

FROSINONE  
Cause of the Beatification and Canonization  
of the Servant of God Maria Teresa Spinelli  
Foundress of the Augustinian Sisters Servants of Jesus and Mary  
(1789 – 1850)

*Her virtues*

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.”  
(*Hebrews* 11, 8).

This affirmation from the Letter to the Hebrews, interprets very well the human and spiritual sequence of events of the Servant of God Maria Teresa Spinelli: trusting in divine Providence in every situation, she welcomed with faith the Lord’s call and dedicated herself to it generously.

The Servant of God was born in Rome on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1789, to Michelangelo and Caterina Moretti. She was the last of nine siblings, five of whom died at a very early age. Her father was a tanner of hides. The family’s financial situation was good enough, and this allowed Maria Teresa to study at the *Maestre Pie Venerini* besides studying embroidery in gold. She loved reading most of all the Holy Bible, and this helped her to be drawn close to God.

However in 1805, due to the family’s financial problems, she was given in marriage at the age of sixteen years to Luigi Ravieli, employed as an agent. Unfortunately he revealed himself as a brutal man with revolutionary ideas. The Servant of God, victim of her husband’s continuous outbursts, used to offer the pain and the humiliations she endured for the conversion of her spouse. However after only three months, her mother Caterina, having heard from her daughter’s neighbours of the abuse that she was enduring in silence, turned to the Ecclesiastical authorities. The vicariate of Rome intervened, opened an inquiry and decided to separate the couple.

Maria Teresa returned to her parents’ home, where on the 4th October 1806 she gave birth to her daughter M. Domenica. The precarious financial conditions to maintain her elderly parents and now her daughter, compelled her to look for a job as a wet nurse at the aristocratic Stampa family who possessed lands in Rome and in Ferentino (FR). After a period of uncertainties, Maria Teresa followed the Stampa family in Ferentino where this noble family, faithful to the Pope, retired in voluntary exile during the Napoleonic invasion.

The Servant of God’s charitable activity towards the poor of Ferentino, and also those of Rome, bore fruit, like when she obtained the grace she asked for a blind man who restored his sight and when she distributed wine to the poor for a long time from a barrel which was never emptied.

Having returned to Rome in the beginning of 1816, she dedicated herself to her daughter’s and her parents’ needs. Her mother passed away in 1820. That was a year of great suffering, but it was also a time in which the Lord gave Teresa the gift of an

extraordinary call to apostolate. On the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1820, whilst she was absorbed in prayer in *Santa Maria in Monticelli's* Church, she felt within her that the apostles gave themselves totally to evangelization and for the good of humankind. She quickly started gathering illiterate girls, deprived of solid education and she instructed them culturally and spiritually. However she felt deeply that the Lord was calling her to expand her apostolate. She would have liked to go back to Ferentino but above all she wanted to do God's will. Some months later, whilst praying that the Lord might enlighten her, she heard a voice telling her: "I want you not in Ferentino but in Frosinone." Just that day, a Councillor of Frosinone went to the Dottrinari Fathers at *Santa Maria in Monticelli* to ask for help in his search for a teacher to open the first public school for girls in the *ciociara* town (Frosinone). Maria Teresa, seeing in this episode a clear manifestation of God's will, left for Frosinone and here, the Servant of God, together with her first companions, opened the first public school for girls in an apartment which the Town Council had given her.

Since the number of students was continually increasing, the Town Council, having recognized her fruitful educational activity, gave the Servant of God the Augustinian Fathers' ex-convent which, having been confiscated during the Napoleonic era, was reduced to a very bad state. It was here that Maria Teresa started different kinds of educational apostolate: the school, boarding, catechism for children and adults, courses of spiritual exercises; and it was also here that on the 23rd September 1827, together with seven companions, she received from the hands of the Bishop the religious habit and founded the Servants of Jesus and Mary who after the aggregation within the Augustinian Order became known as Augustinians Servants of Jesus and Mary.

Maria Teresa placed the will of God at the centre of her choices in life. One of her most frequent short prayers was: "Oh Will of God, how beautiful you are!" Through the many letters addressed to her spiritual director, and which we have achieved, we can see how her interior life was nourished by intense prayer which often led her to experience union with God. She interiorly felt called to partake in the Passion of Christ for the salvation of sinners. In 1835 she took the vow of victim after having taken in 1822 the vow of the most perfect and of abandonment in God. The exercise of many corporal penances were the means of her full union with the suffering of Christ in favour of humanity. The Servant of God had a special devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary and set up the feast of the Madonna of Guadalupe in Frosinone and the Augustinian devotions to our Lady of Consolation and to the miracle worker Nicholas of Tolentino. She did not lack trials and sufferings, amongst which that of her own daughter who, mentally ill, spent the last years of her life in her mother's convent. However in every circumstance Maria Teresa overcame the temptation of discouragement, by renewing her trust in the Lord, putting her hope in the divine will and intensifying charity towards all.

After a life dedicated to youth and spent for the expansion of the kingdom of God at the expense of sacrifices and sufferings, Maria Teresa ended her journey on earth on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1850 after giving her spiritual daughters her will: "As my will, I leave you Charity. This house moved on with Charity, if this ceases, the House will cease."

Due to her reputation of being holy, from the 17th September 1982 up to the 27th February 1997, a Diocesan Inquiry was set up at the Bishop's Curia in Frosinone. Its legal validity was recognized by this Congregation as decreed on the 20<sup>th</sup> February 1998. Once the *Positio* was prepared, the historical consultation was carried out. Then, according to the

usual procedure, it was discussed whether the Servant of God had exercised the virtues in a heroic manner. The result being a positive one, on the 9<sup>th</sup> June 2015, the Particular Congress of Theologians met. The Cardinals and Bishops headed by me, Card. Angelo Amato, on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 2016, have discerned that the Servant of God had lived the theological, cardinal and other virtues in a heroic manner.

Finally, an accurate report of all this was handed to Pope Francis by me Cardinal Prefect, and His Holiness, having approved the votes and judgments of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, declared today: *“The Theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity towards God and neighbor, and the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude and other virtues of the Servant of God Maria Teresa Spinelli, Foundress of the Augustinian Sisters Servants of Jesus and Mary, whose cause and effect are the object of this discussion, have been lived in a heroic manner.*

His Holiness has ordered that this decree be published and registered among the acts of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Rome, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2016

ANGELO Card. AMATO, S. D. B.  
*Prefect*

+ MARCELLUS BARTOLUCCI  
Titular Archbishop of Bevagna  
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