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# Saint Anthony Mary Zaccaria, M. D.

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THE FIRST few decades of the Sixteenth Century, if compared to a stage, presented a cast of such brilliant actors that few comparable periods have ever rivaled them. The last years of Christopher Columbus coincided with the boyhood of Ignatius Loyola. Meanwhile Martin Luther advanced from university studies to sacred ordination and a pilgrimage to Rome in 1510. In 1509 Henry VIII of England married his brother Arthur's widow, Catherine of Aragon, and then was crowned King of England. Spanish ships bore missionaries across the Atlantic to evangelize the newly discovered lands. Everywhere the relatively new art of printing was employed for the diffusion of books more sacred than profane. At Rome the mundane atmosphere that swirled around Alexander VI, the warlike Pontiff Julius II, and the dilettante Leo X of the Florentine Medicis was brightened by the founding at Rome of an Oratory of Divine Love to serve the poor, the sick, and the homeless. The apocalyptic voice of Savonarola had been stifled in an executioner's bonfire not long before the close of the previous century in the same city that had been graced by a holy archbishop, Saint Antoninus. Soldiers, students, beggars, pilgrims, vagabond religious, ecclesiastics of all types, artisans, artists, and musicians crowded onto

this stage amid the better known figures of monarchs, popes, and supposed religious reformers.

Anthony Mary Zaccaria was one of the noble spirits of the opening decades, moved by grace and instinctive motions of generosity to fill his thirty-seven years of life with the appealing virtues of charity and compassion. Born in Cremona in 1502, he was told in childhood of the Zaccaria family's fame in Genoa where one ancestor, Benedict, had been an admiral and was related by marriage to the Byzantine Emperor. Widowed soon after Anthony's birth, the mother raised her son in such a manner that his later life would prove a signal credit to her.

The medical profession was held in esteem and in those northern regions of the Italian peninsula its practice was largely limited to the nobility. The Universities of Pavia and Padua, neither too far from his home, trained Anthony in medical science. He returned to Cremona to join the illustrious group of doctors who owed their association to the foresight of Duke Sforza. Anthony soon showed himself eager to do more for people than heal their bodies. Once his hospital visits were concluded he gathered children together in his home, and later in an adjoining church, where he taught them the truths of religion. Under expert

spiritual direction and enriched by his reading of Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Saint Paul he filled copy books with fervent sermons and instructions. Thus developed his vocation to preach and to save souls. The fervor of his voice was echoed by the children in their own homes and soon their parents and neighbors joined the willing audience. Anthony, ever restless, sought broader fields and went into the streets to hold high a crucifix. Over the humorous and even hostile remarks of passersby he called for penance.

By the year 1528 his counsellors had urged him to become a priest. After a delay motivated by humility that made him pause with the reception of minor orders he continued on to the priesthood in his twenty-sixth year. Convinced that his Mass should be a time of union with God he dispensed with music, flowers, and every non-essential element that might prove distracting. As a priest he left the altar to take on the hearing of confessions followed by visits to hospitals and prisons. Although offered a considerable benefice that had been in control of the Zaccaria family he refused to seek comfort and security.

The path that would eventually lead Anthony Mary Zaccaria to the altar of Canonization<sup>1</sup> took him to Milan in 1530 as chaplain for Countess Torelli and her associates. The countess had changed her name from Louise to Paula in

<sup>1</sup> May 15, 1897, during the pontificate of Leo XIII. His Feast Day is celebrated on July 5.

view of the Pauline theme of her chaplain's sermons. Aided by priests named Morigia and Ferrari, she encouraged him in gathering together young men of apostolic interests. This foundation known officially as the Clerks Regular of Saint Paul, (popularly referred to as the Barnabites from the title of the house they occupied) was given approval in 1535. The previous August had seen a small band of seven, led by Ignatius, gathered in a chapel on Montmartre in Paris, pronouncing together the vows that later would inspire the Society of Jesus. Simultaneously in Milan Anthony Mary Zaccaria was gathering men of like mind around him for the service of God as a man.

The nucleus of the new religious family had been found in the Confraternity of Eternal Wisdom which met at the Augustinian Church of Saint Martin. This group, similar to the better known Oratory of Divine Love, based works of charity on practices of piety and devotion. In a land ripped by imperial troops and crippled by recurrent plagues such centers of prayer and charity were oases of hope. The now universal Forty Hours Devotion was inaugurated in this setting as a means of petition for release from plague and disaster.

The Barnabites in simple garb observed simple customs and devoted themselves to the hearing of confessions and to the observance of the liturgical life of the Church. Insisting on strict silence in their churches, the beauty of their cere-

monies brought crowds to the doors to participate in the adoration of the Holy Eucharist. Street missions, penitential processions, hours of service to the sick in home and hospital and the persuasive sermon of good example were the outstanding characteristics of their institute. They served Saint Charles Borromeo in the vast re-

forms he enforced in Milan which served to set an example to the rest of the Catholic world.

This was the life and work of Anthony Mary Zaccaria, nobleman, physician, priest, and saint. He stands as a heavenly patron for all who desire to attain noble qualities, to serve others, and to reach eternal union with God.

### *A Note of Thanks . . . .*

*I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude for the spiritual bouquet and generous burse given to me by members of the Guilds on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. May God bless all of you for your generosity and thoughtfulness.*

*John J. Flanagan, S.J.*