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Blessed Marco d'Aviano- The Spiritual Doctor of Europe

The inspiring life of Blessed Marco d'Aviano is one with a most unlikely outcome considering the small town he was born in, and his vows to the Capuchin order. The humility, conviction, and courage that he virtuously demonstrated in his life can be a great source of wisdom for the New Evangelization.

Charles Dominic Cristofori was born in the small town of Aviano, in the Venetian Province of northern Italy, on November 17, 1631(Vatican 2). As a teenager, Charles was deeply affected by the war of Candia, fought between the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire. He ran away from home desiring to fight and spill his blood for the cause; walking for two days straight he ended up exhausted on the steps of a Cappuccin house(Vatican 3). During his stay there he was inspired by grace to find a new way towards martyrdom through apostolic work. In September 1648, he was received into the novitiate of Conegliano and one year later, on November 21, 1649, he professed religious vows with the name of Marco d'Aviano. He was ordained a priest in 1655 (Santi Beati 3).

Due to Fr. Marco's moving exhortations for listeners to increase their lives of faith and Christian practice, to repent of their sins and to the necessity of penance and serving Christ, his fame spread, and requests for his preaching began to come from all across the region (Cappuccin 4, 30Days 3). He moved up the ranks in the Capuchin order to serve as superior of the convent of Belluno 1672, and in 1674 he was called to direct the fraternity of Oderzo (Santi Beati 4). These offices proved difficult for him because they hindered his desire for solitude and prayer, so the superiors, accepting his request, transferred him to Padua (Santi Beati 4). During his time in Padua, much of which he spent in preaching and in visiting the sick, a nun named Vincenza

Francesconi - ill and bedridden for 13 years - was instantly healed through his prayers (Vatican 6). More healings followed, and his reputation spread, drawing growing numbers of followers eager to witness, or to benefit from his miracles. Word of Fr. Marco's miracles reached the Holy See, and Pope Innocent XI appointed Marco d'Aviano as apostolic nuncio, papal legate, and his personal envoy to the Emperor Leopold I, Holy Roman Emperor (Wander 6). He traveled all over Europe preaching at the request of the leaders of nations, Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, Bohemia and Austria (Vatican 9).

In late June of 1683 Kara Mustafà the Grand Vizir leading the Ottoman army, was able to advance on Vienna and eventually put the city under siege in July . The plan was to take Vienna and then move forward to conquer the rest of Western Europe, including Rome. Pope Innocent XI sent Marco d'Aviano along with the papal state troops to facilitate a melding together of the imperial army(Cappuccin 6). Marco had a specific hand in unifying the differing opinions of the military leaders, inspiring soldiers to pray and trust in God (Vatican 11). The soldiers were led by John III Sobieski, the King of Poland, and the whole army was exhorted by Fr. Marco to request divine help, specifically from Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

On the morning of the battle for Vienna, 12 September 1683, Marco d'Aviano prayed Mass for the soldiers, emboldening them to fight to protect their faith and their loved ones. While the fighting was happening he retreated into a nearby chapel to pray for victory (30days 4). Through the grace of God the battle was won and the Siege of Vienna was over. Marco stayed in his position to reunite and organize the Christians, provoking the definitive defeat of Ottoman aggression in Europe, with the battles of Budapest (1684-1686), Neuhäusel (1685), Mohacz (1687), Belgrade (1688) and finally culminating with the peace of Karlowitz (1689) (Santi Beati 8).

Upon the liberation of Belgrade, on 6 September 1688: after the city had been taken by storm, eight hundred Muslim soldiers of the Sublime Porte were still barricaded in the stronghold. Fr. Marco personally petitioned for their lives and his request was granted, the captives would have been put to the sword (30Days 6).

On August 13 1699, during a visit to Vienna, Fr. Marco passed from cancer in the presence of his long time friend Emperor Leopold I. He is poorly remembered in Italy, but is studied in schools in Austria and Eastern Europe (Cappuccin 8). Pope Pius X signed the decree introducing the cause of his beatification and on April 27, 2003 he was beatified by Pope John Paul II (Cappuccin 9).

Blessed Marco d'Aviano's significance as a witness for the Gospel is very clear in the events of his life. The proof is in the fruit that blossomed in the wake of his preaching, blessings, and work with the armies and commanders of Europe. His dedication to communal living and learning scripture led him to exhibit the gifts of counsel and healing. In earnest search for prayer and contemplation he was led in the direction of living a more public life due to the healing miracles God worked through him. Bl. Marco sacrificed his personal desire for a quiet life and was obedient to his superiors and the requests for his preaching. His travel for preaching gained him esteem and friendships with the leaders of Christian nations, often at odds with each other until Bl. Marco's interventions. The trust he built with Emperor Leopold I allowed Bl. Marco to counsel him in times of great conflict. Throughout his life, the moving force was his urgency to be involved in the conflict of the Ottoman Turks in his youth. God moved him, matured him, and ultimately granted Bl. Marco's heart's desire in a way that he could never have imagined.

Blessed Marco d'Aviano is a possible inspiration for wisdom in the New Evangelization for many reasons, but let us consider three: humility in service, strength in conviction, and

courage to preach against violent attacks from Muslim armies. His humility is subtle in some ways because he turns out to be more of a public figure than he'd wished. In the act of maintaining such a public life, his preservation of humility demonstrates heroic holiness in a manner that ought to be applied among contemporary would-be evangelists. The new media is an effective tool, but humility in use and application is necessary to bearing fruit for Christ, lest public Catholic figures be drawn into the cults of personality and pride which have so often been the downfall of celebrities.

The strength in conviction Bl. Marco held and used through his gift of preaching allowed him to befriend and hold the confidence of powerful political leaders. In the New Evangelization, his example of strength in conviction is necessary, because, today more than ever, our politicians need good counsel. Counsel that comes from time spent in relationship and in fostered trust. His strength in conviction was also what allowed God to work so many miracles through him. Bl. Marco's preaching and the blessings that came from it were compelling because of the trust that he had in Christ. Not only do secular leaders need good counsel, but so does the common man, who deserves to be treated with the same dignity as men and women of power.

Courage to preach against attacks from Muslim armies is a very timely inspiration for the New Evangelization. Our culture shames and demeans anyone who dares to speak out against any form of Muslim aggression in the United States and around the world. The courage Bl. Marco drew upon allowed him to mediate between feuding Christian nations, allying them against the real problem, namely invading forces. There have been movements of invasion and land occupation in our own times, but the random acts of violence in the form of terror attacks were not a reality in the time of Bl. Marco. The inspiration needed today is courage to stand by our faith and to defend it against aggression. At the same time the dignity of all people needs to

be vigorously defended, in the manner of Bl. Marco's protection of the lives of the trapped Muslims.

The life of Blessed Marco d'Aviano is source of much inspiration and wisdom for the New Evangelization. May his passion and dedication be better known to us and to future generations, who will need no less than his heroic humility, conviction and courage.

Vatican: http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20030427_d-aviano_it.html

Wander: <http://thewandererpress.com/catholic/news/featured-today/blessed-marco-daviano-capuchin-defender-of-the-faith-against-militant-islam/>

30Days:

http://www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_786_13.htm

Cappuccin:

<http://www.fraticappucciniassisi.it/storia/beati/beato-marco-daviano.html>

Santi Beati:

<http://www.santiebeati.it/dettaglio/91492>