

Venerable Ursula Benincasa

1547 - 1618

PURGATORY

Ursula Benincasa was born in Naples (Italy) on the 7th of August 1547. Ever since infancy she lived always devoted to prayer and surrendered to God, despite sickness and poverty. She had numerous ecstasies and visions, and given the fact that through her, the Lord healed the faithful, a crowd was always milling around her door. To flee from the clamor, in 1579 she took refuge at the fortress of St. Elmo, on the hill of Vomero, choosing the hermetic life. She had asked to be able to join the Capuchin Poor Clares of the monastery of Saint Mary of Jerusalem, founded by the Blessed Maria Lorenza Longo, but she was not welcomed. In 1582, following an ecstasy received on the 12th of March, she departed for Rome to meet Pope Gregory XIII, because she had a message to transmit to him on behalf of the divine, so that he would begin the reform of the Church.

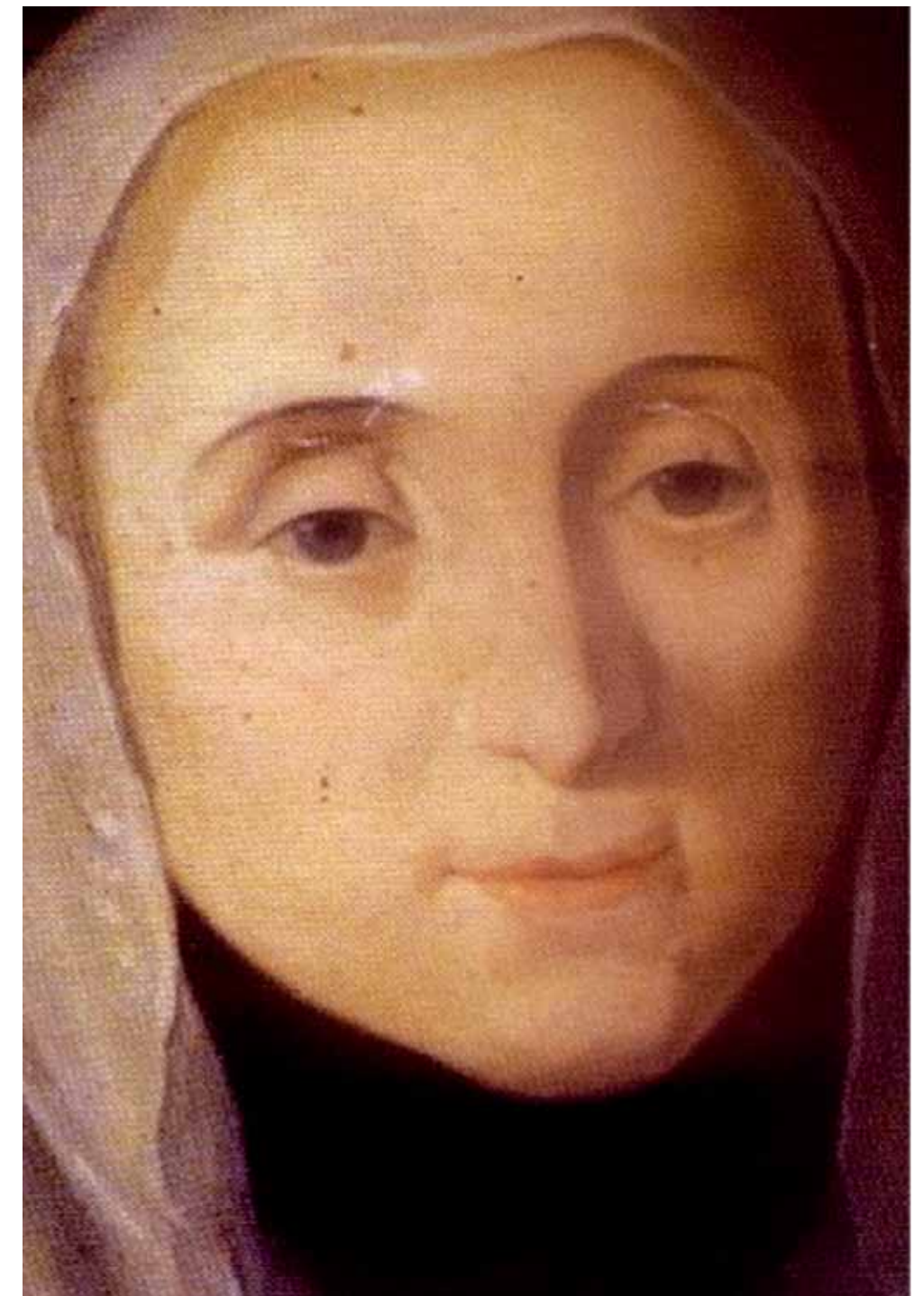
After having listened to her, the Pope had her examined by a commission of nine theologians; amongst them was Saint Philip Neri, to whom she was then also entrusted.

Ursula returned to Naples and she retired on the mount of Saint Elmo, where in 1583 she founded the Congregation of the Theatine Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, religious nuns with simple vows, to which there would also be

attached a cloistered branch, called the Hermitage, whose rules were approved after her death, by Gregory XV in 1623. In her intentions, the Hermitesses of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, cloistered contemplative nuns, needed to sustain, with the power of prayer, the apostolic work of the Oblates.

In 1587 she received as a gift from Cornelia Pignatelli, duchess of Saint Agatha, the first nucleus of construction and the surrounding terrain, so that Ursula could retire into a convent together with her sister Christina and two nieces, to whom other girls were added soon afterward. Ursula died in the concept of sanctity on the 20th of October of 1618. On the 7th of August 1793, Pius VI proclaimed the heroicness of her virtues and declared her Venerable.

Before dying, Ursula had asked that her religious would be put under the governance and spiritual direction of the Regular Theatine Clergy, but being contrary to their establishment, the Fathers refused the proposal. In 1633, however, with the authorization of Urban VIII, the Oblates and the Hermitesses officially became under the jurisdiction of the Theatines, from whom they adopted the name. She had great devotion for the Souls in Purgatory and at times took upon herself their penalties. She tells of an episode which occurred while she was



assisting her sister Christina who was dying. The Venerable was aware that her sister had a terrible fear of Purgatory. To comfort her and to liberate her from that anguish, Ursula begged God that should he wish to condemn the dying girl to the pains of Purgatory to instead let her suffer in her place. The Lord accepted her prayer and Christina soon became liberated from the torment and fear, dying serenely. Ursula, instead, was immediately taken by great pains which did not abandon her until her death.

