



Abbot General Thomas Handgrätinger O. Praem.

**Blessed Bronislava
750 Years (1203-1259)**

For the jubilee year 2009, the year that recalls the 750th anniversary of the death of Blessed Sister Bronislava, a glass panel with her image is hung in the cloister walk of the Generalate in Rome. This image portrays her holding a precious gemmed cross as she approaches the observer. She is depicted as a sister of the Order in a white habit and black veil. Her entire appearance is inviting and open as she draws near, even though in the background a darker shadow of a cross appears.

Bronislava had entered the convent of Zwierzyniec in Krakow, Poland at the age of 16 in 1219. She lived during a difficult time at the beginning of the 13th century, a time that was marked by invasions of the Tartars and outbreaks of the plague. Hardship and misfortune, death and terror were constant companions. Bronislava encountered everything with nothing other than the cross of triumph which expressed her belief in victory and resurrection. On the glass panel in gothic script the artist, Andreas Dorfey, has placed the words: “*crux tua – crux mea/gloria mea – gloria tua*”, your cross is my cross; my glory is your glory. For Bronislava the cross is the point of identification and at the same time a sign of hope so that the darkness and mortality is already overcome in him who said of himself: “I am the resurrection and the life” (Jn 11: 25). The image radiates great calmness and confidence, as when after a storm the clouds break up and the sun comes out. In contrast to the shadow of the cross a clear bright white light appears to shine from above. Bronislava is marked by her courage and active love of neighbor with which she encountered outward distress. She held the cross toward those causing disturbance, but for the most part it really gave support to herself. She believed in the transforming power of the cross that was ennobled through the suffering and death of the Lord, changed from a mark of shame to a tree of life, from an instrument of torture to a mark of triumph. Thus her life became a great witness and profession, itself slowly purified and brought to maturity under this sign of the cross. People called her an “angel of consolation”. She showed to others what gave her consolation and strength and she allowed others to feel this through her vibrant love.

In this year 2009 the Order also observes the 875th anniversary of the death of our founder, St. Norbert, who died in Magdeburg, Germany on June 6, 1134. It may look like pure

chance but it appears more to indicate character relatedness, for both are showing something to people, at least in their iconographic representation. With Norbert of course this was only added later.

Norbert encounters people with a monstrance; he shows us the Lord who is present in the Eucharist. Bronislava encounters people with the cross; she shows us the cross of victory, a sign of life and the coming glory. She points to the Lord who “will make all things new” (Rev. 21,5). Both have something important and essential to say and contribute. Both are ambassadors and preachers, perhaps more through their lives than their word. Not a line is passed on from Norbert, not a word from Bronislava. But they have left their mark in the hearts of the people whom they encountered with their great faith and deep love. Later ages have recorded about the life of Norbert: “I want to have only Christ as my leader” (*solo Christo duce*). In the case of Blessed Sister Bronislava, one could write: “I know that my redeemer lives” (Job 19, 25).

Even today this nun wants to give encouragement, where for many the dark shadows and cross appear to become more threatening. In spite of the fun-society and ongoing fun-culture many fall by the wayside, many live on the shadow side, much remains shallow and empty, superficial and without meaning. The loss of a middle way is lamentable. Norbert and Bronislava point to what for them is the center and substance, sense and depth of existence. It is the love which goes to the extreme, the love which gives of itself, the love that creates and maintains life. Both speak of him who has come that “they may have life and have it to the full” (Jn 10, 10).

*Almighty, eternal God,
you call what is weak in this world,
in order to shame what is strong.
Help us, through the intercession of Blessed Bronislava,
in spite of our weakness,
to work toward the building up of your kingdom.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

*Blessed Bronislava, pray for us.
Saint Norbert, pray for us.*

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