

referred to Bartolo Longo several times. In October 2002, John Paul II had the image of Our Lady of Pompeii brought from the Basilica to the Vatican, to inaugurate the Year of the Rosary. Despite being in poor health, Pope John Paul II journeyed to Pompeii to close out the Year of the Rosary at the Shrine on Oct. 7, 2003. Pope Francis announced the approval of St. Bartolo's canonization from his hospital bed on Feb. 25, 2025. At the canonization in 2025, Pope Leo XIV described St. Bartolo as a "benefactor of humanity." To celebrate the first anniversary of his election to the papacy, Pope Leo XIV visited the Pontifical Shrine of the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary of Pompeii on May 8, 2026.

St. Bartolo was a Knight of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem, a Papal Order created to help protect and support the Holy Land. Following his death, Bartolo was laid to rest wearing the cloak and insignia of a Knight's Grand Cross of that Order, in the Basilica of the Most Holy Rosary of Pompeii in a chapel beneath Mary's Throne.

He considered himself "an instrument of God who allowed him to make amends for the mistakes of his youth." He accomplished his chief mission: to honor his promise to Mary and spread the Rosary in the hope of salvation. He taught the Rosary to everyone he met and was a true Apostle of the Rosary.

Bartolo wrote the story of the Sanctuary in Pompeii, which attracts more than 10 million tourists every year, and where thousands of miracles are reported to have occurred.

Charity without faith would be the greatest of lies. Faith without charity would be the greatest of contradictions. – St. Bartolo Longo

Sources include DominicanFriars.org, Jerusalem Cross Magazine 2025-26, National Catholic Reporter, SchoolOfFaith.com, CatholicCompany.com, and *Bartolo Longo: From Priest of Satan to Apostle of the Rosary* by Marek Wos.



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St. Bartolo Longo *Apostle of the Rosary*



Born: 10 Feb. 1841 at Latiano, near Brindisi, Kingdom of the Two Sicilies

Died: 5 October 1926 at Pompei, Naples, Campania, Kingdom of Italy

Feast Day: October 5

Patron: of Pompeii and of those engaged in the occult

Born to a devout Catholic family in southern Italy, Bartolo was the favorite child of a family that lived a comfortable life. His father was a physician. As a young boy, he was mischievous, a daredevil despite being frail, and brilliantly intelligent. From the age of six, he was sent to a school, taught by the Piarist order of priests, where he was given instruction in Theology at a fairly high level.

Tragically, his mother died when Bartolo was only 10 years old, which profoundly impacted him. Soon afterwards, he began to lose his way. When he received his diploma, he was allowed to teach in a primary school and continue his studies at the university. His parents' dream was that Bartolo attend a private university in his small hometown, but he had other plans. His father's remarriage following the loss of his mother probably helped to fuel Bartolo's desire to move to the big city, Naples.

During Bartolo's adolescence, Italy was in great turmoil; there existed much friction between the Church and supporters of the Italian nationalist movement which sought to eliminate the papal city-states and unite Italy. General Giuseppe Garibaldi, who is considered Italy's greatest national hero, allied himself with King Victor Emmanuel of Sardinia and others, resulting in a unified Italy in 1861, just as Bartolo was coming of age.

His father and stepmother succeeded in convincing Bartolo not to go to Naples but to study at a private law university in Lecce, closer to home. When private instruction was abolished four years later, Bartolo had to transfer to a public university to complete his law degree. He chose the University of Naples and, shortly after arriving there in January 1863, he got swept up into Neapolitan social life.

Many of Bartolo's professors were ex-priests who espoused the nationalist cause and passionately spewed hate speech against the Church. In that atmosphere, it isn't surprising that, before long, Bartolo

got caught up in their movement and became one of its agitators. He grew to hate the clergy, especially Dominicans, and the pope. He doubted the existence of God and viewed Jesus as an extraordinary man, not God. Though a professed atheist, he did believe in an afterlife and thought seances would allow him to “explore spiritual mysteries firsthand.”

As his interest in the supernatural grew, Bartolo sank into depression. He began visiting Naples’ mediums and participated regularly in seances, which led him into the occult and, soon after, Satanism. His enchantment with Spiritualism and delving into the dark arts fed his senses of confusion, paranoia, and anxiety. His appearance changed to the point that he looked skeletal and haggard during this phase of his life. He suffered horrible nightmares, and even heard voices.

Bartolo’s rigorous study and intense fasting were followed by his promising his soul to a demon and being consecrated a Satanic priest. He took a solemn oath to serve Satan until death and, for about a year and a half, Bartolo presided over Satanic rituals; demons spoke through his mouth, and he blasphemed against God and the Church, which he saw as evil. He did all this while earning the title “Professor of Law,” passing his exams on December 12, 1864.

Bartolo’s family desperately tried to get him to turn his life around. They sought help from Professor Vincenzo Pepe, a Catholic instructor from their home region, who taught at the University of Naples. Professor Pepe aggressively challenged him to mend his ways. Eventually, Bartolo could no longer ignore the state he was in psychologically and physically. He met with a Dominican priest, Friar Alberto Radente. His entire family was praying for him, as were Professor Pepe and Pepe’s friend, Signorina Caterina Volpicelli, in whom Bartolo confided about his inner torment. Friar Alberto and another friend of Caterina’s, Fr. Ludovico of Casovia, were saying Masses for him.

It took three weeks and many long, arduous discussions and confessions, before Bartolo’s conversion reached the point where Friar Alberto was able to grant him absolution and welcome him back into the Church. That happened on June 23, the feast of the Sacred Heart, in 1865.

As a gesture of support, Professor Pepe invited Bartolo to move into his home. Friar Alberto urged Bartolo to accept that invitation, knowing that the professor would ensure Bartolo ate regular meals, got enough sleep, fresh air, and exercise. The professor surrounded Bartolo with faithful

initial intent was for an artist to paint such an image. When negotiations on the price for the chosen artist’s commission fell through, Bartolo secured an old, beat-up painting of Our Lady from a convent. The painting was in such disrepair, that it seemed to Bartolo that the nun who handed it to him seemed relieved to be rid of the eyesore. Bartolo did not hold much hope that it could be made presentable enough to be displayed, much less hung at the shrine once it was built, especially after the painting was delivered to Pompeii on a manure wagon! It took close to four months for a painter named Galella to restore it *pro bono*. The new painting hangs in the basilica today.

Construction of the basilica commenced with the cornerstone on May 8, 1876. The project was funded mainly by Bartolo himself, along with the other small donations. The Basilica of the Most Holy Rosary of Pompeii was consecrated in 1891, beginning the revival of New Pompeii.

A need for an orphanage became apparent, which led to the need for a Kindergarten, school and playground, and, then, a home for the children of prisoners who had no supervision and roamed the streets. To prevent those children from following the paths of their wayward parents, Bartolo not only built a home and a trade school for them, but also established a printing shop which printed leaflets, holy cards, religious books and periodicals. The print shop helped spread the word about the miracles performed at the Basilica and about the charitable works of the City of Love, the New Pompeii – the city that grew around the Basilica.

As word spread, many pilgrims came to the New Pompeii to see it for themselves, and to seek the intercession of Our Blessed Mother for their own needs. As the number of pilgrims grew, so did the need to expand Pompeii’s infrastructure to accommodate and feed them. Bartolo brought order, administrative services, and laid the groundwork for advancements such as a railway station, post and telegraph offices, aqueducts, electrical networks, police and fire departments, and paved roads.

These improvements were not viewed favorably by all. In fact, anti-clericals, Naples’ tabloids, and even some clergy exploited the situation to criticize Bartolo, claiming the enhancements were in his own self-interest. This reached the ears of the Popes. Though Pius X was skeptical, Leo XIII, Benedict XV and Pius XI, all supported Bartolo’s efforts.

St. Bartolo died at age 85 on Oct. 5, 1926 and was beatified on October 26, 1980 by Pope St. John Paul II, who in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*

Catholics, including Fr. Ribera, a Redemptorist priest, who was Bartolo's spiritual director for many years. Bartolo was not quite 25 years old.

His zeal for truth led him to immerse himself in spiritual reading and devotions. During this time, he joined a reputable law firm, where he was very successful and well respected. Despite his sincere efforts to make amends for his past by performing charitable works, Bartolo just could not forgive himself. He simply could not imagine how Our Lord could possibly forgive him. So severe was his self-loathing that years later, he considered ending his life. "One day in the fields around Pompeii," he later described, "I recalled my former condition as a priest of Satan... I thought that perhaps as the priesthood of Christ is for eternity, so also the priesthood of Satan is for eternity. So, despite my repentance, I thought: I am still consecrated to Satan, and I am still his slave and property as he awaits me in Hell. As I pondered over my condition, I experienced a deep sense of despair and almost committed suicide. Then I heard an echo in my ear of the voice of Friar Alberto repeating the words of the Blessed Virgin Mary: 'One who propagates my Rosary shall be saved.' Falling on my knees, I exclaimed: 'If your words are true that he who propagates your Rosary will be saved, I shall reach salvation because I shall not leave this earth without propagating your Rosary.'" Thus, Bartolo finally realized and accepted that God had indeed forgiven him, and discovered his true purpose in life was to lead other lost souls to God through the Rosary, especially the religiously illiterate.

Bartolo fell in love with a cousin, but his spiritual director advised him against the marriage. He later became engaged to another young woman, but this time Prof. Pepe encouraged him to seek advice from Friar Alberto, who convinced him the marriage would be his ruin. As serving God by propagating the Rosary was his new purpose in life, Bartolo decided to make a vow of celibacy, to accomplish his mission with an undivided heart. He prayed fervently and studied to become a third order Dominican, which he did on Oct. 7, 1871 in Naples on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, taking the name "Brother Rosario."

Bartolo knew he wanted to serve God, but not exactly how, so he waited for a sign. He began studying theology under Friar Alberto's tutelage, and continued to seek the spiritual counsel of Fr. Ribera, who encouraged him to read about the saints. He went home to spend several months with family, put on weight, and grew strong again. He returned to Naples, and joined a prayer group that prayed the Rosary every night. He wanted

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desperately to make reparation for his former Satanic activities, even to the point of visiting his former hangouts, holding up the Rosary, and publicly renouncing his former behavior. He even considered joining the Dominican Order as a religious, but Fr. Ribera discouraged it.

Then he met Franciscan Friar Ludovico through his friend Caterina. Friar Ludovico worked among Naples's poorest, had built an orphanage and school for African children ransomed from slavery, a school for the deaf and mute, cared for the elderly of his order, and led many ministries, including the Franciscan Third Order. He also founded an order of religious women, the Franciscan Sisters of St. Elizabeth. Bartolo became his spiritual disciple, assisting him in his ministry to the sick, supporting hospital patients, and praying the Rosary with them.

Despite being respected in his field, Bartolo never felt at home in the law profession. He went through a period of uncertainty about his career, meanwhile growing in his faith life through regular attendance at Mass, reception of the Eucharist, Reconciliation, and reading all the spiritual literature available to him. All the while, Italy's political situation grew worse. Naples became the center of anti-Church sentiment.

In 1872, Bartolo traveled to Pompeii for a friend who needed legal help with an important real estate matter. After settling the issue, Bartolo went through a spiritual crisis. He witnessed the material and spiritual poverty of those living in the Pompeii Valley, and saw his former self in the Pompeiians. Spiritualism, anti-Church sentiment, and the practice of witchcraft were rampant. Pompeii was a lawless place, with bandits roaming freely, and it seemed everyone carried some type of weapon.

He remembered the promise of Our Lady to St. Dominic, "Whoever spreads the Rosary will be saved." He promised Our Lady that he wouldn't leave Pompeii until the Rosary had triumphed there, and he was filled with peace and joy, and heard the sound of the Angelus bell ringing in the distance.

Bartolo was aware that his first task in honoring his promise was to build a small church, which Bishop Formisano also wanted built there, as a shrine to Our Lady of the Rosary. The bishop wanted the church to be financed by raising money over time, asking for only the smallest gifts monthly, so even the peasants could afford to help finance the project.

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