

Saint Francis de Geronimo

1642 - 1716

HELL

In the life of Saint Francis de Geronimo there was an episode which causes one to reflect on the reality of the Inferno. A public sinner, of the name Catherine, often mocked the sermons of the Saint in Naples, where he exercised his ministry, and she made fun of his threats of punishments, as in those of the dogma of faith on Hell.

One day while she was leaning out of her window, with her lute in hand, she lost her equilibrium and fell in the street, remaining killed upon impact. The cadaver was picked up and put onto a stretcher. As in a flash the news of the incident was spread throughout the whole city. The news arrived also to Saint Francis while he was preaching, he interrupted himself and said to those who were listening, "Let us go see!" Surrounded by a huge crowd of people, he went to the place where the deceased was lying on the stretcher, he took her by the hand and he began to pray and to conjure her.

Upon the third conjuring, while he was asking her, "Catherine, where are you now?" the dead woman got up and answered in a voice shaking from desperation, "In Hell!" Then she fell back down and remained spread on the stretcher. The event occurred on the 4th of April 1704.

After the death of the Saint, the Archbishop of Naples asked ocular and auricular witnesses to testify under oath. There were about 250 people who had assisted at the scene. This inquest appears also in the dossier of the beatification. Saint Francis was born in Grottaglie (Taranto) on the 17th of December 1642, the first of eleven children, three of which were clergymen, from a well-to-do family of a profoundly Christian faith.

At the age of about ten years old, he was entrusted to a Congregation of priests dedicated to the teaching and to the missions among the people. At sixteen years old he was conferred the first tonsure of the same Congregation upon proposal (1658) and at seventeen he was received into the diocesan seminary of Taranto to continue his studies. In 1665 he went to Naples, upon the counsel of his own teachers, to attend courses in civil and canon law, achieving a degree in those subjects, it seems in 1668, and in theology.

In 1666 he was ordained a priest and in 1670 became a Jesuit not having yet finished his theological studies. From 1671 to 1674 he was sent as a missionary to the diocese of Lecce.

Upon returning to Naples to complete his studies of theology, he then remained for the rest of his life in charge of the



missions of the people who made him an apostle of Naples and which substituted for the missions of India or of the Orient which he insistently requested. He fulfilled his solemn religious profession (8th of December 1682) during the fullness of his Neapolitan apostolate, being assigned in 1676 to the Professed House of the church Gesù Nuovo. He dedicated himself to the missions of the people, which consisted of sermons which took place in the public squares or along the streets, wherever more people converged on feast days, at that time fairly numerous. He promoted the general Holy Communion every third Sunday of the month, also having prepared for it by preaching out in the open and trying to convert the women of the street.

