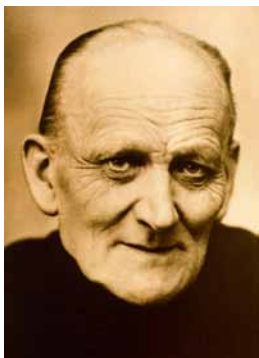


Blessed Anton Maria Schwartz



Mystic, Apostle and Prophet

“You know, Jesus, that my deep desire is to do everything to achieve my goal of becoming holy. Don’t forsake me, but forgive me my sins and pull me close to your Godly heart.” The person praying this prayer is twenty-one years old. His name is Anton Schwartz and he is in his third year of seminary. He often writes similar prayers down in his diary. He longs to be without sin, to be holy – to really become holy. To be one with God: *“Take my soul and pull it towards You. It belongs to you already.”*

What causes him to write these words? Ambition or the imitation of some saints? No, there are other reasons, above all a great thankfulness.

Mystic

He comes to realize that he owes his Redeemer, Jesus Christ everything in his life, and even life itself. He feels how very much Jesus lives alongside the sorrows and joys of His people. How much He takes delight in His people and shares their sufferings. This is the reason why Anton Schwartz is longing for becoming a saint, in order to please Jesus and to demonstrate his love for his Lord. His life is dedicated to God.

His supreme effort to become holy makes him an outsider in the seminary; very few seminarists

understand him. He only has two concerns, to live a saintly life, and to make to God the present of peoples' hearts, that means to share and live the love of God. He is alienated by those who do not feel the same way he does.

Anton Schwartz was born in Baden on February 28, 1852, as the fourth child of thirteen children; his father worked in the Town Council and was a musician in the theatre, his mother was a housewife. He attended a church primary school in Baden, was a chorister in Heiligenkreuz, and then a grammar-school boy with the "Schotten". He lost his father at the age of fifteen. One year later his excellent marks at school deteriorated and he went through a crisis that he never really could describe. However, he often referred to the fact of how very thankful he was to Jesus for delivering him from this misery.

In 1869, he entered the Monastery of the Piarists and stayed there until his "Matura" (= high school diploma). It was during this period that his reverence for Saint Joseph Calasanz (1557-1648), the Founder of the Piarists and free primary school education in Europe, began. As the Order of the Piarists seemed to be in danger of being suppressed, he was advised in his own interest to leave. Consequently, in March 1871, he changed to the Seminary in Vienna.

How can one describe this period in the Seminary? Excellent exam results, the founding of a "Convent of Love" (the members wanted, as far as possible, to live in a community of sacrificial devotion), two serious illnesses (after the first one he dedicated himself to the Mother of God and on the December 8, 1873, he chose "Mary" for his second name). **On July 25, 1875 he is ordained to the Priesthood by Cardinal Rauscher.**

He is called to Vienna after four years as a

Chaplain (assistant priest) in Marchegg, to act as Spiritual and Hospital Chaplain in the Hospital of the "Sisters of Charity" in Sechshaus. The nuns draw his attention to the wretched conditions of apprentices. As long as the boys are at School, the sisters can look after them, but afterwards it's not possible to care for their spiritual needs, and when the lads are already apprentices, the sisters have no longer any access to them. Anton Maria Schwartz founds the Catholic Society for Apprentices, under the patronage of Saint Joseph Calasanz, and begins an intensive but fast blossoming ministry in spiritual care. He is weighed down by the double burden of his work in the hospital and his care for the apprentices for four years, then he begs Cardinal Ganglbauer to allow him to devote himself exclusively to the apprentices. This request is turned down, because the Cardinal sees no possibility of financing such a work. This disappointment lands the young priest on his sickbed, and the doctors fear for his life. However sister Magdalena Kühtreiber persuades aristocratic ladies to look after him for two years and to help to finance his work. By this time the Cardinal has agreed and things are looking up for Anton Maria Schwartz (so he comes back to life).

Apostle

"I want to win souls for You! Give me the grace to serve You and bring people to You with all the eagerness of the apostles. I want to give my life for each and every soul if this is the only way to win them."

This is the way the young priest Anton Maria Schwartz tries to strengthen the beginning dwindling faith in the churches and earns for his efforts quite often disapproval and mockery in a local newspaper, which describes him as the

“Pope of Marchegg”. However, none of these difficulties prevent him from untiringly living his burning desire to win souls for God.

Prophet

His life’s vision becomes even clearer to him in the following years. That is to say that the spiritual revival of Society must begin with the workers who are the most exposed ones to the evils of the time, and especially the younger workers. So from now on he wrestles for the souls of the young workers, in order to come to Christ and start to believe in Him as their Saviour.

He follows this vocation with all his strength. His efforts to win souls for God and inspire them at last are coming to fruition. Every minute of his life is spent in this work. In 1888 he founds a newspaper for craftsmen and workers, in which he is the only writer for a long time! But one year later, in the space of eight months, the first Worker’s Church is built under the auspices of the Kalasantiner Congregation. **And then on November 24, 1889, the Congregation of pious Workers after the rule of Saint Joseph Calasanz is founded.**

Father Schwartz very often describes the new Order’s field of activity as overpowering. The very people whom he wishes to convince of God’s love for them and the need to give their lives to Him, are experiencing a lot of misery and unfair discrimination. There are no trade unions for workers, no regular working hours; young workers have to work twelve hours a day, on Sundays and holidays as well. Overtime is unpaid; the working conditions compared with today’s standards are unimaginable.

Fr. Schwartz fights with all his strength against these abuses. Alongside his efforts to disciple and educate the apprentices is his concern to help

them in their work situation and to try to effect changes in society. Fr. Schwartz gives religious lectures, but he is also ambitious about heart and character formation (music and theatre) and teaches manners, to help them feel at ease in society. He brings into being the first Christian free Labour Exchange for apprentices. He has contacts to a thousand Christian foremen or master craftsmen, so that thousands of apprentices get jobs where they are fairly treated, have not to work on Sundays, and he arranges accommodation for those who come from further away to live in a hostel. He encourages the formation of safety standards and further education and personally takes part in the strike of the tramway workers, carpenters and waiters.

However, all these efforts to improve the workers' conditions and their lives are grounded in his desire to bring the Gospel to them, encourage them and give them strength. His commitment is to show them the way to the Kingdom of Heaven.

To give people's souls to God

"How I longed to send my spiritual sons out into the whole world, overseas, in order to save workers' souls, because after all there are workers everywhere. We have to work unceasingly, as long as there is just one worker in the world who has lost his way, so that this one can be led back to our Saviour in the Tabernacle." This time this is not just a quiet prayer, but a fiery appeal to his fellow brothers and his colleagues.

As the leader of the Kalasantiner Congregation, he still lives for the permanent ideal he has had since his youth, to lead people's souls to God. The longing for holiness manifests itself in the desire for every person to know that God loves him. He sets up or founds monaster-

ies in Vienna, Lower Austria and Styria. Out of the many requests from abroad only two houses can be founded: in South Tyrol and in Budapest. However the Prophet is still heard too little. If the Church is unable to win the workers for Christ, the whole of the society will gradually distance itself from Christ. Not many people share his view. Only a minority feels that no time should be lost, not many hop on the moving train. This aspect gave rise to the Encyclical “Rerum Novarum” by Pope Leo XIII.

This big lack of understanding by the part of those around him is painful for Fr. Schwartz, but he cannot stop himself. The Prophet untiringly proclaims his message, and he lives it. He fights faithfully for his mission until the end of his life. He leads individual workers back to the Sacraments and gathers them in Oratories, in order to turn them into strong personalities and characters, full of faith. He also stakes everything by coaxing the “intellectuals” to show interest in social problems and invites them to attend the Kalasantinum.

Pronounced as a Blessed in Vienna

He dies on September 15, 1929, totally exhausted by his ceaseless activity, also the guidance and administration of the Community demands a lot of him. Thousands of people take part in the procession to the cemetery, in spite of the pouring rain, in order to say goodbye to him.

Twenty years after his death, the process of canonization has started. **On June 21, 1998, Pope John Paul II beatifies him as a Blessed in the course of his visit to Vienna.**

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