

Blessed Emilia Bicchieri

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PURGATORY

Emilia Bicchieri was born in Vercelli in 1238 in a noble and rich family. Ever since she was a little girl, she loved to retreat into her room to pray. Left an orphan, without her mother, she became the pupil of her father. Attracted by the word and the example of the preaching monks, she soon decided to enter into a convent, but found the firm opposition of her parent. Only in 1255 did her father give his consent, and he – by his own expense, had a Dominican monastery built in the periphery of Vercelli which was named after Saint Margaret. Here Emilia went into retreat with other young ladies to live under the Rule of the Third Order of Saint Dominic. In 1266 the monastery was incorporated into the Dominican Order and the religious women became Tertiary Regulars.

From 1273 she became elected prioress of the monastery, guiding the community to a great union with God. Her motto was: “Do everything for God alone.”

She was very devoted to the Eucharist and to the Virgin, and she sought to infuse these devotions to her fellow sisters, too. She prayed and did penitence without withholding any sacrifices and burdens in order to help the others. With her authentic evangelical testimony, she was able to draw souls into the love of God. Enamored by the Passion of Christ she did not cease to urge everyone to meditate on it and to take it as an example for spiritual growth

and as a font of grace. The characteristics of her spirituality are based upon two elements: the filial gratitude towards God for his benefits, and the rightness of intention which preserves behaviors from ulterior motives that are not conformed to the Divine Will and entrusts them to Him. She died in Vercelli on the 3rd of May 1314. In 1537 her remains were transferred to the monastery of Saint Margaret, then, in 1811 moved to the Cathedral of Vercelli. Clement XIV approved her worship as Blessed on the 19th of July 1769.

During the period of her time as superior, in the monastery of Saint Margaret there was a rule in force which prohibited drinking from one meal to another without the permission of the prioress, and that was conceded very rarely. All that had the purpose of suffering in union with Jesus for the thirst which he suffered on Calvary. A nun, by the name of Cecilia Avogadro, one day turned to Emilia to ask her permission to drink, but did not obtain her consent, and so then – regardless of the thirst, she accepted the sacrifice as the will of God. The religious, after a few weeks since her death, totally luminous with glory, appeared to the Blessed, thanking her for having invited her to that mortification, on the merit of which her period of Purgatory was lessened. If she had not done that penitence, the time of her purification would have been much longer because of her attachment to her relatives.

