

FROM THE HOUSE TOPS

A Magazine Spreading the Faith Across the Country



Blessed Bartolo Longo
and Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompeii

FROM THE HOUSETOPS

“And that which you hear in the ear,
preach ye from the housetops.”
MATTHEW 10:27

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*Sanctuary of
Our Lady of the Rosary in Pompeii, Italy.*



BLESSED BARTOLO LONGO

From Satanism to Sanctity

Sister Mary Elizabeth, MICM

The story of Bartolo Longo is the tale of a young man who had once loved and practiced his Catholic Faith, but who, after entering one of Italy's most prestigious universities, became a young man seething with hatred of his religion. So much so that he eventually became a satanic priest. His story ends in the shadow of the great Mount Vesuvius whose violent eruption laid to waste the unsuspecting city of Pompeii in the year 79AD. Out of the famous ruins of this pagan city, which lay in death-like silence, for eighteen hundred years, rose the life-giving sanctuary of Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompeii through the reparative works of this one time satanist. It was to this dangerous, bandit-ridden and God-forsaken countryside, that the most unlikely person brought spiritual life, mercy, and love. Bartolo stands as proof that miracles can happen. People can change. Even those who had once been instruments of evil have the potential, through God's grace, to become conduits of God's love and blessings. From Satanism to sanctity, Bartolo, apostle of the Rosary, exemplifies God's miracles and ability to touch even hardened souls.

Serene Beginnings

Bartolo Longo, son of a physician, was born February 11, 1841, into a devout Catholic Italian family in a small town called Latiano. Since there was no local school, and like most members of his social class, he was sent to boarding school run by the Scolopian Fathers. Bartolo was ten years old when his father died, and his mother remarried to a kind devout man who was a lawyer. His early school years were filled with happy memories of pranks, music (he played piano by ear), and fireworks. He was popular and enjoyed the friendship of good companions, nurtured as he was, in the faith-filled setting of a religious school. He graduated at sixteen and immediately began teaching, following the track of becoming a professor, which his stepfather encouraged.



Although the halls of the University of Naples had once been blessed by the presence of Saint Thomas Aquinas, by the time Bartolo enrolled, it was a hotbed of heresy.

Life was happy and seemed to progress uninhibited by social conflicts. The time period was actually marked by tremendous political turmoil and upheaval resulting in the Kingdom of the Two Sicily's uniting to become the Kingdom of Italy in 1860. At this time Bartolo, no longer interested in teaching, begged his stepfather to allow him to enroll in the University of Naples to pursue a degree in law. His stepfather, however, was extremely hesitant to give permission for this because he knew the danger of the pestilent anti-Christian atmosphere of the institutions of higher learning. He finally yielded, allowing Bartolo to study law, but only under the condition that it be in the private tutelage of a lawyer he knew in Lecce. This lasted only a year because the Department of Education decided not to recognize private education any longer. Bartolo then finally obtained consent to pursue

his studies at the university, but what a shock he was soon to experience!

Culture Shock

The atmosphere of the school was infected with heresy, immorality, and philosophies opposed to the traditions of the Catholic Faith. It seemed impossible that Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor of the Church, ever walked through the same halls of this University of Naples that Bartolo now walked! What would Aquinas think of the present environs? Instead of traditional theology, the study of the pagan Hegel was promoted. Atheism, anti-clericalism, and spiritism were just some of the pernicious philosophies poisoning the university halls.

It was a hard environment where even the most vigilant of students had to be extremely cautious to keep their purity and faith in these dangerous waters. The Café de Angelis was a popular "hang-

out” where students would gather after classes to discuss philosophies and exchange ideas with each other. The religious practices, such as the daily recitation of the Rosary, which was the mainstay of his teenage years, began to evaporate under the pressure of his peers. The reckless use of his newfound freedom would have a profound effect on the innocence of his soul in a very short time.

Reflecting on this period of his life, Bartolo wrote: “Overwhelmed as I was in the enthusiasm of my youth, in the errors against the faith and against the True Church as sown in the celebrated University of Naples...ensnared on the enticing hook of freedom of conscience and thought... I too grew to hate monks, priests, the pope, and in particular the Dominicans, the most formidable, furious opponents of those great modern professors....”

During one of the visits to the Café de Angelis, Bartolo became introduced to Spiritism. Rowland in her book, *From Pompeii*, discusses how this popular movement in New York influenced the rest of the world. Europeans and Americans became mesmerized by the “art” of séance where they would discourse with deceased souls in the other world.

Introduction to Evil

The first spiritualist session that Bartolo attended was held on May 29, 1864. Here he experienced the deception and intrigue of manipulating spiritualists, known as mediums. The medium, who was experiencing a preternatural trance, focused on the inexperienced, young, vulnerable

lawyer asking him to tell her what he wanted to know from the other world. Impressed with the charades of the host and stunned by the answers he received, Bartolo enthusiastically plunged into these newly discovered powers. Drawn by the appeal of mystery, he was determined to become more involved, volunteering even to be part of experiments that tested his own ability to communicate with the spirit realm. It was not long before he determined to become a medium himself. This process would require a rigorous period of fasting and training to achieve what he thought would soothe and fill the void he felt within himself since he began frequenting the Café.

Prisoner of Satan

The long process of satanic “novitiate” was exhausting and demanding, but once it was completed, it was determined that Bartolo was now ready to proceed to the next step, his investiture as a satanic priest. Auletta, his biographer, describes what happened that evening:

One evening he was consecrated “priest of spiritism” in a strange, macabre ceremony, in the midst of black drapes, skulls of the dead, and crossed shin bones. He advanced bare-footed,



wearing a black cloak in a semi-dark room. He recited certain formulas. He was anointed with oil taken from who knows which church. He gave a magnificent proof of falling into a trance, responding to questions, and invoking first Pythagoras, then Confucius, and then Caiphaz. Spiritism had a new "priest" with a body reduced to skin and bones, two possessed eyes, frazzled nerves, a devilish beard, and a stomach ailment doomed to accompany him for the rest of his life.

Following this ceremony, Bartolo entered into a preternatural state. He felt an ominous presence at his side, a being, that he referred to as his "angel." He conversed continuously with this dark companion, seeking his counsel and direction in everything he did. Then he began to be tormented by unsound and disturbing nightmares and slowly and unknowingly became severely



Saint Ludovico da Casoria was an inspiring example to the newly converted Bartolo.

sleep-deprived. Combined with the year of severe fasting, it was not long before he became a virtual wreck of a man. Amazingly, he was somehow able to complete his studies and earned his law degree in December of 1864. However, this completion of his academic work only gave him more time to devote to the diabolic spiritism.

What at first he had regarded as a guiding or protecting angel began to torment him. When Longo was called upon to lead the nightly séances at the Spiritualist gatherings, this "being" began to contradict itself in response to Longo's questions. Because of this disturbing fact, Bartolo realized something was wrong and sought to know truth. He was frightened as he felt himself losing grip and heading toward a complete breakdown.

Nothing happens by accident, and God was watching over this young lawyer, perhaps through the prayers of his mother. There were at the university a small group of professors who were faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Among these faithful few was Professor Vincenzo Pepe who saw Bartolo mixing with the wrong crowd and warned him that the path that he was following would lead to certain madness. He tried to convince him that all the supposed "revelations" that he was having were nothing but lies. When Pepe saw him after a time, he was alarmed at the young man's physical condition and horrified by the reports of the contacts that he was making with the dead through diabolic means. "Do you want to die in an insane asylum," he warned him, "and then be damned to hell?" This professor sought others to also pray for Bartolo. Nothing had an effect and Longo continued his involve-

ment with séances.

Moment of Grace

One night, on May 27, 1865, after a year in the cult, Bartolo believed he had contacted his father and heard his voice. This event brought back memories of his mother; and he recalled the Masses she would have said for the repose of souls the faithful departed. The next day, Bartolo returned to Professor Pepe and related his recent experience and told him he was going to have a Mass said for his father. The professor became very serious and in a fatherly concern told him, "Not only will you have a Mass said, but tomorrow, you will also make your confession to one of those learned, holy monks. Understood?" The harrowed young man could no longer resist the appeal of grace.

The very next day, Father Radente, a Dominican friend of Professor Pepe, met with Bartolo and began a month-long process of "spiritual de-toxing." Each day Father Radente patiently listened, explained, and absolved his penitent and slowly walked him spiritually out of the dark mire, which had clouded the once clear mind of the young lawyer. Layers of error were lifted off his soul as he begged for God and Our Lady to guide him. Finally, on the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that year June 23, 1865, Bartolo was absolved and restored to the state of grace enabling him once again to receive the Holy Eucharist. It was a day so jubilant and happy for him that he felt he had received "his First Holy Communion a second time." It had been a difficult struggle to break the chains of the occult's satanic stranglehold, but he went one last time to an séance and holding up a Rosary, the strength of his soul



At the young age of 22, Bartolo was losing his Faith and dabbling in Satanism.

told those present that from now on he was going to only seek the truth. He now began to reawaken to a life of light and grace.

New Direction of Life

The question now was what should he do now with his life? How should he move forward? While Bartolo was discerning an appropriate course to follow, Professor Pepe stepped in and offered him to stay at his own home where he would be able to have a small law practice. The kind professor's friendship was redemptive, and he made himself always available to discuss problems and concerns with him. After a while Bartolo decided to return to his hometown to work there as a penal lawyer at which he became quite successful. His mother's home cooking restored strength and vigor

to his weak constitution. After two years at home, he suddenly received a forceful letter from Father Radente insisting that he return to Naples for he felt that God had plans for him there. Trusting in God, he began the journey back, leaving behind the quaint peace of Latiano.

When he arrived, he instantly became part of a prayer group of young people and also began helping them in works of charity. A laywoman, Catherine Volpicelli (later to be canonized), who was friend of Father Radente organized the group who gathered every evening to say the Rosary. Bartolo, not only joined this group every evening for prayer, but he also joined a Franciscan known for his tireless work among the poor, named Ludovico da Casoria (also a canonized saint). Bartolo referred to him as "this daring founder who founded churches and hospices, having as his only capital the awareness of a divine mission and an unshakable faith in Providence...." This holy man was such an inspiring example, that he also began to visit the hospital for incurables every day, sacrificing his precious time helping others. After a while, he decided to give up his legal profession in order to devote himself to the service to the Church. He even thought that he should become a Dominican or possibly a priest. Father Ribera dissuaded him, and instead he counseled him to remain a secular, prophesying, "The day will come when laymen will be the leaders of religious undertakings, and the ones to conserve faith within the family."

Bartolo continued to pray, attending retreats and helping the poor. The Rosary became his source of strength as he struggled to discern

God's Will. Bartolo became a member of the Third Order of Saint Dominic, a branch founded for lay people who follow a simple, but spiritual way of life in the society.

Crusade for Souls

Bartolo began to see more clearly that society was permeated with the heresies and philosophies of the modernists, spiritually depriving the already poor country people. He felt he needed something strong to combat these and to re evangelize souls back to God. Professor Pepe again came to the rescue and found some excellent professors to instruct him in philosophy, Latin, and Italian grammar and literature so that he could be a resource for this mission. He learned the art of rhetoric, refuting errors with precise language and style.

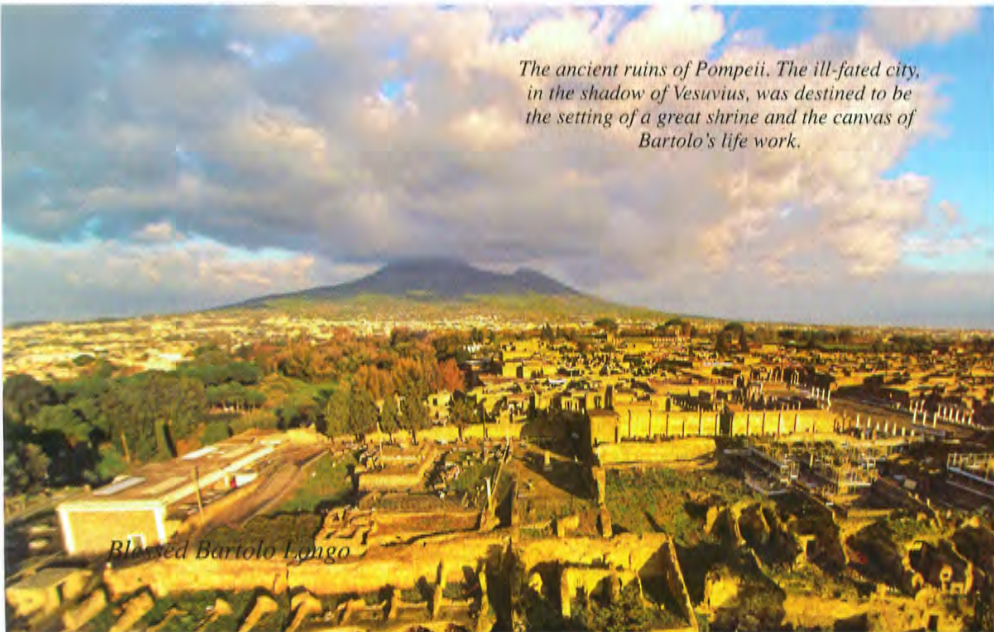
Bartolo continued daily attending the Rosary at the home of Saint Catherine Volpicelli, and it was here that a new phase of his life began. Also in attendance was a young widowed countess, Marianna di Fusco, who had five children. They had been invited to the Volpicelli estate through the charity of Saint Catherine. Although Marianna had a difficult personality, her deep Faith and virtue amply made up for the shortcomings. Once when Bartolo failed to attend meetings for three evenings in a row, the two women became concerned and sent someone to check up on him. They discovered that he had been ill and had no one to care for him. Catherine offered him an apartment in her very large villa. The countess was assigned the task of making his meals and providing anything he needed. Bartolo accepted this kindness; however, when he recovered, he realized that part of the deal was he

had to eat his meals each day with the countess and her undisciplined children. When Bartolo saw that she had no control over the children, he offered some advice, but the countess was extremely imperious and took offence at his suggestions, voicing her opinions vehemently making the daily meals a trial for Bartolo.

Oddly enough, this new situation opened yet another phase of his life. The countess dealt so crossly with Bartolo because in her eyes he was only a provincial aristocrat. Despite this, she saw something spiritual in him and sought his advice, describing the problems she had collecting rent from the poor farmers who worked on her properties. Bartolo offered to help her legal work to manage her properties. In October of 1872 he set out for the Valley of Pompeii where her properties were located. Bartolo wrote about this first trip. "I set out for the Valley of Pompeii without any apostolic design. I traveled there only to renew rental contracts; that is all. I

thought I was arriving in the role of a lawyer, but instead, through the plans of God, setting out as a missionary."

When he stepped off the train, he was surprised to be met by an armed escort arranged by the countess. The valley was notorious for its bandits who, due to the absence of any law enforcement, controlled the area. He was taken to an inn that also served as the local post office and employment agency. Then the hired guards escorted him to the parish church of The Holy Savior. "What a church!" Bartolo later wrote, "It was an altar of worm-eaten wood, where insects nested undisturbed and the rats sucked away at the oil in the Eucharistic lamp. The locals were ignorant of even the simplest prayers or the most rudimentary ideas of the catechism, not to mention the sacraments. Their religion was a mixture of superstition and folk tradition; for every necessity they went to the witch, the enchantress, the fortune teller, to obtain charms and spells. Most of the population ignorant, uncared-for souls



The ancient ruins of Pompeii. The ill-fated city, in the shadow of Vesuvius, was destined to be the setting of a great shrine and the canvas of Bartolo's life work.

Blessed Bartolo Longo

never went to Mass or heard a sermon. Furthermore, there were not even a sacristy nor a custodian to oversee the cleaning of the house of God. He could not help but feel overwhelmed with pity for the ignorance and spiritual poverty when he saw some of the residents in this God-forsaken countryside.

The sight haunted him; deep in thought, he grew overwhelmed with regret over his own past life. He felt very depressed and did not know how he could go forward, but "One day," it was the ninth of October 1872: he wrote, "the tempest in my soul was torturing my heart and body more than usual, and filled me with a sadness not far removed from desperation. I went out of the house, a villa of the di Fusco's, and began to walk with a hurried and nervous step through the valley without well knowing where I was going. So walking, I came to the most bleak and desolate part of this country.

All nature lay wrapped in the deepest silence. I looked around me; there was not even the shadow of a living soul. Suddenly, I came to a dead stop; my heart was bursting within me. In such darkness of being it seemed to me as though a friendly voice were whispering to me those same words that I had read, and that true, holy friend of mine, now gone to his rest, was wont to repeat to me: 'If you seek to be saved, promulgate the Rosary. This is dear Mary's own promise.' Who promulgates the Rosary is safe! This thought was like the lightning that flashes through the clouds on a dark and stormy night. Satan, who had held me as his prey, saw his defeat drawing near, and in a last desperate effort wound his coils more closely around me. It was the last battle, but a most terrible one.

Suddenly, a great calm succeeded to the dreadful tempest in my soul, and I felt that perhaps some day my cry



The Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Rosary as it is seen in Pompeii today.

of anguish would be answered. The distant sound of a church bell struck my ear and startled me; it was the noonday Angelus. I sank to my knees and voiced the prayer that a world of faithful addresses to Mary at that hour. When I arose I felt that a tear had wet my cheek. Heaven did not make me wait long for an answer."

Bartolo immediately put his plan into action and began to organize a prayer group for the peasants. It proved futile when he became aware of their abysmal ignorance, as they did not even know the *Hail Mary* or the most basic elements of the Faith. A priest friend suggested having a festival in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary, appealing to the peasants by means of music, fireworks and raffles. He spent an entire year and planned the festival, which would take place on the feast of the Holy Rosary in October.

When the feast day finally arrived, torrential rains poured in sheets down on the Valley of Pompeii, accompanied by unbelievable thunder, and winds. Those who dared to attend were imprisoned in the church by the rain. Bartolo's disappointment peaked when the preacher who came to help him spoke with such a heavy dialect that hardly anyone could understand. Although it seemed wasted, he refused to give up and immediately began planning for the next year.

The second attempt went much better. The priest preached in the dialect of the villagers, but this disappointed Bartolo because, instead of preaching on the Holy Rosary as planned, he only spoke on Our Lady as Queen. Another thing that disappointed Bartolo was the small statue of the Madonna placed under a canopy for the ceremonies.



Bartolo was determined that before next year he was going to procure a beautiful image that would draw these families into a greater devotion to the Queen of the Rosary. Again, he immediately began to plan for the following year's celebrations.

The third year's anniversary was finally a success. Bartolo planned a parish mission ten days long. It was comprised of daily Masses, sermons, and prayers all to bring the peasants to a greater understanding of their Faith as well as a devotion to the Rosary. Villagers came from far and wide to attend.

The fruit of his plan was at last becoming visible. The villagers began to say the Rosary, crucifixes and images of Our Lady could be seen hanging in the cottages. He felt it was now time that the church had its own devotional image of Our Lady of the Rosary. As the celebrations were concluding, Bartolo impulsively promised the crowds that he would have something special to present them on the last day. He immediately



image and decided to bring Countess di Fusco to see it and let her decide. When the countess saw it, she said that it looked as though it was painted purposely to discourage devotion!

It seemed, however, that Sister Maria was inspired when she authoritatively told her, "This is no time for frowns, Countess. You must take this painting away with you at once; you will see that the Blessed Mother will use this painting to work many miracles." Trusting in Divine Providence, they carried the painting back to Countess di Fusco's home.

A new problem now confronted Bartolo. Being a meter wide and about a meter and half long, it was too big to transport by train back

boarded the train for Naples in quest of a painting.

Building the Shrine

His friend Father Radente came to the rescue. He knew of a painting of Our Lady of the Rosary that he had given a to a Sister and he felt sure that she still had the image. When Bartolo hastened to her convent requesting to see the picture, Sister Maria Concetta was most compliant. Within moments, she brought out the painting. It was so hideous that he had to suppress a gasp. He was tempted to leave the painting right there, but he was desperate for an

to Pompeii. The only available transportation going to Pompeii was a dung cart! The poor driver, agreeing, felt honored to transport the picture and refused to be paid.

One can only imagine the surprise of the priests when the painting arrived in Pompeii! They unwrapped the covering on the painting, now soiled with manure only to discover a very amateur and ugly painting. The priests agreed that it could not be displayed in its present condition, and they summoned a painter to re-paint in a more devotional style. This could not be done overnight; so there would be no surprise this year,

but the villagers did not mind, knowing the painting would be finished in God's good time.

Before all the celebrations were over the bishop of Nola arrived to administer Confirmation. Bartolo met with him and told him of his passionate desire to build an altar to the Mother of God under the title of Our Lady of the Rosary. The bishop listened to Bartolo and then met with the priests who had assisted during the mission. They told him about the pitiable moral and spiritual condition of the people in Pompeii. Moved by what he heard, he exclaimed to Bartolo and the Countess, that, "I consider it my duty to raise a church which shall gather together for divine worship all these poor people; and for many years I have been looking earnestly to find at least one person to help me as this is the most remote point of my diocese. I propose that we raise instead, not an altar, but a church. Seek to find subscribers for a penny a month; and so you will collect a sum on your part, while on mine subscribe a subsidy of 500 francs."

Bartolo was overwhelmed with joy, but he feared the endeavor might be beyond his capabilities and financial means. One of the missionaries reassured him that "the counsel of our superiors is the voice of God. Your good will is acceptable unto God, but carry out the instruction of your superiors."

When the pious bishop returned a few days later on 12 of November 1875, he again encouraged the plan. Looking out the window, he pointed to a field and exclaimed in a prophetic voice: "That is the spot where a temple must be raised in Pompeii."

When the Countess first heard the Bishop discussing the building of

a church, she refused to help. Bartolo convinced her by promising that he would act as lawyer for the both of them and assured her that her influential acquaintances would financially help, leaving the details to Our Lady. The Bishop warned them that work would be difficult, especially the collecting of alms, but he promised that, "If you both are determined to carry out God's work, and for Him alone, then and only then would God bless your efforts and intentions. Their mission had begun!"

Breaking Ground

Purifying like gold in the fire, contradictions came from the most unexpected places; yet so did blessings. One of them was the painting of Our Lady of the Rosary, which became one avenue of grace. A talented artist refurbished it with the peaceful and devotional strokes of his brush, changing the figure of the Peruvian Saint Rose of Lima to the Italian Saint Catherine of Siena; removing a crown of roses and replacing it with a crown of thorns. The wounds of the stigmata wounds were also added to Saint Catherine's hands. Parts of the badly damaged canvas were replaced. The Virgin and Christ Child were crowned with diadems, and gems encircled Our Lady's neck. Hardly a trace of the old picture remained. The beautiful painting now began to be referred to as the "Madonna of Pompeii."

Bartolo felt a great reverence for it and could not attribute the celestial expression on the Virgin's face to the artist, it was so heavenly. "I am personally convinced," he observed, "that the Virgin by a visible portent has embellished Her own face, a certain beauty, a majesty and confidence inspiring

sweetness are to be noticed on the features of the celestial Queen which most certainly were not seen before. As shown by daily proofs, persons of all nationalities who come here every day behold in that Image something which attracts and constrains admiration, not because of any artistic perfection, but by some secret, latent power, which draws one, almost against one's will, to kneel and pray. While praying before that Image, one feels in one's soul the firm hope that prayer will be answered, and such ineffable bliss is enjoyed, and one who has never felt, cannot possibly understand."

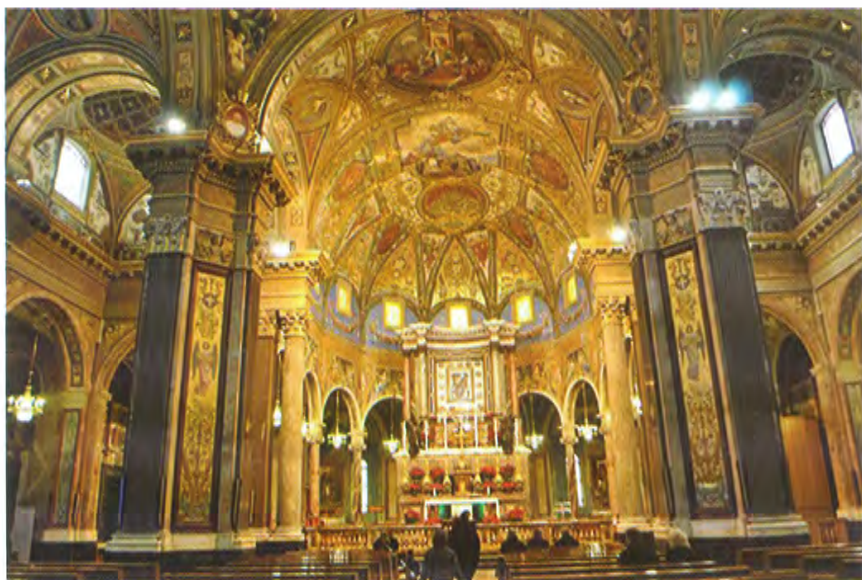
To continue the building of the chapel, Bartolo acquired monthly pledges from both the rich and the poor. The Countess was also busy procuring funds from among a circle of ladies associated with Saint Catherine Volpicelli. Even the poorest families of Pompeii gave from their meager earnings, pledging a penny a month for the new shrine dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary.

On May 8, 1876, the first stone was blessed and laid for the new sanctuary.

It was feast of the apparition of Saint Michael the Archangel on Mount Gargano in the year 409, a significant day for Bartolo, who felt that Saint Michael had a purpose to fulfill in this Valley of Pompeii. He explains in his book *The History of Pompeii*: "It seemed evident to me that Saint Michael was the natural protector of this spot that he had honored with his apparition and with the signs of his patronage." Saint Michael was the Guardian Angel of the Blessed Virgin during her life on earth. Saint Michael is the Patron of all the Temples of the living God, and Saint Michael shall be the Guardian and Protector of the Temple of Pompeii. My presentiments were not wrong. The powerful and glorious Prince, always kind to us, has repeatedly allowed us to feel the beneficent effects of his protection. Innumerable have been the victories gained by Saint Michel on this spot over all enemies visible and invisible, both of ourselves and this Sanctuary. His apparition in the 7th century indicated the preparation for the reign of Mary in this desolate, unknown, and abandoned country that had one day been under the rule of sin and Satan. The great Archangel came to chase Satan from the land of the Gentiles, where a new era of grace was to begin, and a new Sun of mercy to rise."

It was an outstanding day, the sky as exceptionally blue and cloudless, fields fragrant and lovely with majestic Vesuvius raising its plume of smoke. The blessing of the bishop was one sign of more blessings yet to come. The attending crowd of local peasants and hundreds of generous Neapolitan nobility came to watch the building of what is now a world famous shrine. The church construction started about





The miraculous painting of Our Lady of Pompeii as it is seen and venerated in the Shrine today.

500 yards from a small quarry of volcanic stones that had just been opened for excavation. When the owner of the quarry realized that a shrine was being built next to him, he offered to supply the project with some of his stone. The Sunday after the construction began; a priest addressed the congregation in the valley of Pompeii. "God, my children, has taken pity on you and has disposed that a church rise in your midst where you can congregate and become good Christians." He urged the congregation to carry a stone to the building as a symbol of their subjection to the God of heaven and earth. Taking the lead, he also carried one of the stones to the beloved shrine. Following him in procession was the Countess di Fusco, her children, a group of priests and men, women, and children of all walks of life. Bartolo was so moved to see, "...God adored in this spot where He

was so little known..." He was jubilant that his dream was finally under way; however, what seemed to be a successful beginning soon became a near-catastrophe. The volcanic nature of Mt. Vesuvius was extremely unpredictable and presented many challenges to the building around it. Bartolo made a mistake when he followed the advice not to hire an architect because it would completely deplete the funds that he had collected for the building materials. When the construction began, there was no competent and knowledgeable person to oversee the project. An expert was needed to manage such a difficult undertaking in the volcano prone district. He began a fervent campaign of prayer to Our Lady, begging her to intervene.

At a gathering in Naples, Bartolo discussed the building project and its multifaceted problems to a group of

men. Antonio Cua, a renowned professor of architecture at the University of Naples, showed great interest in the construction work on the church and asked to see the plans for the building. Bartolo unfolded a wrinkled paper from his pocket and handed the professor a very roughly and amateur sketched design. The experienced architect was shocked at what he saw. Right then and there he offered to re-draw the entire project and oversee everything, adding that, because it was for the poor peasants of Pompeii, he would do everything at no cost. Bartolo immediately returned to Pompeii and stopped work on the makeshift sanctuary until Cua could take over the reins, thanking heaven for this generous benefactor who was miraculously answered his prayers.

Patience in Contradiction

Bartolo continued begging for pledges even though many of the "contributions" came in the form of fruit peelings that were left in envelopes for him. Nothing could stop him, and he continued to persevere despite the jeers, insults, and mockery he received. Some accused him of being a Protestant, because he was handing out flyers that they thought were tracts against the Church. Often he was called "dog" or "excommunicate." It took much for Bartolo, who was very passionate, to control his temper; he was often remorseful for reacting, later confessing and doing penance for his lack of control. Despite these setbacks he forged ahead, knowing that the Queen of Heaven was on his side.

Early in the construction of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Pompeii, two miracles occurred that were attributed

to the intercession of Our Lady of the Rosary. Bartolo's mother and the father of a local priest both fell seriously ill at the same time, languishing at death's door. Prayers were offered to Our Lady of Pompeii and contrary to the expectations of even the doctors, they both recovered. Word began to spread of this wonderful outcome. Then the family of a little girl who was seriously afflicted with epilepsy begged Our Lady's intercession through the Rosary for a cure. The answer was spontaneous, and the little girl's seizures all stopped.

When a girl from Naples named Fortuna Agrelli, who was suffering intense pain for thirteen months, heard of the other cures, she and her relatives began a novena of Rosaries for her recovery. During the novena Our Lady appeared to Fortuna accompanied by Saint Dominic and Saint Catherine of Siena. Holding a Rosary in her hand, Our Lady said, "Since you have called me by the title so pleasing to me, 'Queen of the Holy Rosary,' I can no longer refuse the favor that you petition; for this name is most precious and dear to me. Make three novenas, and you will obtain all." Fortuna followed the instruction of her heavenly mother and was cured. Then Our Lady appeared again and told Fortuna: "Whoever desires to obtain favors from me should make three novenas in petition and three in thanksgiving." This was the origin of the now famous devotion called the fifty-four-day Rosary novena. It consists of twenty-seven days of petitioning prayers followed immediately by twenty-seven days of thanksgiving, trusting that the prayers will be answered. This devotion spread like wildfire worldwide.

Bartolo now catechized through

the teaching of the Rosary. He felt that coming from Heaven, this sacramental would be an effective tool against immorality and ignorance of the Faith. Teaching the Rosary to the people of Pompeii was the key to his success. The fifteen decades meditating on the life of Our Lord and Our Lady accompanied with prayer, was a springboard from which he incorporated lessons in Bible history, Scripture, and the teachings of the Church. Starting from ground zero, the zealous layman through this means was able to draw the villagers closer to know, love, and serve God. He continued to attract the people closer to Christ through the much-loved festivities celebrated in October and May 8, which were replete not only with spiritual benefits, but also music, fun, and fireworks.

‘Write and They Will Listen’

At this time Bartolo saw the need for more devotional reading, so he began a printing apostolate where he published a small booklet called *The Fifteen Saturdays*. This book appealed to everyone; it was full of meditations and stories of miracles through Our Lady and her Rosary. He then wrote a prayer he called The Petition and

printed and distributed it for Our Lady’s special feasts. Bartolo attributed the success of his printing to God: “You did not look at my past; you did not stop before my weakness; in one hand you placed the Rosary, in the other a pen, and you

said to me: Write, they will listen to you, for it is I who will place in your heart the word of life.” He then began a magazine that would eventually reach over 100,000 subscribers.

Although the apostolate of the written word consumed much of his time, he did not feel he was doing enough. His greatest desire was to actually go into the villages himself to catechize. Although this seemed like a good idea,

it was not easy; some of the children avoided him, and those who did come were so undisciplined that he spent the whole time just trying to get control. He devised another plan to try to attract serious students by offering free reading and writing classes along with the catechism. This did the trick; along with prizes for incentive, he began to even attract the parents to join the classes. The classes became so full that he had to divide them to fit everyone. But he could see that this was still not enough. The farmers needed some dignity and self-respect, so he began to provide clothes and school





Countess di Fusco and Bartolo Longo

supplies. Next he sought volunteers to come to teach classes in the trades and other skills. One man hearing of all this wonderful work donated a printing press and all the other equipment for a print shop. This was the beginning of Bartolo's apostolate with, "The Print Shop of The Most Holy Rosary." The result in the valley of Pompeii was visible as the one time notorious district of thieves and robbers had been turned into functioning families that now prayed, worked, and studied. The print shop began to prosper, and the once poor families began to take home some profits as well.

Still not ready to stop working for Our Lady, Bartolo had more plans. He organized nursery schools for the children whose parents were working in the fields, so that they would not turn into the undisciplined wild bandits who once roamed the valley. He provided clothes, food, and organized volunteers to rid

them of the lice and other parasites that commonly afflicted the poor.

Our Lady's Orphans

He began to visit places in Italy where he could see how other charitable organizations ran. His quest took him to places such as Siena, and Turin, where he met Saint John Bosco, who encouraged him to forge ahead, putting his new projects into action.

An orphanage was the first project. The first five orphan girls he received represented the first five mysteries of the Rosary and became known as "The Orphans of the Virgin of Pompeii." Within five years there were over one hundred girls under the care of Our Blessed Mother. "These fragile girls had a supreme force," Bartolo observed, "the force of prayer. The world offered them charity, they in turn gave the world prayer; they prayed and obtained miracles. He said that even

though the time period was one where few prayed and convents were being destroyed, especially the cloistered orders, in the Valley of Pompeii the orphanage was being opened. It was the prayer of innocence taking the place of the prayer of virginity; they were angels substituting for other angels."

Even though he took care of the bodies of these little ones, most of all he took care of the souls, instructing, catechizing, and guiding. By doing this, the charitable works of Bartolo seemed to multiply, but it did not remain so. Satan was loosing his grip on the once corrupt valley, and he now began to manifest his anger against his former client.

The Cross

Bartolo used to say that contradictions are the distinguishing sign of all of Our Lord's works, echoing the words of Leo the XIII. Contradictions are difficult in themselves, but when they come from those who you expect would support and encourage the faithful, it can be very discouraging. The Sanctuary of Our Lady of Pompeii building project and its charitable works were becoming very well known, both in Italy and outside of the country. Jealousy was the motive for the first attack on Bartolo's work. It came from a member of the clergy who owned and edited a newspaper in a nearby town. At first, the paper carried articles that lauded and flattered the work of Pompeii. The editor even once volunteered to act as a cooperator or even an administrator. Bartolo did not trust him, however, and so did not accept his offer. The monsignor intercepted his donations by mailing out an appeal for the new shrine asking returns to be mailed to him instead. Adding to the confusion, he printed it

on a letterhead he called *The Rosary of Mary*. Bartolo, with the approval of the Bishop of Nola, mailed a clarification to his subscribers that the letter from *The Rosary of Mary* did not represent him or his works. The monsignor retaliated through his newspaper, by threatening to expose a scandal where he would "write the true story of the new Pompeii and the new temple." He recruited another newspaper to join him in his smear campaign. Bartolo, confident in our Blessed Mother, remained silent.

Hearing of this attack on so good a cause, a newspaper from Rome rebuked Bartolo for his silence and encouraged him to defend himself and his hard work, but he still refused especially since it would engage in legal action against a priest. His lawyer friends kept urging him to defend his work, and as experienced lawyers, they insisted that he should file a suit. Reluctantly he finally took their advice. At last the threat of a public scandal ended, and the monsignor publicly confessed his wrongdoings and withdrew his accusations in the local Neapolitan newspapers. More problems, however, were yet to come.

It seems that his working with the widowed Countess di Fusco was the source of gossip. They were seen everywhere together. They even resided in the same villa of Catherine Volpicelli, who so generously hosted them and others. His friends bluntly told them that they should just simply get married, as they were both free to, and silence the whole whisper campaign.

The Countess had no intention of remarrying, and Bartolo refused to get married for the sake of expediency. Despite pressure from friends, priests, and laymen, the two did not feel there was a need. Everything had worked out

so far. Why did they need to change things because of rumors and vicious talk? Things changed when the couple had an audience with Leo XIII.

"Advocate, you are free?" He asked. "The Countess is a widow? Well then, the problem is immediately resolved: get married, thus putting to rest all voices." The Pope had spoken. The couple was married on April 1, 1885, in the private chapel of Monsignor Carbonelli, the general vicar of Naples.

Not a Stone Unturned for Charity

Many years had passed, and Bartolo looked back at the once notorious valley of thieves and thanked God for allowing him to be a poor instrument in His hands. "The humble church begun simply to satisfy the need of a few poor villagers. This desert land had instead become a monumental temple; one could even say the international homeland and point of gravitation of all Mary's devotees everywhere." He could see next to the Sanctuary, the house of charity for the girls, the Sisters who helped his works, the printing school, the nursery schools, and the evening school. Everything looked complete with the exception of one forgotten group, the still uncared for abandoned children of those in prison.

This new adventure began when Bartolo received a visitor on the feast of Saint Dominic, August 4, 1885. A fugitive killed someone in self-defense and was hiding from the law. He was terrified to turn himself in because no one would take care of his wife, children, and elderly mother. Bartolo convinced him to stop running from the law and to go to the authorities. He was deeply troubled by this case and



Pope Leo XIII

many others who came to him seeking help. He also received letters at the shrine from prisoners begging him to watch over their sons whom they did not want to follow in their footsteps. Psychologists of his day claimed that it was absolutely useless to try to reform children of criminals. Bartolo felt otherwise. He felt he must do something to help them.

When he was at Mass on the feast of Saint John of God, the founder of hospitals and other charitable institutions, the priest gave a sermon on Saint John and how he begged from door to door to help the poor. The one thing Bartolo had not done yet was to be a beggar for the poor. This project became the "vow of my heart" as he expressed it.

He wrote in his magazine that, "It was indeed a cry repressed for years that held within it the echo of so many ignored traumas of derelict childhood, of so many unspeakable misfortunes, of so many cries of poor mothers and un-

fortunate fathers who, from the depths of the prisons, cry out for mercy, imploring help for their wretched offspring, the innocent sufferers of their parents' faults."

Fifteen years after the new apostolate, Bartolo's achievements gave evidence that sons of criminals were not doomed to follow the footsteps into crime but could be educated. At that time there were one hundred boys living in the home and over one hundred who had left educated and became successful young men in the military, clergy, and skilled professions. The very first boy who was accepted into the home had become a priest and offered his first Mass at the altar of Our Lady of Pompeii. What a tribute to Our Lady's mercy! "My secret is I gave them and taught them to love Jesus Christ." That says it all.

It was significant that it was during the reign of Leo XIII that Bartolo accomplished most of his work. This Pope wrote twelve encyclicals and five Pontifical letters about the Rosary and, not surprisingly, was given the nickname The Rosary Pope. There seemed to be a unique and Heavenly "Rosarian" bond between the Countess, Bartolo, and Pope Leo XIII. In 1890 after the Sanctuary

was completed, Bartolo, as a loyal and loving son, petitioned the Holy Father to assign a protector of his works in honor of the Rosary, and appointed Cardinal Monaco La Valletta. In 1893 for the celebration of the episcopal jubilee of Leo XIII, Bartolo donated to the Holy See the Sanctuary and all its precious contents and furnishings. In response, the Holy Father declared the Sanctuary to be Pontifical and directly under the jurisdiction of the Holy See, even though the administration of it continued under Bartolo Longo's jurisdiction. The twenty-five year reign of Leo XIII ended in 1903. Then the gentle Saint Pius X was elected.

Sons of Perdition

Change in the papacy coincided with changes in Bartolo's family as well. The Countess' unruly sons were continually causing scandal by their compulsive gambling and immorality.



Bartolo Longo surrounded by the orphan children of Pompeii.

Once one of them threatened to commit suicide in front of his mother and even pulled a gun on Bartolo. Matters became worse when the oldest son went bankrupt and unsuccessfully attempted to kill himself. Speculation that the couple might be using the shrine's money began to circulate. There is ample evidence that Bartolo never touched the sanctuary funds for personal problems. That was not investigated, however, and accusations traveled far and wide, spreading a dark cloud of doubt over all his work in Pompeii.

Bartolo, heartbroken, traveled to Rome and was received in audience by the newly elected Saint Pius X. Even though he was by now a well-known name in Italy, he received a cold reception, indicating to Bartolo that the Holy Father believed the reports and considered him a thief. This was by far the most difficult and bitter cross that he had to bear.

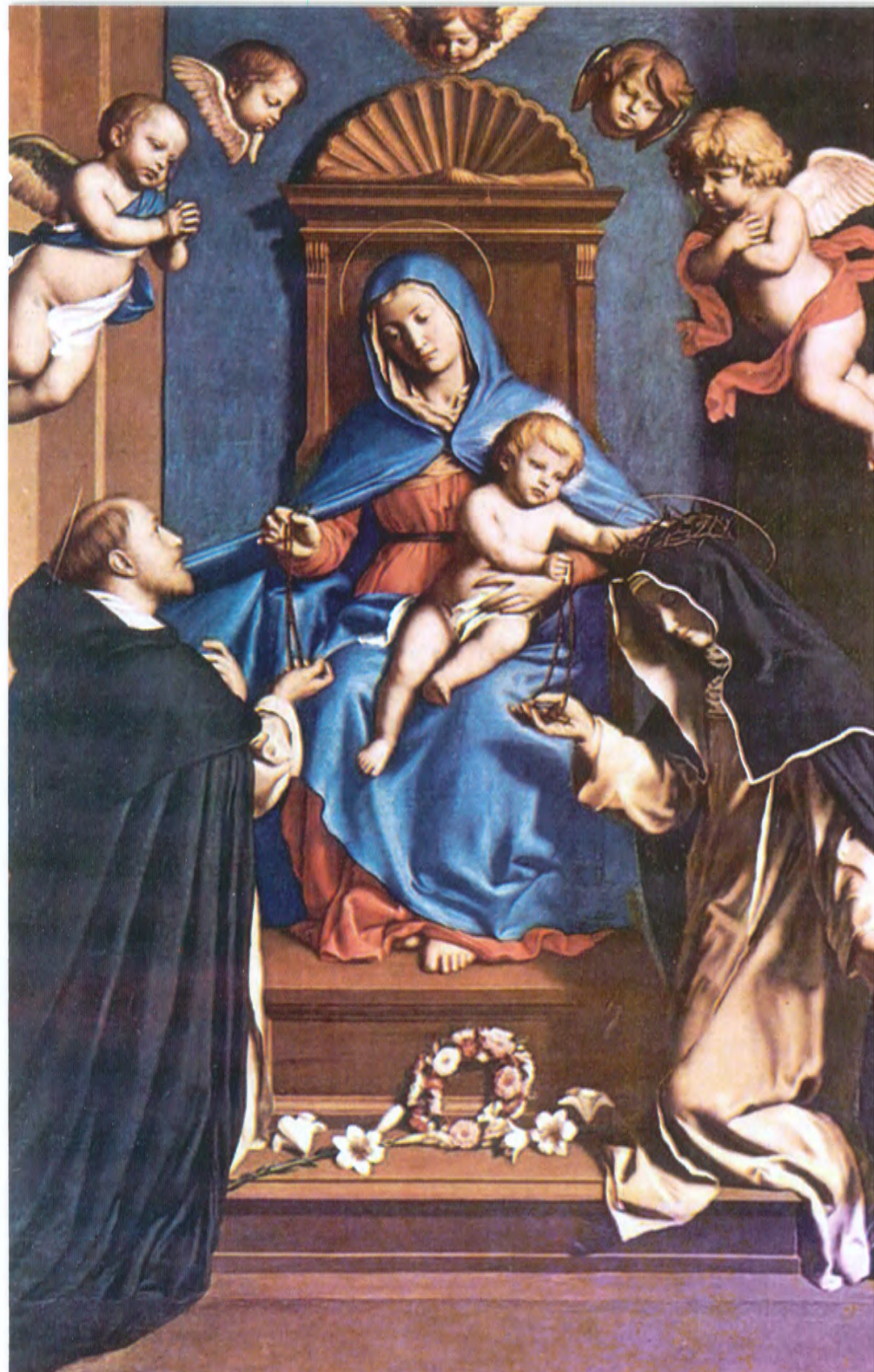
A year later, after appeals from the public, the Holy See enacted a change in the financial management of the shrine. Control was taken out of the private work of the poor devotee of the Rosary, and the Dominicans were placed in charge of the sanctuary. Donations were to be divided into funds for the charitable organizations or the shrine. It had all been one unit before, and donations were simply used, as they were needed. Confusion, hard feelings, and misunderstandings resulted as the workers at the sanctuary tried to understand the changes. Bartolo struggled to resign himself to the humbling feeling of distrust that had descended upon him, yet he was very human and felt crushed by it.

After seeking advice from friends and religious, Bartolo finally saw his

solution. On January 17, 1906, he petitioned for a private audience with the Holy Father, which was granted. As a result of the meeting, two weeks later, he handed to the secretary of the Council Congregation, Monsignor De Lai, a document of complete renunciation: I have arrived at the decision to renounce, as a complete renunciation, all that was founded and erected by me in the Valley of Pompeii and all that has been given to me in legacy, in favor of the Holy See. My only purpose in thirty-three years of service has been that of saving my soul and that of my brother by spreading the Most Holy Rosary and educating prisoners' sons, little orphans of the Virgin of Pompeii, and the children of the Pompeian City.

When this renunciation was notarized and signed it was made official and public on September 12, 1906. The Countess and Bartolo brought a contingent of children both orphans and sons of parents in jail to meet Pope Pius X in a special audience. When Bartolo sorrowfully asked the Pope, "Now can I die in peace?" He responded, "No, you must not die, you must work!" Bartolo took this as a command and responded, "Very well, Holy Father, I shall work until my death." He would continue his work for God and Our Lady, in a new venue.

A dear friend of Bartolo, Professor Martuscelli, was aware of the great interior suffering endured by this renunciation of his life's work and gave him this advice: "You must never again be the head, the commander and director, but the 'Hermit of the Valley' instead. You will pray, work and render testimony to everyone of the miracles of the Virgin of Pompeii, no longer as head, but as the 'Hermit of Our Lady.'" The



"Hermit of Pompeii" bowed his head to his forced retirement and accepted all. "As long as my heart continues beating in my breast," Bartolo testified, "I shall continue spreading the devotion of the Holy Rosary and propagating by means of books and periodicals the glory of the most merciful Queen of the Most Holy Rosary of Pompeii, as I have done until now."

"Hermit of Pompeii"

Bartolo turned to prayer and writing, and did not abandon his purpose to bring to completion his life's ideals. He was a great promoter of the dogma of the Assumption, initiating what came to be known as the Assumption Movement. Father Leone, his spiritual guide and confessor, advised him to never give up and stated that it was of great importance. "Promoting the glories of Mary must be the life, the very heartbeat of you, her son, and even when your strength may not take you where you wish to go, do not worry; Providence will take this into consideration. It is my opinion that this desire will be fulfilled."

The change of commander at the shrine was so smooth that visitors did not notice anything different at the sanctuary. No one asked who managed the sanctuary and all the charitable works. The festivities and celebrations of liturgical events continued as they always had been. The Hermit of Pompeii could be seen walking the grounds, praying his Rosary. Some would stop to touch his garments or kiss the hand of the now aging white-bearded patriarch who in turn would give a few words of encouragement such as, "My dear, my dear, God bless you. Recommend yourselves to Our Lady."

Last Vow of My Heart

He spent his days routinely in what could be considered austere with prayer, meditation, and contemplation. Every day hours were set aside for his correspondence or to visiting priests and the prisoners' sons. The boys loved to spend time with "Commendatore," as they delighted to call him. "We have taken another step toward eternity," he would remind them.

Months passed into years and Bartolo, the "Hermit of Pompeii," watched and prayed over the works of his spiritual garden. His eighty-five years did not daunt his energy or joy. Age was taking a toll, yet still he forged ahead, continuing his daily schedule. There was one more project, however, that he felt God wanted him to plant amongst the multitude of his flowers. His last project was providing care for the daughters of prisoners. He wrote the following: "Listen to the last vow of the heart of your old friend. This work is for me the last ray of the sunset, but for many other souls its will be the radiant dawn of rebirth. Offer yourselves as soldiers of this new battle. Let this be your motto: To the salvation of endangered innocence!" The old patriarch was finally able to see and to experience the joy of being surrounded by fifteen daughters of prisoners on October 15, 1922.

With this joy came one more sorrow. On February 9, 1924, the Countess passed into eternity. In the wake of her passing, came a flood of legal difficulties. Her sons, who had been so trying in the past, now stepped forward to make claims on the house and attempted to gain legal rights over all the properties, including the charitable works. His residence was legally sealed, and Bartolo was forced to leave and seek shelter with

relatives. Time passed, and legal battles continued. Bartolo only wanted peace and to prepare for eternity. Although he had been a lawyer, legal action was not for him. He knew that God would eventually take care of everything.

Returning Home at Last

Pilgrims from all over Italy and even outside the country began to beg for his return to the Sanctuary of Pompeii. Bartolo, however, did not want to stir up any more problems and remained outside the sanctuary he had built. Pius XI was now reigning and had declared a Jubilee Year in 1925. He organized special events to celebrate: First, to the surprise of all, was a new bell tower to embellish the Shrine at Pompeii. It was installed on May 24. Second, the new shelter for the daughters of prisoners was to be solemnly opened on October 18. Finally, the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the painting of the Madonna to Pompeii would be celebrated on the 13 of November. Bartolo realized as founder, he simply must be present at these historic events, and after a fourteen-month absence, he decided to return. A Pontifical Delegation purchased the di Fusco home for the use of the sanctuary, and therefore, Bartolo's use. In April of 1925, he was able to return, to the great joy of all his friends in Pompeii.

A special train was sent to convey him back to the sanctuary. The streets were adorned with flags and banners; music burst from the crowds of jubilant friends, orphans, students, and benefactors, bringing tears to the eyes of Bartolo and those who witnessed the return of the venerable patriarch. He had finally come home.

On May 4, the Holy Father made



Blessed Bartolo Longo is seen in the background of this painting of his friend and doctor, Saint Giuseppe Moscati.

Bartolo an honorary knight in the Order of the Holy Cross of the Holy Sepulcher after the ceremony for the installment of the bell tower. Bartolo, filled with joy receiving the honor of knighthood, on this glorious day, decided that this was the appropriate time to publicly read the depositions of his Will.

The crowd was moved at the sight of the aged patriarch who addressed them with great emotion. He explained that although he had spent millions of dollars for the founding of the Shrine and all the institutions attached to it, he was a poor man with nothing to leave his spiritual children except the medals and sword of honor he had received from Rome. These he gave to the orphaned girls and the boys and girls whose fathers were in prison,



reminding them to be strong in their faith. Lastly he addressed the presiding prelate, Monsignor Silj, "Most eminent Prince, I leave my bones, with the prayer that they may be placed to rest in the sanctuary at the foot of the great throne of my sweet Queen, served by me for more than fifty years and next to the remains of my wife the Countess. On the stone that shall cover my modest tomb may these words be written: Here lies advocate Bartolo Longo, the founder of this sanctuary. Pray for peace."

On the evening of the first Sunday of October, the feast of the Holy Rosary, Bartolo began to run a high fever. Doctor Moscati was sent for and diagnosed his condition as pneumonia, which was fatal in those pre-antibiotic days. The next day, October 4, Bartolo received Holy Communion for the last time saying to those around him: "My only desire is to see Mary who saved me, and who will save me from the

clutches of Satan." He continued to fail during the night, and in the early morning, priests, Sisters, and close associates gathered round his bed to say farewell and to pray. Mass was being offered in the adjacent room, and at the moment of the elevation of the Sacred Host, Bartolo Longo passed into eternity.

For two days, hundreds of people visited the mortal remains of the "Holy Hermit of Pompeii." Grieving orphans and daughters and sons of prisoners came to pay their last respects to the man who had been their father and benefactor. On October 7, 1926, the feast of the Holy Rosary, Bartolo was laid to rest at the feet of his Queen in the Shrine at Pompeii.

Bartolo's life story is a message of hope and living proof that Our Lady will grant miracles through the Rosary. Pope John Paul II beatified Bartolo and referred to him as *The Man of the Madonna and Apostle of the Rosary*. Both were appropriate titles as it was through the Madonna that Bartolo escaped the clutches of Satan, and it was through the Rosary that he gained holiness. Today Satan is waging against our families and our Faith. In the book of *Genesis*, God rebuked Satan warning him, "I will put enmities between thee and the Woman, between thy seed and her seed." This life is a study in contrasts, Satan's camp against that of Our Lady's. Let us stand beneath Her banner, with Her Rosary of Victory clenched in our hands. ■



FROM THE HOUSETOPS