

MOLFETTA'S LETTER

The Capuchin Friar Jerome from Molfetta issues (1539) the work of Friar Bartholomew da Citta' di Castello, "Dialogue of the spiritual union of the soul with God, where Divine Love, the bride and the human reason are the debaters." In the preface, he dedicates the work to the Company of the Servants of the Poor.

Friar Jerome Molfetta, Preacher of the Order of the Minor Friars, called Capuchins.

To the Fathers and Brothers, dear in Christ, the Servants of the Poor, and to their children – orphans in the institutions of Lombardy.

My dear ones in Christ Jesus, Fathers and Brothers, the peace and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always, and with all those who believe in Him and accompany their faith and their Christian names with similar works.

Many days ago, a booklet came into my hands titled "On Divine Love," written by the Reverend Father of sacred memory Friar Bartholomeo della Citta' di Castello, of our Order of the Minor Friars. He is a man of no lesser holiness, life and customs, and of no lesser ardent love than the divine Love that his burning and sweet writings show. I thought that charity required that such a beautiful and useful work should nor remain buried either for the honor of God or the successful utility to those who would read it with attentive silence (after prayer, though). In it the author unveils to us and gives proofs of the beautiful and wonderful examples of the Divine Union accompanied by many effective reasons and irrefutable witnesses of sacred Scripture. Therefore, I have decided to publish it myself.

Looking for someone to whom I would make so holy and beautiful a gift, it came to my mind (not without God's special Providence, I believe) that I could not do better than to inscribe it to your charities. You, as burning lamps, shine outwardly as rays of works inflamed by Divine Love, and inspired by the examples and the teaching of that blessed soul of Sir Jerome Miani, Venetian nobleman. He had a burning desire to draw and join to God people of every status, class, and condition. For this desire he showed such clear signs: burning with Divine Love, for the sake of the Gospel and for the building of the kingdom of God, he left behind his riches, his noble relatives and his illustrious fatherland. Having thrown himself into the arms of his beloved, the naked and crucified Jesus Christ, after a brief wandering, he began to fulfill his desire starting with your poor ones, by rescuing you from filth, in Bergamo first and then in other cities where you lived. You were distressed with hunger, cold, and nakedness, and some of you were found almost dead. And those of you who could escape such miserable a fate, in your troubles, gave out a sound no less sad than that of the tormented souls in purgatory, as everyone knows.

Thus, he gathered you with so great a sweetness and goodness curing your souls with his holy examples and teachings. With his hands he cured your physical illnesses, such as scabies and many other diseases. He looked for you walking through the neighborhoods, and he acquired food for you by knocking on doors. In so doing he has given through his virtues a fragrant perfume to the Lord, and to all Lombardy the living light of loving God entirely without ceremony. A proof of this is the hospitals which were established by him in the most honorable towns. There, your very voices used to cry, "I'm dying of starvation, I'm dying of cold," and now they sing praises to the Lord day and night.

And after having gathered you poor things, he led some of you priests and some of you laymen to leave your property and patrimonies, to enter into holy work, and to join God with him. What else can I say about the many and many acts of charity performed by him in different places and

by which he showed his love for God? Was not that a great testimony of his love when, in Milan, he became ill in the church of Santo Sepolcro with almost all of you poor things sick too, and he was lying on a bed of straw, and, though ill, he kept helping his sick sheep? Then, invited by some gentlemen of that city to go, only by himself, to their houses to get cured, as a good shepherd, he never wanted to depart from you. The Lord, having tried his constancy, provided a place for everybody and gave back to them their health too.

And in Pavia, when the administrators of the Hospital of Mercy evicted some people who were living in the hospital in order to give him that place, he preferred to go to live with those who were with him then, at the Sala Grande, which is in the Citadel of the city, rather than cause anyone trouble. And the Lord gave him the institution that now is St. Gervasio. And I do not want to be silent about the other many episodes of which those who knew him can testify, such as his patiently bearing with and forgiving the miseries, infirmities, and shortcomings, not only of those with whom he lived, but of others as well.

Therefore, I dedicate it to you, beloved in Christ, given the eagerness that that blessed spirit had to unite you to God, so that this book may produce the desired effect.

And I pray to the Lord that the great fire of his Divine Love may increase in your hearts, as much I truly desire for His glory and for the growth of His kingdom. In this way, you too will dedicate yourselves with greater fervor to the works of mercy and divine love. Many others, because of your example, as you did because of the example of Sir Jerome – whom though dead I still greatly revere – will move to do the same and to win over the universal reformation of the Church, for which he thirsted greatly and for which he composed a particular prayer. Still today this prayer is said during Mass and in our community prayers. It reads: “Our dear Father Lord Jesus Christ, we pray to you that, out of your infinite goodness, you may bring all Christendom to that same sanctity which existed during the time of the Apostles; and I desire that our Lord Jesus Christ will grant it to us out of his infinite mercy.”

And pray to Him at times for me also, poor sinner, so that He may lead us all together to the blessed heavenly vision. Amen.

In Vinegia for Piero da Nicolini sa Sabio MDLVIII