

Titus Brandsma Carmelite and Martyr

MARY, THE MOTHER OF GOD

Anno Brandsma was born in the Dutch province of Friesland in 1881. He joined the Carmelite Order in 1898 taking his father's name, Titus, as his religious name. He made his First Profession in October 1899 and was ordained priest on 17 June 1905. As an academic Titus specialised in philosophy and mysticism. He helped to found the Catholic University of Nijmegen in 1923 and later served as *Rector Magnificus*.

In the years before the Second World War Titus was openly critical of the Nazi ideology. During the occupation of Holland, he defended the freedom of the Press and of the Catholic Press in particular. Titus was arrested in January 1942 and sent to Dachau Concentration Camp where he was killed by lethal injection on 26 July 1942. He was beatified as a martyr in 1985 and canonised on 15 May 2022.



To Jesus with Mary

Our Lady held a special importance for Titus Brandsma throughout his life. As a young boy Titus became familiar with various Marian practices including the rosary which the Brandsma family prayed on a daily basis. This Marian devotion would last a lifetime for Titus who even in prison organised several rosaries for himself when his one was taken from him.

In addition, Titus became familiar with the idea that we find Jesus by going through Mary. With Mary as a mother and as a sister, he followed Jesus on his way to the heavenly father.

▼ Young Titus with the Blessed Virgin Mary



My soul magnifies the Lord

Titus entered the Carmelite novitiate out of his desire for a more intense prayer life and because of the Order's great devotion to Our Lady. Later, Titus places on his ordination card the words of Mary in her Magnificat:

My soul magnifies the Lord. He who is mighty has done great things to me.
(Luke 1: 46, 49)

During his Roman years (1905-1909) Titus visited the catacombs, where an ancient image of Our Lady, called the *Orante*, impressed him. This he refers to as the image of the praying Church and to the image of Mary who sings her Magnificat. In a Marian magazine, *Carmelrozen*, which he co-founded, Titus wrote dozens of articles to foster love for Mary through an increased knowledge about the different forms of veneration of Mary, her feast days, Christian artwork and the teaching of the church and councils on Mary.

Mary's divine motherhood

Of special importance to Titus was the Council of Ephesus (431) which had declared the dogma of Mary as *Theotokos* (God-bearer). Titus reflected on the divine motherhood of Mary writing:

In Mary we see the most beautiful image of our union with God. She, the bride of the Holy Spirit, teaches us how we also, though not in the fullness of grace but in a wider sense, must be brides of God, in order that he be born in us, united – also in us – with human nature, our human nature. Under the beneficent influence of the Holy Spirit we must be born to a new life with God, who lives in us more than we live of ourselves.

Increasing our devotion to Mary means learning to imitate the attitudes she has in her life. And so, we too are called to become like Mary: bearers of the divine life.

By following her example, we should obviously be other Marys. We ought to let Mary live in us. Mary should not stand outside the Carmelite, but the Carmelite should live a life so similar to Mary's that the Carmelite should live with, in, through, and for Mary.



Prayer

God of peace and justice,
 you open our hearts to love
 and to the joy of the Gospel
 even in the midst of countless forms of
 violence that take away the dignity of
 our brothers and sisters,
 fill us with your grace,
 so that like Saint Titus Brandsma,
 we may in tenderness see beyond
 the horrors of inhumanity
 and contemplate your glory
 that shines forth through
 the martyrs of every age,
 and so become your authentic witnesses
 in the world of today.
 Amen.

Mary, Hope of all Carmelites

In 1939 Titus wrote a Way of the Cross for a pilgrimage. At the ninth station, when Jesus falls under the Cross for the third time, he prays:

O Mary, who has observed with admiration and motherly compassion the final efforts of your Son, help me to remember this when the fulfilling of my task in life becomes too heavy.

Perhaps this prayer was with him when he was arrested in January 1942 and sent initially to the prison of Scheveningen. There Titus transforms his prison cell into a Carmelite cell with a picture of Christ and a picture of Mary:

In the part of the breviary we are using now and which was luckily left to me, is the beautiful picture of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. So now my breviary is standing wide open on the topmost of the two corner shelves, to the left of the bed. When sitting at my table I only have to look a bit to the right and I can see her beautiful picture; while laying in bed my eye is firstly caught by that star-bearing Madonna, Hope of all Carmelites.

With the eyes of his heart fixed on Mary and with Jesus at his side Titus continued his own way of the cross from Scheveningen to Dachau. There he died on 26 July 1942. May his example inspire us to live a Christian and Marian life.



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For further information on Titus Brandsma please visit:
carmelites.org.au/titusbrandsma

