

Blessed Marco d'Aviano (1631-1699)



Marco d'Aviano was born in Aviano (Udine) on 17 November 1631, his parents were Marco Cristofori and Rosa Zanoni. He was baptised Carlo Domenico. He received his early education from a local tutor. The next phase of education was entrusted to the Jesuit college in Gorizia. The boy was shy and a dreamer and let himself be taken by fantasy. One day when the students returned from a walk, he was missing at the roll-call. After days of walking he, exhausted, knocked at the door of the Capuchins in Capodistria (Koper). This youthful crisis was resolved with his divine call to the cloister when on 21 November 1648 he received the Capuchin habit in the novitiate at Conegliano. He also received the name Marco.

He had difficulties to overcome, one of which was that at first his superiors thought not to admit him to studies. Fortunato da Cadore, General Minister at the time, had the intuition to admit the young religious to further education, which would be anything but easy for him. He was ordained to the priesthood on 18 September 1655. He began straightaway in the ministry of the word, and not without some apprehension. In 1670 he was appointed superior of the friary at Belluno and then two years later in Oderzo. However, the weight of responsibility was an obstacle to his desire for solitude and prayer. Therefore the superiors, ceding his request, transferred him to Padua. It was in Padua that under obedience he had to give a panegyric. This event made him known before a large crowd in the learned city, perhaps not so much for eloquence but as a remarkable sign.

From that moment an intense rhythm of life began which led Marco along the streets not only of the Veneto, but throughout nearly all Europe. His preaching and journeys were marked by an ever growing reputation as a wonder-worker. Numerous private and diplomatic reports exalt this ability in him. Some, on the other hand, interpreted these things as suggestive of fanaticism. Apart from a judicial view of individual cases which would involve a dispassionate critical examination, the fact remains that Marco fled honours as much as possible and led a life of austerity and profound piety. When he intervened in favour of the needy and the sick he used a particular blessing which was famous and caused him some bother with church authorities.



His fame went beyond the borders of Italy and requests to have the extraordinary apostle began to reach his superiors and the pope. In 1680 he carried out his first journey, visiting Tyrol, Bavaria, Salzburg and other Austrian cities. And so he went to Linz where the Emperor was waiting for him. He stayed fifteen days and thus began that relationship with Leopold I which will have a notable influence on political life at the time. The Emperor, who will be famous for his long reign of forty seven years and for the complexity of his character, recognised in the Capuchin a confidant and advisor. This is evident from the lengthy correspondence between them. From Vienna Marco went to Neuberg where he performed another great sign.

He had returned to Venice when he undertook another journey the following spring. This was a new journey to Flanders, crossing through

France. Citing bureaucratic reasons, while the actual reasons were political, Louis XIV did not permit the Capuchin to pass through Paris. In fact, he even had Marco accompanied to the border, in a crude manner it would seem. When he had finished the mission in Flanders, Marco returned to Italy crossing through Germany and Switzerland again. After continuous requests from the king of Spain, the pope wanted Marco to go again to Spain. He would have to go by ship from Genoa, but because he suffered badly with sea-sickness, he requested a *laissez-passez* through southern France. Louis adamantly refused.

The events of the time led Marco back to Vienna and prepared him for the great and characteristic task of the second period of his life, namely the struggle against the Turks. In their advance they had pushed as far as Vienna and had laid it siege. Urged on by Innocent XI Marco took himself to the imperial camp. There he gave heart to the demoralised army and reconciled opposing views. He animated the soldiers, particularly the courageous Jan Sobieski, with the unshakeable appeal to divine help, and Vienna was liberated (1683). When writing about this to the pope he stated that the liberation had happened "by a miracle." Great advantage could have been taken of the victory, pursuing the fleeing army and freeing other cities that had been invaded. However the persistent rivalry among the princes prevented this. Nevertheless Marco continued his work of persuasion, even arriving at the point of suggesting strategies. With determination he was able to see the definitive victory of the invader in Europe at the battles of Budapest (1684.1686), Neuhausen (1685), Mohacz (1687) and Belgrade (1688), and finally the Karlowitz (1689). In 1684 he even succeeded to have Venice take part in the Holy League. Had been able to speak to Louis XIV he may even have convinced him too.



With the campaigns over, Marco was tireless in his pastoral work: reprimanding consciences, combating sin, fostering peace and harmony, shunning the artifices of official politics and resisting the subterfuges to which he felt subject sometimes even on the part of papal diplomacy itself.

In 1699 he set out a final journey to Vienna. "I can't do this again," he said, "but the Pope has given his command." His weariness was the result of a tumour that was consuming him. He went to bed on 25 July and on 13 August he died, with the emperor at his bedside. After the solemn funeral his body was finally laid to rest. In 1703 his remains were transferred to the Capuchin crypt in Vienna alongside the imperial tombs. Only some small aesthetical treatises of his remain. They enjoyed great circulation in his time. Usually he is depicted in the act of preaching. The Polish painter Matejko, in a painting conserved in the Pinacoteca Vaticana, has shown him triumphant on a horse behind Jan Sobieski after the liberation of Vienna.

In 1891 his process began in Vienna and Venice and concluded in 1904. Pius X introduced the apostolic process which concluded in Vienna and Venice in 1920. The *Positio Storica* was prepared in 1966. In 1990 the *Postulatio* of his heroic virtue was examined and approved in 1991. Pope John Paul II declared him blessed on 27 April 2003.