

JEROME OF JESUS MARY JOSEPH (Jerome Terzo, 1683-1758)
Servant of God

Jerome Nunzio Matthew Terzo was born at Noto, Italy, on May 17, 1683; his youth was spent in poverty, as he exercised the craft of shoemaker. In 1707 he retired to the hermitage of Jesus, Mary and St. Conrad, above Noto, where he took the hermit's habit on Oct. 30, 1707, and committed himself to a life of contemplation and to the apostolate, known as he was for his miraculous powers. Called in 1710 to the pass of Bove, to direct the other hermitage of St. Mary of the Stairs, he was able to transfer the ancient image of Our Lady, till then exposed to the inclemency of the weather, into the church of the hermitage. After an earthquake, in 1715 he rebuilt and amplified the church and made it a center of Marian piety. It is due to him, as the brief *Scandere caelum* /To ascend into heaven/ of Nov. 27, 1963, recalls, that the devotion to Mary, Stairway to Paradise, was established and diffused among the people, and that after more than two centuries the diocese of Noto asked for and obtained the Virgin, precisely under that title, as its principal patroness. This devotion had been the great devotion of the venerable Jerome (AAS, XVI /1963/ pp. 517-18).

In 1710 Providence put him in contact with the Marquis Andrew Statella of Palermo, who through his influence became a priest and then a Carmelite with the name of Salvatore of the Trinity (1678-1728). Fr. Salvatore attained a great holiness and introduced a Carmelite reform into some houses of Sicily, which was afterwards extended also to the nuns (Syracuse, 1729). This reform, which the venerable supported and guided from behind the wings, while still obeying the order of the ordinary and looking after the reform of all the hermitages of the diocese of Syracuse, was embraced by Jerome himself in 1741. This happened after he had obtained from Pope Benedict XIV, on a trip to Rome, leave to have the hermitage of the Scala aggregated to the Carmelite reform. The pontifical concession ended (though not completely) a long series of vicissitudes and sorrows that Jerome had humbly and courageously borne in his efforts to have the ancient hermitage pass over to Carmel. The trials continued even after Jerome had been vested in the Carmelite habit (Oct. 6, 1741) and had made his religious profession. Yet, endowed with great trust in God and in Our Lady, he always bore the trials with serenity, and the ancient hermitage became the heart of the reformed province of Sicily, with St. Mary of the Stairs as titular.

A man of prayer and of penance and of palpable faith, Jerome also had the gifts of prophecy, of wonders and the reading of hearts, and he worked extraordinary miracles. Full of zeal for the salvation of souls, he worked for the conversion of sinners and of the Moslems in Sicily and Malta. He was convinced of having received a heavenly communication that foretold the return of England to the ancient Roman faith. In 1743, when Messina was devastated by the plague, he worked wonders of heroic charity. He died on Apr. 11, 1758, near the sanctuary of Our Lady of the Stairs, which he had served and honored so much and where his body rests.

His fame for holiness and wonders moved the ecclesiastical authorities to begin working immediately for his canonization. His cause for beatification was introduced on May 4,

1796; after being interrupted for well-known political reasons, it was reopened in our century. On Nov. 7, 1944, the S. Congregation of Rites held a preparatory congregation for the declaration of heroicity of his virtues.

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Valentine Macca