



# LIGHT & LIFE

VOICE OF THE ROSARY CENTER & CONFRATERNITY

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Fr. Dismas Sayre, O.P., *Director*

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## Saint Bartolo Longo

There are times in the Christian life when we must face our past. Sometimes that is reconciling with those we have hurt, sometimes it is calling to conversion those who have hurt us, and sometimes it is preaching to those who do harm to themselves or others. St. Bartolo Longo was faced with just such a moment after he returned to the practice of his Catholic faith. By spending time in communal prayer, instruction, and study, he was equipped with everything he needed to return to a place of darkness from his own past.

St. Bartolo Longo had been a leader in a group of practitioners of the occult. In a fit of zeal for souls and a desire to make reparation for his past transgressions, he resolved to return to his former association one last time. Instead of returning for wicked fellowship, he had something else in mind. He entered into that dark parlor and greeted his former conspirators. But instead of leading the group in their vain attempts at glory and control, he rose in their midst and did the unexpected. He began to preach the Gospel. He desperately sought to convert those men and women who had strayed down the path of darkness and death to the path of light and life. He preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He proclaimed the glories of the Rosary. He spoke to their hearts about true happiness and peace. When he had finished his task, he left that place, never to return.

We have no record of whether his efforts planted the seeds of faith in the hearts of his former associates. We do not know what secret ways the Lord began to work in the hearts of those who had turned away from him. But we do know how it affected the man himself. By confronting the darkness of his past, he was made free. He was free to seek ever more diligently the renewed life of grace that he had discovered. The power of this witness broke the ties of the occult that

had bound him. This was a decisive moment in his path to holiness. We can look to him as an example of how to do the same. Supported by prayer, community, and sound teaching, we can revisit the problems, trials, and traumas in our life with the authority of Christ and the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This was not the only time that St. Bartolo Longo faced the darkness. Sometimes we find the darkness within. This blessed man frequently suffered from strong temptations to despair and suicide. According to his own testimony, he was able to resist these urges due to a special closeness he had with the Blessed Virgin. He vigorously prayed the Rosary in her honor daily, and more so when these temptations would assault him. One such moment was so strong that he fell to his knees in the middle of the street and lost all sense



of self. But in that moment, he was able to turn to the chaplet of our Mother and resist the temptation in tears, suffering, and eventually joy. In addition to this deep devotion to the Blessed Mother, he was supported by a Dominican spiritual director, a number of other holy priests, and a loving circle of friends with whom he would regularly pray and practice good works of charity. In

these moments, we need the care of our community, professional assistance, and the gentle embrace of the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary.

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# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## Our New Saint: Bartolo Longo

By Fr. Gabriel Mosher, O.P.

### **Our Newest Saint, as of October 19, 2025**

by Fr. Gabriel Mosher, OP

*[Fr Gabriel Mosher, OP, is currently Pastor at St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Newman Center, Salt Lake City, Utah.]*

The Church will soon elevate a great apostle of the Rosary to rank among the Saints. St. Bartolo Longo was a man who was so deeply devoted to the prayer of the Most Holy Rosary that his prayers and meditation would change the way that every Catholic would experience it. But before he was a man of deep and steadfast faith, he was a child—a difficult one at that. And while he was born in the mid-1800s, his life follows a similar path to many people today.

St. Bartolo Longo was born on February 10, 1841, in Latiano, Italy, to Antonina Luparella and Bartolomeo Longo. Both of his parents' influence played significant roles in his development as a person and the manner in which he practiced his faith. Bartolomeo valued hard work and the life of the mind. He himself had honed these very skills as a respected physician and instilled them in his son. Antonina also valued discipline. In her home, the young Bartolo learned to develop a regular schedule for prayer, habits of service, and the foundations of a sound Christian moral character. While Bartolo strayed from many of these precepts during his young life, the seed that was planted would eventually grow into a full tree in blossom.

Bartolo Longo was not known in his early life for being well-behaved. He was a rather rambunctious youth. But as he matured, this grew into a form of affability and spontaneity that would serve him well in his later years. His initial education qualified him to be a school teacher, which he only did for about a year. Following this, he enrolled at the University of Naples, where he earned a degree in law. It was in these years that he experienced tremendous strain on his faith and even his sanity.

His years at the University of Naples were intellectually fruitful. However, at the same time, he experienced a wide range of militant secular ideas and ideologies that he hadn't been prepared to cope with. He became enamored with the anti-religious and anti-clerical sentiments that were promoted by his professors and the culture that Naples had at the time. He fell away from the practice of the faith while at the University just like so many young people still experience to this day. Many of his professors were prominent secularists and anticlericalists. They made a strong impression on him and chipped away at his Catholic faith. Perhaps the death of his father at an early age took its own toll on him at this time. It was in this fragile state that our dear Bartolo started seeking the advice of mystagogues and soothsayers. He found no hope or joy in the secularism he had experienced in his years at the university. However, in the spiritualistic

arts, he found a sort of hope that he could latch on to in opposition to both the secularism and religiosity he had previously held.

At least that's what he thought. But as such things usually go, what he thought was ripe fruit from a garden in full bloom was really a rotten deception that drained him of all hope, joy, love, and sanity. Gratefully, the lessons of reason and religion that his parents had imparted to him as a child would soon serve to save his mind, body, and soul. However, before the light of glory appears, often there is darkness. St. Bartolo Longo experienced a deep and abiding darkness. He himself said, "I was on the brink of despair, thinking I was already destined to hell." But God does not abandon us, even if we have seemed to abandon him. Even while Bartolo was under the deception of the enemy, in contact with a malicious spirit, supported by a cabal of nefarious compatriots, God was working to draw Bartolo Longo closer to him.

In these years of occultism, Bartolo was plagued with a host of mental health issues. He experienced bouts of depression and anxiety. He was frequently assaulted by temptations to suicide. Yet, somehow, he held on. But just as the despair of secularism led him to occult mysticism, so too the radical despair he discovered in the false promises and teachings of his present organization led him to seek meaning elsewhere.

Fortunately, Bartolo Longo had some friends outside of his occult circles. Chief among them was a professor by the name of Vincenzo Pepe. Vincenzo's concern for the soul of his friend came right at the opportune moment. He challenged Bartolo, pointing out the errors of his ways and the harm it was causing him. It was through this friendship that he met other luminaries that would bring him closer to conversion. Eventually, he would be introduced to the Dominican priest Fr. Alberto Radente, who after a month of meetings heard Bartolo's confession and admitted him back to Holy Communion.

From this point forward, he had a zeal for the Christian life that would eventually carry him to sainthood. He lived with Vincenzo and became acquainted with many other devout souls who aided him in his healing. During this time, he would join a prayer apostolate dedicated to the spread of the Sacred Heart devotion and eventually enter the Dominican Third Order. Through these apostolates, among others, he would dedicate his life to prayer, service, and penance. In particular, he developed a deep love for the Rosary, and through it, the Blessed Virgin.

During this time, he still suffered great mental anguish. The scars of his former life were not yet completely healed. However, through his ever-deepening devotion to the Blessed Virgin, he was able to resist the strongest inclinations to despair. He took her to be a special protectress over this life and a guide for eternal life. He

decided to become a special apostle of the Rosary in reparation for his former life. As he would remind us, "Whoever spreads the Rosary is saved!"

But, it was more than his own salvation that concerned him. By spreading devotion to the Rosary, he wanted to save as many souls as possible. In fact, his care for souls was so great that he was inspired to attempt the salvation of his former occultists. It must have been a striking scene when he entered those chambers for the last time. Instead of entering into a spiritualist trance, he would summon the grace of the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the glories of the Rosary to his former associates.

In the course of his growth in the faith, he dedicated himself to good works and proclaiming the glories of the Rosary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He would regularly visit a hospital to learn to care for those in terminally poor health. He would spend evenings in prayer with friends, and he would interact with various priests to discern what God wanted him to do with his life. One such priest urged him to remain a layman and dedicate his life as a celibate layman in the world for the sake of the apostolate that God would reveal to him. Trusting in the advice of this priest he privately vowed to live as single laymen in the world. As he settled into this state of life, he soon met the Countess Mariana di Fusco. It was in his relationship with her that he, by chance, discovered the work that would eventually consume his life.

The Contessa owned properties in Pompeii that were in poor repair. Bartolo offered his services to renew the contracts there to make them profitable again. They had been defunct for some time. While visiting the Valley of Pompeii, he discovered that the whole region was in desperate need of conversion. Their catechesis was nonexistent. Their spiritual life was bound up with pagan superstitions. There was no safety and security in the region, and the priest had lost his zeal for souls. He immediately realized that these were the people that the Lord had sent him to serve.

He resolved to establish a Confraternity of the Rosary among the peasants of the region. His initial attempts didn't go well. However, undaunted, he continued to press the cause. He was eventually able to teach them to pray the Rosary, and it was then that he decided that he needed an image of Our Lady of the Rosary as an object for their devotion. The first image he discovered was beyond his financial means. The second image was ... less than beautiful. However, this image was eventually to be set up as the central image around the devotion of the people of Pompeii. Indeed, the poor image arrived on a cart carrying dung and everyone who gazed upon it were horrified by its appearance. But fortune would have it that a local artist was able to restore it and make it a more fitting image for the devotion of the people.

While Bartolo Longo was waiting for the image of the Madonna to be completed, he began the painstaking process of building a proper chapel for the image. This proved to be very difficult. It seems that only he could see the importance of caring for the spiritual life of the

people in Pompeii. However, through perseverance and good fortune, he was able to raise the funds and build the church within which the image of Our Lady would be displayed. It would eventually grow into one of the most important Marian shrines in the world. Finally, in October of 1879, the new image was finally installed in the partially constructed church. I should note, raising the funds for the shrine caused great suffering in Bartolo Longo. He was regularly treated to indignities and insults. People accused him of being a scam artist and worse. But in all this, he persevered because he knew that God was guiding his actions to serve the people of Pompeii.

It was in this same year, while terribly ill and in bed, that he wrote his first devotional for the shrine. He wrote a Novena to the Virgin of Pompeii. This would be the first of many devotionals that he would personally write that are still prayed to this day.

By 1887, the altar and the basic structure of the shrine were completed. It was consecrated by a representative of the Holy Father and witnessed by thousands of devotees. From its humble beginnings of 1872, it had significantly grown. In these 15 years, the work of Bartolo Longo built tremendous awareness about the shrine, and over the time of his mendicancy, the devotion to Our Lady of Pompeii became a strong and pious movement among the people, and not merely among the people in Pompeii. It is said that people immediately started to make pilgrimage to the shrine from all over the world. What began as a project to help the poor neglected people of Pompeii became a movement to instruct everyone about the glories of the Rosary.

In addition to his fundraising work, his publication titled "The Fifteen Saturdays" became a devotional phenomenon among the Christian faithful. Bartolo Longo never expected that this little work would strike such a chord in the heart of the faithful. Even greater than this work was his second book, "The History, Marvels, and Novena of the Most Holy Virgin of the Rosary of Pompeii." It inspired many souls to conversion and deeper devotion for the salvation of souls. This success spawned the idea of starting a magazine, which is where he found his mission as an author to reach an even greater amount of people. This initiative was even promoted by the Holy Father. This is how well his work had become known by this time. The Supreme Pontiff himself was talking about Pompeii.

If building the shrine was not enough, Bartolo Longo set about seeking to do more for his people in Pompeii. He noticed that there were a lot of children running about the area, causing mischief and not learning how to be productive or pious individuals. To solve this problem, he started programs to train the young boys in various trades and provide them with an education. This led to him discovering that there were a great number of orphans without any care. So, to solve this, he built an orphanage for young girls that quickly took in hundreds of orphans. He set them about the task of prayer as an act of gratitude for the benefaction that they would receive. The young girls that he helped out of abject poverty were innumerable. His heart burned for these young girls, and he entrusted them all to the Blessed Virgin of Pompeii.

Yet, as we know from so many examples in the lives of the saints, no good deed goes unpunished. The fame of his mission brought many condemnations from clergy and laymen alike. Most of these were brought about by envy of the generous benefaction his mission was receiving. However, some even questioned the piety and orthodoxy of his mission. Even his relationship with the Contessa was brought into question. Many pundits spread rumors that their relationship was other than a pious one. To end the perceived scandal of Bartolo and the Contessa living under the same roof, they joined together in a Josephite marriage to help quell any rumor that they were living in an inappropriate relationship. But even this brought greater problems with the children born of the Contessa's first marriage. In later years, they accused Bartolo of all forms of knavery as they attempted to reap financial benefits from the shrine at Pompeii. Even though his friends urged Bartolo to fight against the various calumnies he was facing, the living saint chose to bear all of these wrongs patiently and in silence.

In 1891, the completed shrine was finally consecrated. And while the shrine was built and the orphanage was growing, he was still unsettled. He turned his eye toward the many prisoners who left their children to grow up in a never-ending cycle of poverty and crime. Bartolo vowed to take care of the young boys of these prisoners and, like the orphanage he had established for orphaned girls, he erected a ministry to serve these poor young boys of convicts. Of course, the regular insults from various corners of society tried to discourage him in this work. He was once again denounced as a charlatan. Yet, giving no heed to these voices, he persevered in this great work of mercy. In this new boys' home, he set the residents to both work and prayer so that they might have dignity and that their souls might be nourished. Just like the orphanage, this home in Pompeii became filled in a very short time.

As the ministry continued to grow and pilgrims came from all the corners of the world, Bartolo eventually entrusted the shrine and all of its works to the Holy Father. It was taken under pontifical governance, but Bartolo Longo remained the administrator. Eventually, Pope St. Pius X released him of his administrative tasks. However, St. Bartolo Longo never fully rested. He would continue to write and give tours of the Temple. He would foster devotion to the Rosary and advocate for the youths under the care of the Blessed Virgin. But released from administrative duties, he was free to spend time in contemplation. He would plumb the depths of the mysteries of our Lord's life, death, and resurrection with great intensity and fervor. So deep were his meditations on the life of Christ that, perhaps even unbeknownst to himself, he gave birth to a new devotion within the mysteries of the Rosary.

When Pope St. John Paul II shared with the world his desire to establish a new series of mysteries for the rosary, he specifically notes the inspiration of St. Bartolo

Longo for this devotion. The Mysteries of Light are, in part, born of the writings of St. Bartolo Longo. His deep reflection on the life of Christ led him to meditate on the earthly life and mission of our Lord. These mysteries are not merely a call to focus on novel moments. Rather, each mystery is a glimpse of the divinity of Christ. They teach us, just as the traditional mysteries do, about the incarnate nature of the Lord and how our Lord's hypostatic union affects the very arc of salvation.

In 1901, Bartolo Longo was made a Knight Commander of the Holy Sepulcher as an honor recognizing him for all of the charitable works he had accomplished in his life and his zealous commitment to the Catholic faith in every way. Twenty-five years later, on October 5th, after a life full of Christian zeal the future saint passed away. He had dedicated his life to the perfection of the virtues and the heroic living out of the Christian life. When looking at all the works he was able to accomplish for the salvation of souls and the love of God and the Blessed Mother, it is impossible not to see the greatness in his dedication to robustly living out the universal call to holiness. The course of his life and the struggles that he suffered remain for us an example of how to navigate the complexity of modern life. He was no different than so many who fall away from the faith. But through the grace of God and the intervention of priests, friends, and other acquaintances, he was able to attain the true grace of a "white martyrdom." When Pope St. John Paul II



beatified him in 1980, he was recommended to all of us for his piety, charity, and perseverance in suffering. We should hold him up in our minds as patron of so many things. He is a patron for those ensnared by the occult, those with mental health problems, for the orphan, the imprisoned, the poor, families, writers, benefactors, but above all, the people of Pompeii and those dedicated to the Most Holy Rosary.

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#### **Bartolo Longo (Continued from page 1)**

Whether the darkness we face is within or without, we can lean on St. Bartolo Longo. Pray to him to aid you in the trials of your life. Pray for the courage to stand against the darkness of sin, sadness, and despair. Pray for the healing and conversion of those still captivated by the darkness. Ask this great saint to intercede for you and for all of those who need the true freedom that is only found in Christ. Pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary, particularly under the title of Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, for the fullness of God's grace to overcome every form that the darkness may take in your life.