

Blessed Osanna of Mantua, Dominican Tertiary - June 18

Osanna Andreasi was born on January 17, 1449 in Carbonarola, close to Mantua, in the magnificent palace of a very noble Italian family that originated in Hungary. Later the family moved to a smaller palace in Mantua. At age 5, while walking along the banks of the Po River, she heard a clear, firm voice that told her: "Life and death consist in loving God." She entered into an ecstasy and was raised to Heaven by a splendorous Angel. He showed her the celestial hierarchy and told her, "To enter Heaven it is necessary to love God very much: See how all created things sing His glory and proclaim it to men."



Then the Angel, moving in a kind of crescendo of beauties, raised her from this earth and showed her the celestial hierarchy, that is, the Angelic Hierarchy in Heaven, where the empty thrones of the fallen angels are gradually being filled by worthy men and women. Thus, he presented the most beautiful reality he could, which is the ensemble of the Heavenly Kingdom. After having shown her all that beauty, he told her to observe how all things created by God are beautiful and worthy of being loved. Thus, he came to the natural conclusion: Love them and love their Author, so that you also might go to Heaven and occupy your place there.

Thus God, through His Angel, invited that little girl to understand the splendor of His creation and His magnificence, which lay beyond the realm of the natural senses. He invited her to rise above those limits and focus her soul on the spiritual realities that are imperceptible to our senses, but are more intense than the material reality. He also showed her the Angel and the Angelic Hierarchy formed by spiritual beings. At the top of that hierarchy were Our Lady and, above her, the King of Kings, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

She was taken by a great desire to study theology, but her father forbade it as unsuitable for a child. Then Osanna had recourse to prayer. In response, Our Lady herself taught her and gave her lessons. In this way Ossana learned Latin and acquired a great mastery over Holy Scriptures. She was even able to quote the commentaries of the Church Fathers.



A legend states that Osanna, like St. Catherine of Siena, miraculously learned to read and write. One day she saw a piece of paper with two words and said, "Those words are 'Jesus' and 'Mary.'" Allegedly, from that time on, anything relating to the spiritual was within her grasp.

Feeling called to consecrated life, she rejected a marriage arranged by her father. Unable to explain her attraction to religious life to her father, in 1463, at the age of 14, she secretly received the religious habit of the Third Order of St. Dominic. She had been drawn to this Order from

her admiration of two members of the Order, the holy tertiary, Saint Catherine of Siena, and her contemporary, Friar Girolamo Savonarola, who both represented to her lives of strict self-denial.

Returning home, Osanna explained that she had made a religious vow and had to wear it until she had fulfilled her promise, which is an ancient custom. She waited 37 years to complete her vows so she could care for her brothers and sisters after the death of her parents.

The paternal prohibition was eventually lifted. Blessed Osanna entered the Dominican Third Order.

When Osanna was thirty years old, she received the stigmata on her head, her side and her feet. At age 28 (1477), Osanna received the mark of the wound in Jesus' side, caused by a long nail. For the next year various of the sacred wounds would appear, including the crown of thorns. Others saw them only on Wednesdays, Fridays, and during Holy Week, but it appears that they were visible to her and caused both pain and joy. She bore stigmata along with red marks, but there was no bleeding.

She helped the poor and sick and served as spiritual director for many, spending much of her family's considerable fortune to help the unfortunate. She spoke out against decadence, and criticized the aristocracy for a lack of morality. She was a friend of another holy member of her Order, the Blessed Columba of Rieti, and is recorded to have sought counsel from another, the Blessed Stephana de Quinzanis.

She also had a vision in which her heart was transformed and divided into four parts. For the rest of her life, she actively experienced the Passion of Jesus, but especially intensely on Wednesdays and Fridays. Osanna confided these things in her biographer and "spiritual son," the Olivetan monk, Dom Jerome of Mount Olivet, as well as the fact that for years, she subsisted on practically no food at all.

These phenomena brought Osanna to the attention of Mantua's ruling family. Most notably, she was sought by Francesco II Gonzaga and his wife, Isabella d'Este, as both a spiritual guide and a counselor on matters of state. She frequently foretold correctly events which later came to pass, and gained the reputation of a seer.

At this time Osanna felt the need for a spiritual director and prayed for one with wisdom, patience, and understanding. She found him during Mass when an interior voice said to her, "That's the one you need, the one who is saying Mass." Osanna thought he was too young, but, upon meeting him in the confessional a few days later, all doubts were erased. A record of her spiritual conversations with Girolamo de Monte Oliveto (Dom Jerome) has survived. He wrote a biography of her life in 1507, very shortly after her death. Although Jerome noted that Osanna was not quick to discuss her spiritual experiences, in the last years of her life she adopted Jerome as a "spiritual son," "conceived in the Blood of Christ." Jerome's account is especially unique due to his intimate relationship with his subject. The biography takes the form of a detailed report of his conversations with Osanna. Jerome appended to his account Latin translations of twenty-four letters from Osanna, accompanied by documents certifying their authenticity. According to Father Benedict Ashley, O.P., these letters express an "intense and constant physical and inner suffering" made bearable only by "sublime experiences of union with God

which [Osanna] cannot describe except in broken and inadequate language." A special source of misery for Osanna was the degradation of the Church under the abusive pontificate of Alexander VI.

Before her death, the soul of Blessed Columba of Rieti, another Dominican tertiary, appeared to her and told Osanna to prepare for death. When she died in Mantua on 18 June 1505, all the members of the nobility and clergy attended her funeral, as her body was taken in procession to the Church of St. Dominic, where it was enshrined. Later her remains were transferred to the Cathedral of St. Peter in



Mantua (Mantova), where they are still venerated.

Her body remains incorrupt after 400 years.



Relics of Blessed Osanna are exposed in her family's palace on the Via Frattini just down the street from the monastery of San Vincenzo in Mantua and are available for public veneration and maintained as a museum by lay Dominicans.



In art, Osanna is a Dominican tertiary wearing a crown of thorns, surrounded by rays of light (not the halo of a saint), a lily, a broken heart with a crucifix springing from it, the devil under her feet, two angels (one with a lily, one with a cross). This is similar to the image of Saint Catherine of Siena, who has a halo. Osanna is the patroness of school girls.

Further reading:

Women, Art and Architectural Patronage in Renaissance Mantua: Matrons, Mystics and Monasteries, by Sally Anne Hickson, Routledge, Feb 17, 2016 - Art - 204 pages