

Saint Agnes 1268

Called from her early childhood to a profound union with her Divine Spouse, she was rewarded with abundant mystical graces and with the gift of working miracles. Even the infernal spirits were obliged to obey her.

The Holy Spirit acts differently on how to bring souls to a complete and definitive union with God. While some, like St. Paul, are shaken by a resounding fall and called to a radical conversion only after reaching maturity, others have their innocence preserved and reach perfection in charity from a tender age.

Yet regardless of the way travelled and even of age, all, without exception, at a certain moment were faithful to the voice of grace that clamoured within them, like that of Jesus saying to the Apostles: "Follow Me" (Matthew 9:9; John 1:43).

In the life of Agnes of Montepulciano, God's call was not long in being heard. At the time of her birth, several candles in the place were miraculously lit with divine flames. They announced the great mission of that girl who, by her virtues, would enlighten souls, thereby heeding the appeal of the Divine Master: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Vocation tested from childhood

By four years of age, Agnes had learned to pray the Our Father and Hail Mary, often preferring to forsake children's games to speak with God in a more secluded corner of the yard. Attracted by a voice that whispered in the depth of her heart, before she had even reached the age of ten she felt a desire to embrace religious life.

However, struggles and trials began at an early age. When she expressed to her parents her good desires, they tried every means to dissuade her.



It happened that one day, while passing by a hill close to the walls of Montepulciano, Agnes was violently attacked by a band of devils who, assuming the form of crows and cawing fiercely, attacked her head with their beaks and claws. There was a house of perdition in the vicinity that would later be destroyed and replaced by a house of Christ's spouses founded by the Saint, and the infernal spirits seemed to foresee the detriment this would cause them.

The unusual episode deeply worried her parents. The girl then categorically presented to them God's plans in her regard, telling them that similar things would follow if they continued to oppose the fulfilment of her vocation. Fearful, they had no other option than to heed the heavenly designs: they entrusted their daughter to religious life, allowing her to enter the monastery of the "Sisters of the Sack."¹ They had earned this appellation because, out of humility, they used a scapular made of rough cloth.

Fervent prayer and observance of the rule

The young religious was always joyful and tireless in the fulfilment of the rule. She fasted, prayed and did penance, being an angelic example to her sisters in the community, who were in awe of such a lofty degree of fervour and virtue. Her seriousness and continual progress toward perfection caused astonishment even among those most outstanding in obedience.

On one occasion, the bishop visited them and, enchanted with Agnes, gave this advice to the religious: "Mothers, take care in instructing this child, for her name will be as glorious for her homeland, as the Saint of the same name is for Rome.

Having been rewarded with innumerable mystical graces, her prayer life was lived in a continual ecstasy. Frequently during her spiritual colloquies, she entered into prolonged levitations. In the places where she prayed, roses and lilies habitually sprang up, exuding a pleasing and exceptional perfume. Assumed by such supernatural phenomena, she was not able to hide from her sisters the flames of love of God that blazed in her heart.

Upon entering the chapel, the religious often found her immersed in ecstasy, with her mantle covered with a shower of manna-like white grains. And on the day in which she professed her vows and received the veil, in Proceno, the chapel was filled with the same Heaven-sent manna, which fell in the

form of little crosses, as to symbolize the acceptance by the Crucified of the self-oblation made by His loving spouse.

Holding the Child Jesus in her arms

On another occasion, while she prayed in the monastery chapel, the Blessed Virgin appeared to her, carrying the Child Jesus. It was the feast of the Assumption, and the Queen of Angels placed her Son in Agnes' arms, allowing her to hold Him for a few moments.

Filled with joy and deeply touched, Agnes implored the Divine Infant to remain at her side or to take her with Him. Nevertheless, the time had not yet come for this desire to be realized, and soon Our Lady took Him back into her arms. Perceiving that the Divine Infant was about to leave, Agnes adroitly removed the little cross that He wore around His neck, and said to Him: "Since you are departing, at least leave me a memento of this day

Our Lady smiled at this pious theft and disappeared, leaving the Saint prostrate on the ground, tightly clutching the little cross in her hand.

Young superior of the monastery of Proceno

At fourteen years of age, St. Agnes left her first convent for a new foundation, in the city of Proceno, where she immediately became known for her virtue, winning the admiration and confidence of all. Many of the people, delighted with her, desired that she be appointed prioress of the monastery despite her young age, and they arranged the necessary dispensations. Thus, even before she had turned fifteen, the young religious received the office of governing the other sisters. Considering herself unworthy of the post she had received, Agnes redoubled her prayers and sacrifices: she only ate bread and water, the cold ground was her bed, and a stone her pillow.

Persevering in prayer, she obtained everything she asked of God. On one occasion, wishing to have a relic from the holy sites where Jesus had lived and shed his most precious Blood, a strong wind filled her hands with dust; an Angel had come to bring her clumps of earth that had been soaked by the Blood of Jesus. And if this were not enough, shortly thereafter the Angel gave her a piece of the clay basin in which the Blessed Virgin had bathed the Child Jesus in His infancy.

A devotee of the Eucharist, she felt constantly drawn to Jesus in the Host, never losing a minute that she might be able spend before the tabernacle. And, very often, when there was no opportunity to receive Communion from the hands of a priest, the Angels themselves were her ministers.

Power to expel demons

However, more than for her own spiritual profit, her ardent prayers benefitted those around her.

There was a possessed man in a neighbouring city of Proceno, whose behaviour was alarming. As no priest in the region could provide a solution, the desperate relatives of the poor man, desiring his cure, decided to turn to the holy abbess, whose miracles were known throughout the region.

Realizing that it would impossible to bring the victim to her, they asked Agnes to come with them to the unfortunate man's dwelling. As soon as the servant of Christ entered the city, the proud and crazed demon, who moments previously had seemed oblivious to anything that was said to him, began to roll the body of the possessed man violently from side to side.

When the holy religious set foot on the threshold of the house, she heard the cowardly and despondent whimpering of the devil: "I am not able to stand, because the virgin Agnes has entered!"⁴ Then the afflicted man was liberated from the spirit that had tormented him for so long.

A contemplative soul, with a solid interior life, St. Agnes progressed daily in spiritual perfection, without letting herself be consumed by earthly concerns. Neither the lack of money, nor the absence of bread was an obstacle for the intrepid abbess. In face of any material problem, she addressed her supplications to God, and was efficaciously attended. Frequently, the bread multiplied so as to feed the religious of her monastery. And when there was no more wine in the house of one of the families she visited, she transformed water into wine, like Jesus at the wedding feast of Cana.

On the hilltop of Montepulciano

After a vision which made it clear that God willed that a new house be founded on the hill of Montepulciano, where she had been attacked by

crows, Agnes departed with some religious to erect a monastery there under the rule of St. Dominic.

When the necessary donations were obtained, she purchased the entire hilltop, on which was built a church dedicated to Our Lady in addition to the convent.

A zealous abbess, with her admonitions and example she strove to encourage her subalterns to give themselves ever more radically to Christ, while also continuing to work miracles to assist them.

On one occasion, a young religious of this house lost her sight and so that she would not have to leave the monastery to be treated, the Saint restored her sight, saying: "What Jesus and I want is that from now on you do not weep with these eyes over temporal works or misfortunes, but only for love of God, abandoning all earthly attachment, and keeping your heart free to love the Divine Spouse."⁵

One Sunday she was in prayer when an Angel gave her a chalice, with the following words: "Drink, spouse of Christ, this chalice which Our Lord also drank for you."⁶ After this apparition, the holy abbess fell gravely ill. He who long ago called her to a life of battles, asking her at the age of nine to persevere in her good resolutions despite the opposition of her parents, now invited her to accompany Him to the height of Calvary, uniting herself to Him through the acceptance of new sufferings.

At the request of her religious sisters, Agnes went to visit the thermal springs of Chianciano, with the aim of recuperating her health. When she placed her feet in the waters to bathe, the place was filled with the mysterious and previously seen manna that fell from Heaven. A new spring also emerged there, which, through the merits of the Saint, was the source of cures for many sick people.

During her trips to these baths, she worked many miracles, including the resurrection of a boy who had drowned, simply by making the sign of the Cross over the body. After so many cures and prodigies realized there by the intercession of the virtuous religious, the site came to be called St. Agnes' Spring.

Prodigies even after death

Returning to the monastery, her sufferings were redoubled and, on April 20, 1317, St. Agnes finished her journey in this life and departed for eternity. Even before the news of her death had spread, at daybreak, a lady struck with a grave malady in her arm approached the gates of the monastery, asking to see the dead abbess. She told the sisters that she had had a vision during the night in which the Saint, filled with light and surrounded by Angels, told her that if she touched her body she would be cured. That inert corpse, marked by heroic sanctity, continued to assist souls, and obtained the cure of the afflicted woman.

Similar episodes ensued for several days after her death. Her body began to exude a celestial odour that spread throughout the monastery, as well as a most sweet-smelling balsam that issued from her in abundance.

St. Catherine of Siena nurtured an intense devotion to St. Agnes, for the Lord revealed to her that in Heaven they would be great companions. In one of her visits to Montepulciano, as she inclined to venerate the mortal remains of the Saint, a foot miraculously began to move, rising up to meet the lips which reverently kissed them.

And the venerable religious remained like this, with one of her feet slightly suspended in the air, as a remembrance of the amazing event. To this day, with her body partially incorrupt, she can be venerated in the shrine of Montepulciano, in Italy, with one foot slightly elevated. There, St. Agnes has aided innumerable souls with prodigious cures, both physical and spiritual, making her worthy to be acclaimed as the intercessor of those in need and terror of infernal spirits.