi. And the spectators were by no means an assemblage of ignorant personages, but men whose rank and credibility would have weight in any section of society” (p. 103). For the rest, this article of Mr. Douglas is, at best, but a cynical travesty. The author repeats this “trace of light fooling,” as he styles it (p. 160), with additions, decidedly stupid and scurrile, in *Old Calabria*, Boston, 1915, pp. 68-79. He quotes the edition of Pastrovicchi published in 1767, which he terms the “official biography.” The dedication by Father Rossi misled him to regard Fr. Rossi as the author.

⁴ *Acta Sanctorum*, September, tom. V, p. 993.

⁵ On the supernatural character of rapturous flights see the discussion, “Is There a Natural Levitation?” in *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, by A. Poulain, S. J., London, 1912, pp. 550-554; *Surbled-Sleumer, Die Moral in ihren Beziehungen zur Medizin und Hygiene*, II (Hildesheim, 1909), pp. 174-181. “The Church has certainly not based canonization on the single fact of levitation, but without doubt she regards it as the hand of God. She looks to the habits of life of the favored person, and in particular to the circumstances of the levitation itself for proof of the supernatural character of this repeated phenomenon (pp. 178-9).

Pope, sacramental Confession and the veneration due to saints, truths which in the time of the saint were impugned by the followers of Luther and other heretics. The fame of the flights of St. Joseph spread throughout Europe and led to conversions as in the case of the Duke of Brunswick.⁶ Another explanation offered is, that these miracles counteracted the diabolical arts (witchcraft and necromancy, especially in the kingdom of Naples) and superstition then prevalent.⁷

To a degree our biography is a “panegyric,” with its drawbacks of “generalization” and “superlatives,” but it is by no means “a dreary inventory of virtues and miracles.” Some of the narratives, as in Chapter 6 and 9, are very charming, “invested with all that tender simplicity and charm . . . which voiced itself in the poetic narratives of the Fioretti.”

This first extensive biography of St. Joseph of Copertino in English was made from Sintzel’s German translation of Fr. Pastrovicchi’s Life of the saint. Only after years was it possible to procure the Italian original and verify the rendering. In the editions of Pastrovicchi of 1753 and 1767 the text is not divided into chapters; these (thirty in all) are indicated by Roman numerals at the beginning of paragraphs; the chapter titles and the references to the Acts are printed in the margin. The division of the text and the chapter titles in the present work are new. The original marginal titles are preserved in part as sub-titles in the *Table of Contents*. The numerous references to the Acts in

⁶ Gattari, Prefazione.

⁷ Gattari, l. c., Montanari, pp. XIV-XV.

the original have been omitted; likewise, in the interest of delicacy or conciseness, several passages in the body of the work. Details of the canonization,⁸ sanctuary, etc., have been added. Other small additions have been made throughout the work, dates and names have been inserted, and obscure passages made clear. The editions used for these changes are marked in the bibliographical list.

Many friends have aided in preparing this little book. The Conventual Fathers at Osimo kindly donated a copy of the first edition of Pastrovicchi. During a visit to Rome Rev. A. T. Ennis (Concordia, Kansas) procured for me several rare works. Some of the bibliographical details I owe to Rev. Edward Jannitto, O. M. C. (Osimo), Rev. Michael Bihl, O. F. M. (Quaracchi), Rev Fr. Maurice, O. M. Cap. (Quebec), and Rev Engelbert Rosenmaier, O. M. Cap. (Milwaukee). All these I sincerely thank, as, too, the Franciscan Fathers (Washington) and the Benedictine Fathers (Atchison) for the use of books, Rev. Felix M. Kirsch, O. M. Cap. (Herman, Pa.) and other fellow-religious for suggestions toward improving the manuscript.

F. S. L.

⁸ Chapter 30 differs in the editions of 1753 and 1767, the latter edition substituting an account of the three miracles approved in the process of canonization for that of thirteen miracles in the earlier edition and omitting the documents (pp. 97-108) of the first edition.

Chapter 1

THE “SUPERNAL VOCATION”

Phil. 3:14

Copertino, the birthplace of our saint, is situated on the peninsula of Apulia, half-way between the Gulf of Taranto and the Strait of Otranto. In the seventeenth century the town belonged to the province of Otranto, Kingdom of Naples.

But few particulars are recorded regarding the parents of St. Joseph, Felix Desa and Frances Penara. Felix was a carpenter. Kind of heart, he had given security for the debts of others. As often happens, the debtors defaulted and the creditors seized Desa's house and would have had him imprisoned had he not fled to a holy place which enjoyed the right of asylum. Meanwhile the mother of our saint fled from her home and, unable to reach the house of a friend, took refuge in a stable.¹ Here, on 17 June 1603, a child was born. He was baptized in the church of our Lady of the Snow² and received the name of Joseph Mary.³

As a child Joseph was a spirited lad and inclined to anger. His mother strove to repress his exuberance of spirit and all manifestations of undue boldness by stern rebuke and kind admonition. She was so severe that in after years the saint

¹ Gattari, 1.

² Bernino, 3.

³ Gattari, 2.

used to say he needed no novitiate as a religious because he had passed a novitiate under his mother.⁴

These efforts of the pious mother bore abundant fruit. Joseph delighted in visiting the churches of his native city. At home he erected a little altar, before which he spent part of the day and the night reciting rosaries and Litanies. At the age of eight he experienced his first ecstasies. When, at school, he would hear the organ or the songs the teacher practised with the more advanced scholars, he would let his book fall and remain immovable with eyes raised to heaven and lips parted. Owing to this his companions called him “*bocca aperta*,” “open mouth.”⁵

About this time⁶ Joseph was afflicted with painful ulcers. This trial he bore with extraordinary patience, seeking no other relief than the consolation of Holy Mass. Unable to walk, he entreated his mother to carry him in her arms to the church every morning. A hermit of some repute as a healer, who lived near the church of our Lady of Grace in Galatone, endeavored to cure the child by employing the surgical means then in vogue,⁷ but to no purpose; long neglect had seemingly rendered the malady incurable. After four years of suffering God intervened. One day when the hermit had applied to the ulcers some oil taken from a lamp kept burning before an image of our Lady of Grace, the boy suddenly felt relieved from all pain. With the aid of a

⁴ Bernino, 3.

⁵ Bernino, 4-5.

⁶ “When little more than seven years” (Bernino, 5); “from 8-14” (Daumer, 45).

⁷ ‘*Col ferro, e col fuoco*,’ this would suggest cauterizing; according to Daumer (46) the diseased flesh was removed by forceps.

cane he was then able to walk from the church of our Lady of Galatone to Copertino, a distance of nine miles. Before his cure he could visit the hermit only by lying helpless on a horse led by his mother. It need hardly be said that the boy showed his gratitude by an increased love of God and greater zeal in His service.

In his youth our saint was apprenticed to a cobbler.⁸ Cardinal Brancati has recorded many of the pious practices of this period of Joseph's life. Such were his frequent visits to various churches, assistance at Holy Mass and the wearing of a painful cilice. He abstained from all fleshmeat, and contented himself with vegetables, which he seasoned with wormwood to give them a bitter taste. His fasts were so severe that he would at times abstain from all food for two or three consecutive days. His body was thus weakened, but his spirit was so lifted up to God that, when asked why he had eaten nothing, he would reply with charming grace, "I did not think of it."

With the years there grew upon Joseph a desire to leave the deceitful world and unite himself more closely to God. Feeling a great attraction to the Order of Conventuals, he applied for assistance to his paternal uncle, Father Francis Desa, a religious of that Order. This priest, however, regarded his nephew as unfit for the exalted dignity of the priesthood because of his lack of education, and was unwilling to assist him. In spite of this refusal Joseph persevered in his resolve to enlist under the banner of the holy patriarch St. Francis, whom to follow he felt called by a continued inspiration

⁸ Bernino, 8.

of God. He therefore humbly requested Father Antony of Francavilla,⁹ Provincial of the Capuchins, to receive him into the Order as a lay-brother. His request was granted and he received the habit, taking the name of Stephen, in the monastery at Martina in August 1620.¹⁰

The path of the novice was beset with difficulties. He was employed in the kitchen and refectory, but displayed a woeful lack of ability. At times he could not distinguish wheat bread from rye bread, often he broke dishes by letting them fall, upset pots in putting wood on the fire and committed other blunders of a similar nature. Some have ascribed this awkwardness to a defect of sight. Another and truer explanation is that his surroundings inflamed him with the fire of divine love to such a degree that his soul was continually enraptured. God, whose ways are wonderful, permitted that after a trial of eight months Joseph was dismissed from the novitiate and deprived of the habit. This pained him so much that in after years he said, "It seemed to me as if my skin was torn off with the habit and my flesh rent from the bones."

Little care had been taken of Joseph's secular apparel since his investment. His hat and shoes and stockings were not forthcoming, and bare of head and foot he set out for Vetrara, where his uncle, Father Francis Desa,¹¹ was then preaching the Lenten sermons. By thus avoiding Copertino he meant to escape ridicule and reproach.

⁹ Bernino, 13

¹⁰ Bernino, *ibid.*

¹¹ Gattari, 5.

On the way he encountered great dangers. A number of savage shepherd-dogs set upon him. The shepherds came to his aid but, owing to his unusual guise, suspected him of being a spy of the banditti and were about to lay violent hands on him when, fortunately, one of them recognized him. They then spoke kindly to him and gave him some bread. Finally a horseman of terrific form appeared to him with a sword in his hand, crying, "Halt, spy!" as if he were a spy of the royal government. Hardly had the saint gone a few steps farther when, on turning about, he found the rider had disappeared from the vast plain, and said to himself, "It was Malatasca¹² [a name also used by St. Catharine of Siena to denote the evil one], who wished to frighten me and drive me to despair."

On his arrival at Vetrara he prostrated himself before his uncle and patiently bore his reproaches of "good-for-nothing" and "vagabond." To his uncle's query as to his strange attire and visit, he replied in simple humility, "The Capuchin Fathers have taken the habit from me because I am good for nothing." Moved by compassion, his uncle kept him till Easter (which in that year fell on 11 April)¹³ and then secretly brought him to Copertino. Joseph bore with invincible patience the upbraidings of his mother, who treated him with apparent severity, but in her heart loved him dearly. With tears she besought the civil authorities not to imprison him because of the debts of his father, who had died. Assisted

¹² This word was also used by Bl. Veronica of Binasco and St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi. "Malatasca" literally means evil sack (*Acta Sanctorum*, Sept. V, 1017).

¹³ *Acta Sanct.*, I, c., 994.

by Father Francis Desa, Father John Donatus,¹⁴ and other friars of the convent at Grottella, she finally obtained his admission as tertiary into the Order of Conventuals.¹⁵

To Joseph the investment as tertiary was a source of happiness, even though he was employed in tending the mule and in other servile occupations about the monastery. After some time he was appointed associate of his maternal uncle, Father John Donatus, a religious of great piety and learning. His new duties served to augment in his heart the flame of divine love. When he was sent out to gather alms for the needs of the monastery, the people were moved by his poor habit, his modest conduct, the charm and simplicity of his kind words, and so gave freely and generously. At the same time he aroused in them a horror of sin, zeal for virtue, and love of God. Within the monastery, his life was one of humble perseverance in lowly and fatiguing labor and of ready obedience at the word, or even beck, of each religious. To mortify his body he wore not only a cilice, but, in addition, an iron chain about his loins. He fasted strictly without intermission and, to gain more time for prayer, slept but little and this on a bed which consisted of three boards, a much-worn bearskin and a rough pallet of straw.

God's design was that Joseph should become a priest in the Order of Conventuals. The religious regarded the pious tertiary with favor, and at the Provincial Chapter held at Altamura, he was received into the Order as a cleric, 19 June

¹⁴ Gattari, 6.

¹⁵ The date of this investment is uncertain (*Acta Sanct.*, p. 1010).

1625. He retained his baptismal name, Joseph, and joyfully began his novitiate in the monastery at Grottella.

With great earnestness he endeavored to live for God alone and to acquire the knowledge necessary for the priesthood. He attained to a high degree of perfection by his withdrawal from all association with men in order to commune uninterruptedly with God in meditation. Other means which he employed, were humility, patience, and obedience. Regarding himself as the most despicable sinner on earth, he often said he had received the habit out of pure mercy. He patiently bore the severest reproaches for faults he had never committed. With alacrity he executed the most difficult and seemingly impossible tasks, which his superiors imposed on him to probe his virtue. To this obedience was added severe mortification of the flesh, in short, the practice of all virtues, which in time led his fellow religious to consider him as a model of holiness.

In studies Joseph made but little progress and was therefore often harshly rebuked by his novicemaster, to whom he would reply, "Have patience with me, you will thus acquire merit." In spite of his poor progress in learning he was admitted to solemn vows because of his great virtue and made his profession amid tears of joy.

Trusting in God and his holy Mother, whose powerful aid he had frequently implored, he received minor orders without previous examination, 30 January 1627, subdeaconship 27 February, of the same year, and deaconship 20 March. The examination on the latter occasion he passed in a providential manner; for the passage of the Gospel beginning with the

words, “Blessed is the womb that bore thee,” which the Bishop of Nardo gave him to explain, was the only one he had learned by long study and could well interpret.¹⁶ He was finally ordained priest 28 March 1628, by the Rt. Rev. John Baptist Detti, Bishop of Castro. This prelate was so pleased with the learning of the friars whom he had examined first, that he considered the others, among whom was Joseph, to be equally well prepared, and ordained them without examination.

¹⁶ Because of this occurrence St. Joseph is invoked as patron of examinations by students in Italy and France (Gattari, 171-172).

The rest of the pages have been removed from this preview..