

LIFE OF JEROME MIANI

Most Distinguished Venetian Nobleman

Written by

ANONYMOUS

God's Benefits to Mankind, the Gift of Writing, Purpose of the Author in Writing the Story of His Friend Jerome.

God has bestowed innumerable gifts upon mankind. Only those who have been purified by faith know how much those gifts are necessary and give grace because of their number and greatness. Those who contemplate the depth of divine goodness see that this immense God not only has been the omnipotent creator and giver of gifts, but also the most gentle and loving Father, a Father who so loved man that, almost forgetful of his superiority and out of overwhelming love, clearly showed that He had planned everything for man, His noblest creature, or better yet, His most beloved child.

I will not talk about His unheard-of mercy, which fills everyone not only with wonder but also with awe and gratitude, if he thinks about it. I would, rather, refer to one of the smallest gifts from His divine majesty, one without which mankind's history and the discoveries of things would be lost, and exchanges among mortals would be hindered. I am talking of the invention of writing by which things always live on, the far ones become closer, and the ones hidden in the innermost parts of the soul become open and clear. Writing preserves the things of the past, teaches those of the present, and prepares us for the things of the future. Although it is useful to us in every situation, it is more useful when, by narrating the history of the people of the past, it guides and makes prudent and wise our deeds.

This marvelous and immortal gift of writing was given to us as it had been to Moses and to the other prophets by God for the benefit and greatness of man. Unfortunately, because of the miserable blindness of human intellects, of their folly, or better yet, of their corrupt malice, today it is greatly perverted and directed to the pitiful detriment of the world. Instead of being a powerful means of life, it has become a most harmful instrument of death. Hence, writing, that is to be of the best, gave us stories of dishonest and despicable loves. One author, through foolish and fictitious tales, deceived people. Another, of beastly rather than human mind, taught the rules of fighting, depicting as good a most cruel act, while yet another wrote convincingly that under certain conditions it is legitimate and blameless that a man kill another. Furthermore, some writers, already beguiled by the devil, endeavored also to beguile others by spreading the cult of false gods, very demons themselves, and filled the world with ideas not only contrary to divinity but also to nature itself. Therefore, nowadays, human blood is being shed in a most cruel war, sincerity is besmirched by decadent extravagance, mutual love is destroyed by greed, and, whereas the world should be a shelter for humanity, temperance, and decency, it has become a horrible den of cruel and merciless wild beasts.

However, being a Christian born of Christian parents by the grace of God, having the gift of writing with Christian freedom, and wanting to give to intelligent people the opportunity to follow this noble undertaking, I would like to start in this way.

In these days, our Lord God has called to heaven our Sir Jerome Miani. I have lived with him for a long time. He loved me very much in this life even though I was not worthy. In telling the story of his life and death, I would like, first, to honor our Lord God, and second, to give an example for others to follow. I think that it would be fitting that in this sweet and human life, his work be a gift from a Christian to a Christian, from a friend to a friend, from a Venetian to a Venetian. In this way, our young and old Venetians, who feel that Baptism alone makes a man a perfect Christian, may learn to what purpose they should direct their efforts and, in this brief and miserable life, know what should be their action and desires.

I now pray that that blessed and friendly soul who loved me so much when in his mortal body, now, I believe, ascended to heaven, may help me by his prayers. May he obtain that what I write for the glory of his beloved Lord be a cause of repentance for the wicked and of greater perfection for the good. In this way, our free republic, which has known no other Lord than Christ, may know by what thoughts and actions she calls herself Christian, a name that she so ardently desires and rightly attributes to herself.

Fatherland, Family, Character, Army, Care of Nephews and Nieces.

Jerome Miani was a native of our city of Venice, which is situated in the lagoons of the Adriatic Sea. Because of the beauty of its palaces, its antiquity, and liberal government, people from all over the world come to live here. By worldly standards, its fame is such that there is little need of praise from others.

Jerome descended from a noble family that in the vernacular is called the House of Mianis. But, as many claim, it should be called the House of Emilianis. As many families of our city, because of the wars with the Goths and other barbarians, they left Rome with their belongings and came to live in Venice. Instead of Emilianis, the family was called Miani by the populace, always the foolish interpreters of things. Many prelates and saintly senators who were issued from this family give witness of its nobility. Many of them reached high government posts in our Republic and brought to it illustrious fame with their wise counseling.

Jerome was nurtured and brought up by his parents in the bosom of the Republic. His father's name was Angelo, and his mother's Dionora, or rather Leonora Morosini. There was something like an omen that, by means of an angel and the action of God, a saint with a sacred name would be born. Jerome had older brothers, Charles, Luke, and Mark.

He did not lack friendships, either because he was gracious in keeping them, or because by nature he was affectionate and benevolent in making them. He was naturally joyful, kind, and strong-minded; as far as being talented, he could hold conversations with equal, but his love was superior to his intelligence. He was short of stature, of rather dark complexion, robust and vigorous. Sometimes he was quick-tempered.

During his youth, he lived in a variety of ways and always adapted himself to the different changes of the times. In the war our Republic waged against the League of Cambrai, he told me that for a time he was a member of the cavalry. And, as St. Paul says, "our injustice praises God's justice," he did not know how to guard himself from those errors into which the army men fall. This is not because they are in the army but because of the ruined souls which join the army, corrupted as they are by the bad example of vicious leaders, who with their sinful villainy corrupt and spoil the army. Instead of being the guardians of Christian customs and defenders of honesty, because of them the army has become an impure and wicked band of criminals, or still

worse, a cesspool of every wickedness, as if to be a soldier means to be lustful, insolent, cruel, and greedy, instead of being chaste, modest, strong, and liberal.

When the war quieted down and his brother Sir Luke was called to his eternal rest by the grace of God, leaving some young children and a widow who, because of their age and the sudden departure of their father, needed assistance, the pious man undertook the care of the poor widow and orphaned nephews and nieces. Since they had some wool clothing business, for several years, until the children grew old enough, Jerome administered both the family affairs and the wool trade without taking any profit for himself, but solely out of sheer and sincere charity.

Conversion, Christian Life

Even before the creation of the world, God because of His infinite mercy, from eternity loves and predestines His children. Therefore, when it pleased the good God to perfectly move his heart and by holy inspiration to draw him to Himself from the occupations of the world, Jerome, by going often to listen to the word of God, started to recall his ingratitude and remember his offenses against his Lord. He therefore wept often and at the feet of the Crucified he prayed to Him that He would be his savior and not his judge. He hated himself and his past life. He attended churches, sermons, and Masses. He sought the company of those who would help him with their counsel, example, and prayer. Among the many the Lord sent to him for his salvation was an illustrious priest, a Venetian Regular Canon, a man of outstanding doctrine and kindness. Since he is still living, I shall not mention his name. For many years he took care of Jerome's soul and directed him in the way of eternal life.

Pondering in these holy thoughts, the servant of God often heard repeated the Gospel's words, "he who wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." Inspired by grace from above, he applied himself to imitate as much as possible his beloved master Christ. Therefore, he began, by moderate fasting to conquer gluttony, the beginning of every vice. He would keep watch at night, never going to bed if he were not sleepy. He would read, pray, get tired, humble himself as much as he could in dress, speech, conversation, and much more in his heart. He considered himself nothing, knowing that speech has been given to praise God, to edify the neighbor, and to ask for necessary things. He would keep diligent vigil over his eyes that they might not see anything over which he would have to repent, knowing that it is written, "turn my eyes away so that they may not see vanity."

He helped the poor with whatever alms he could, with counsel, with visits, and he defended them; what was delightful to note was that he was always joyous except when he remembered his sins. Wanting to uproot them from his soul, he proceeded in this way: first, he chose one sin, then, every day he would try to overcome it by practicing the opposite virtue; having conquered one, he would go to the next. In this way, with the help of God who granted him every greater favors every day, every weed of vice soon was uprooted from his soul and he became ready to receive the seed of divine grace. Often he would remind me of his system: "Brother, if you want to cleanse your soul from sins in order to make it the dwelling place for the Lord, start by pulling one by the hair so that you may punish it in your own way, then go to the others and soon you will be sound."

He set his heart on suffering every misfortune for the love of his Lord. One day, as the nobleman Paul Giustiniani who was present told me, when a scoundrel viciously insulted him for no reason at all and threatened to pull out his beard (that was very long) one hair at a time, he said nothing else but these words: "If God wills it so, here I am. Do it!" Those who heard this said that had

Jerome Miani been his former self, not only would he have not tolerated the offense but he would have torn him to pieces with his teeth.

He stopped attending the Council and put the concern he had for the Republic into the care of his soul, yearning for the heavenly fatherland. He talked with few people, guarded himself from being idle as much as he could, and grieved over nothing except when an hour passed without doing something good.

Famine of 1528, Works of Mercy, Illness of Jerome, St. Rocco's School, Hospital of the Incurables.

While the servant of God was keeping this holy vigilance and was trying to amend his body and his habits, the Heavenly Kindness provided sweet opportunities to His new soldier to imitate his captain, Jesus Christ, and so to gain heaven.

In His justice, or better in His love and mercy, God wanted to awaken the Italians from the deep sleep of abominable vices. Therefore, as everyone knows about and remember with sorrow, in 1528 a famine so serious broke out in Italy and throughout Europe that in towns, cities, and villages thousands of people died of starvation. There was such a shortage of grain that little of it was to be found, and that at intolerably high prices. The poor people were compelled by hunger to eat dogs and donkeys, then grass but not from their gardens or cultivated fields, because on account of the difficult times there were no gardens; therefore, they ate wild grasses, and these without oil and salt, because they did not have any. But, what am I saying, grass? In many places stale hay and straw from the thatched roofs were finely chopped and tried as food.

Hearing that in our city there were more opportunities than in other Italian cities, with their wives and children, men left their homes, more like tombs for the living, and in bands invaded Venice.

You could see the poor people in the squares and the streets unable even to cry but weeping silently at their approaching death. Seeing such a spectacle and moved by ardent charity, our Miani decided to help them with whatever he could. So, in a few days he spent the money he had in this mission, sold his clothes, tapestries, and household goods, and spent everything in this pious and holy enterprise. He would feed some, clothe others because it was winter, shelter some in his own home, comfort and exhort others to patience and to dying for the love of God, reminding them that eternal life was intended for just such a faith and patience.

In these activities he would spend the entire day, but many times the day was not enough. So during the night he would go through the city helping the living and the sick as he could. The dead, whom he found at times in the streets, unseen and unknown, he would put on his shoulders as though they were balsam and gold and carry them to cemeteries and sacred places.

There is not enough time for me to give the details of all his Christian works. Having spent all he had in these works, Jerome was tested by God in his personal life, as He had done with the patient Job.

The horrible famine was suddenly followed by a fatal epidemic disease which caused purple and red spots to cover human bodies. Avoiding neither the sick or the dead, the valiant soldier of Christ contracted the same disease. Once he realized this, he made his confession, received the Holy Sacrament of the altar, and committed himself to the Lord, who was his unique hope and refuge. Then he spoke and cared no more for himself, as if the illness were not his, but patiently he awaited God's will. Doctors had already despaired and were waiting for his death when in a few days he recovered unexpectedly, and immediately he resumed his previous work, though not

yet entirely healed. He worked with greater fervor as he was more sure after this personal experience, that the Lord does not abandon those who work at His service; rather, He accomplishes in His servant new and wonderful things.

Living in this way more and more each day, he decided to leave the wool trade to his nephew, already grown up. After having given an excellent account of everything, he left the business and at the same time civilian attire, a long robe with closed sleeves, called elbow-sleeve robe. Instead he wore a thick cloth, heavy shoes, and a short cloak. Having gathered some children who had been begging in the street, he took a shop near St. Rocco, where he opened a school which even Socrates in all his wisdom would have not dreamt of. Here, neither Plato nor Aristotle taught their vain sciences, but Jerome taught how man, because of faith in Christ and imitation of His holy life, becomes the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, the son and heir of God.

Jerome had brought in some craftsmen who would teach the art of making iron pitchers, and he and his children practiced that art. While working, they would sing psalms; they prayed night and day and everything was held in common. Among them there was a special awareness of poverty and everyone was eager to be the poorest. Their beds were bare straw, their blankets the shabbiest. Their food was coarse bread and water, eaten with fruits and vegetables. God's Saint taught these children to fear God, to consider nothing their own, to live in common, and to live not from begging but from their labor. Begging, he used to say, was less than a Christian practice, except for the sick who cannot live from their own labor; as to the others, everyone should support himself by the sweat of his brow, according to the saying: "He who does not work, should not eat."

No one more than Jerome loved and served the servants of God, whatever might be their condition. To bishops and priests he paid great honor. Not only to the children mentioned above did he extend his care, but as a universal father of the poor he used to give alms he could to Mazorbo, Torcello, Burano, Chioggia and other similar places called districts, either by himself or through others. He was so sincere that whatever was not in himself he did not suspect in others; moreover, he thought well of everybody.

He lived a long time in this good and saintly way. Later, he was called by the directors of the Hospital of the Incurables to unite both the school for children and the hospital in one institution under his responsibility. Since he did not want to confine his soul made in the likeness of God to any particular work, but wished to act according to the will of his Lord, he willingly went there. How much he worked there, how much of his life he gave was witnessed by those good spirits who are in charge of that place today. How many times I visited him either here or at St. Rocco before! During the pious conversations he had with me – the Lord knows well the pure and Christian love he had for me – he would show me the work of his hands, the groups of children and their talents. He pointed out among others four who, I believe, were not older than eight. And he would say: "These pray with me, are pious and have great grace from the Lord; those read well and write; those others work; that one is very obedient, and this other observes silence well; these are their supervisors, that one is the Father who hear their confessions." He would show me his small bed, which was more a tomb than a bed because he was so narrow. He would ask me to live with him, even though I was not worthy of the companionship of such a man. Often in my presence he would weep for the desire of the heavenly fatherland. Surely, had I not been more than cold, his words could have been for me as flames of divine love and of desire for heaven.

Departure from Venice, Activities in the Regions of Bergamo, Milan, and St. Martin Valley, The Congregation of the Poor.

Here we need to defend Jerome against those who, through ignorance, accused him of inconstancy for leaving the care of the hospital and Venice to go elsewhere. Don't they know the hidden designs of God, and that Christ himself said to those who wanted to keep Him: "I must also evangelize the other towns?" Why is it a wonder if he left his fatherland? Don't we know that the precious stones found in one place are imported in to another? That incense, cinnamon, cassia and other valuable goods often see a new sky? That the sun does not remain where it rises but always going around ends his daily course? And so, this precious stone, this rich merchandise of the Lord, this sun so bright, because of his exemplary life, did not remain always in one place. Aware that Christians were like a flock without a shepherd, he left Venice and went to Bergamo. Here, bishops, prelates, and other pious persons who knew him are witness to the fire of divine love he had, to his love for his neighbor, and to his eagerness to save souls.

He hated heresies and their supporters. He used to say that the Lord allows Christians to be in need of material things so that they would see God in those who are able to give them living alms. In the Bergamo region, with the help of the bishop and other good people, he set things in order in the hospitals, which were many in those places. He kept with him some children who were trained in the Christian life. With them he would go through the villages of the territory exhorting the peasants to the blessed life of the holy Gospel.

Not only here he did show his charity but he also went through the region of Cremona and Crema where he performed the same deeds. Having crossed the Adda River, he entered Milanese territory where an outstanding act of his cannot be overlooked. After having arrived in this territory with many of his poor, he and many of his followers fell sick. Having found by chance and old abandoned and unroofed hospital where there was only straw, he lay down on that. He had neither bread nor wine, nor money, because the ardent Christian would bring with him for his need nothing but a living faith in Christ. While waiting for His grace, a friend of his and ours, divinely inspired, entered where the holy man was laying feverish, recognized him and said: "Sir Jerome, if you like it, I will have you transported to a nearby place of mine, you alone, where you will be well cared for." With a generous soul, he answered him: "Brother, I thank you very much for your kindness and I would be happy to go there only if you would also accept these brothers of mine with whom I wish to live and to die." Deeming this response a serious one, our friend left and went to Milan where he related it to Duke Francesco Sforza, whose soul may the Lord God guard with kindness. Having understood the character of the servant of God, the Duke sent him the necessary means and had him taken to a Milan hospital, a place where he would prefer to stay with his companions more than anywhere else.

Nor did his charity ends there. Indeed, having given a good and Christian shape to that place, moved by the Holy Spirit, he went on to Crema, where in a short time he assembled many good persons, some of whom were priests and some laymen. In St. Martin Valley and in Bergamo, these people gathered in communities homeless poor who were healed, clothed, and taught Christian customs, and who earned their living from their own just labor. How nice it was to see in times so corrupted by vice a Venetian nobleman garbed as a peasant, accompanied by many mendicants, or better, by reformed Christians and noblemen according to the holy Gospel, go through the countryside hoeing, cutting grain, and doing similar works, always singing psalms and hymns to the Lord. They would teach the poor peasants the principles of Christian life, and eat sorghum bread and other such food of the countryside. I think we must pity the great men

who, idle and fat, give themselves up to games and feasts in their haughty palaces and gilded rooms and never think of the happy, future immortal life full of every delight. Suddenly, they leave their pomp and wealth, and, poor and alone, stripped of everything, they are borne to the grave.

The holy man had gathered in these communities in the territory of Bergamo, Crema, and Como more than three hundred souls. They led a holy and Christian life, having poverty as a friend and living under the guidance of good priests and laymen whose names I do not want to mention, so that the glory will be the Lord's; they are known to the Holy Spirit and their names are written in the Book of Life.

Return to Venice, His Main Friends, Epidemic in the Bergamo Territory, Death of Jerome.

Having been a long time in this state of perfection, Jerome came to Venice for some pious works and stayed a little less than a year. He was clothed, as usual, as a peasant. For holy eyes it was admirable to see such a man of poor and humble clothes, but of so sublime soul, of so chaste, modest, cautious, and prudent customs; for the purified ears it was a concert of virtues. And to me it looked like a divine deed that he would have great compassion on evildoers and that he would never think ill of anybody. He would frequently visit his friends. We were often together and he filled me with so many holy memories and so much Christian hope that they still resound in my mind. Then he left, never to see us again in this life, but, as I hope through the mercy of God, to see us forever in the next. His closest personal friends were priests: the Most Reverend Archbishop of Chieti, now Cardinal; the two Lippomanos, one Prior of the Trinity, the other bishop of Bergamo; the bishop of Verona and others less important. But, above all, he loved his dear poor who best represented Christ for him.

He had reached, I believe, the fifty-sixth year of his life, of which twelve had been spent in austere Christian living, when our most benign God, who for small trials gives us eternal goods, was pleased to call him to His celestial fatherland. It was the Divine Will that a contagious disease should break out in the Bergamo territory, a disease not understood by the doctors, which in fourteen days or so would kill the sick. At that time, the holy man was in St. Martin Valley with many of his own. From them, occasionally, he would withdraw alone to a grotto for contemplation. It happened at that time that one of his own was taken ill and, in a few days, was at death's door. Since he was in the last stage, he was watched as it is done in such a case by many, and among them Sir Jerome. Now this one had been a long time without speaking or giving any sign of life, when, suddenly, as rousing from a deep sleep, he got up as best as he could, saying: "Oh, what a thing I have seen!" Asked what he had seen, he answered: "I have seen a most beautiful throne surrounded by a great light, on which set a child holding in his hands a banner that read: This is Jerome Miani's throne." Everyone was amazed to hear this, most of all, Jerome.

Then, he wanted to go visit various places, but being forbidden by his own to do so, he said: "Let me go, because in a little while, neither you nor anyone else will see me." Even though this caused apprehension in those who heard it, no one could believe that the Lord wanted to deprive them of their father and shepherd. But the most benign God, in order to reward his labors and so that no one would trust in any man regardless of how saintly he might be, on the day the world calls Carnival Sunday but that the Church calls Quinquagesima, made him fall sick with the plague. Struck very hard, in four days he returned his soul to his Maker with so great a faith (as those who were present said) that he never showed signs of fear. On the contrary, he said that he

had made his covenant with Christ. He exhorted everyone to follow the way of the Crucified, to hold the world in contempt, to love each other, to take care of the poor, saying that whoever did those deeds would never be forsaken by God. Saying this and other similar things, he left this mortal life and went to enjoy the eternal one, which, we hope, the Lord in His goodness will grant to us. Amen.

So ends the life of the most distinguished Jerome Miani, written in Venice, in 1536, under the happy government of the most learned and valiant Andrea Gritti, most serene Prince of Venice.