

conflict with civil authorities. His material charity was equaled by his charitable judgment; he was always ready to pardon mistakes, assuming good intentions, and he defended the cause of the absent.

Tomás authored numerous tracts, including a Soliloquy between God and the Soul, about the Eucharist. His complete writings, entitled *Opera Omnia*, published in 1881, comprised six volumes.

He was in poor health before the Council of Trent (1545-1563), but most of the Castilian bishops who attended the Council consulted with him. He impressed on them the importance of “internal reformation in the Church against the Lutheran heresy” and made two suggestions which weren’t enacted at the Council: ministering to natives especially in rural areas, and that bishops should be as united to their Sees as would be a married couple to each other.

Archbishop Tomás suffered throughout adulthood from angina pectoris, which took him from this life at age 67 on September 8, 1555, the feast day of the Nativity of Our Lady. When he sensed his death was near, he ordered that a Mass be offered. After the consecration, he recited from the Psalms, “May your mercy, Lord, be upon us; as we put our hope in you” (Ps. 33), and then passed away.

He left everything to the poor—except his bed, which was donated to the jailer, for prisoners to use. His remains are preserved in the Cathedral of Valencia. There were many recorded examples of his supernatural gifts, such as multiplying food and healing the sick. Numerous miracles have been attributed to his intercession before and after his death.

He is the namesake of several well-known and distinguished institutions of higher learning including Villanova University near Philadelphia, founded and still administered by the Augustinian Order; St. Thomas University in Miami Gardens, FL; Universidad Católica de Santo Tomás de Villanueva in Havana, Cuba; and Villanova College, a Catholic school for boys, in Brisbane, Australia.

Sources include Butler’s *Lives of the Saints*, *Villanova.edu*, *AugustinianOrder.org*, *The Book of Saints* (Metro Books, NY, 2011), and *Wikipedia.org*.



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St. Thomas of Villanova **(Tomás de Villanueva)** *Augustinian Bishop*

Born: 1488 in Fuentellana, LaMancha, Kingdom of Castile, Spain

Died: September 8, 1555

Canonized: Nov. 1, 1658 (Pope Alexander VII)

Feast Day: September 22

Patronage: The poor, Villanova University



Tomás García y Martínez was born to pious parents who were originally from Villanueva. His father was a miller, and though they were not affluent, his parents were models of charity who regularly brought food and goods to the poor. From childhood, Tomás practiced charity to the point that, having given his clothing to the poor, he is said to have often gone about naked. Tomás came to be known as Thomas of Villanova because he received his early education in Villanueva de los Infantes in the Province of Ciudad Real, Spain.

At age 16, he was sent to the University of Alcalá de Henares to study arts and theology. He earned his Master of Arts degree and, at 26 years old, became a professor of arts, logic, and philosophy.

Although academically gifted, clear-headed, and known for his good judgment, Tomás was also said to be absentminded, with a poor memory. Falling into prayerful raptures, especially at Mass, he’d apologize to those who witnessed this, promising to try to repair his “fault.”

Tomás taught moral philosophy for two years in Salamanca, where his “thirst for the science of the Saints” led him to join the Augustinian Order in 1516. On his thirtieth birthday, he received the Augustinian habit.

He was ordained a priest in 1520. Well-known for his zeal and eloquent, effective preaching, he became known as “the Apostle of Spain.” Emperor Charles V, “who listened to him as an oracle,” claimed Friar Tomás’ homilies “can move even stones,” and named Fr. Tomás the court preacher at his residence when he visited the Low Countries. The Emperor also made the friar one of his councilors of state.

Friar Tomás served in several leadership positions, including as the Prior of his monastery, the Visitor General, and the Prior Provincial for

Andalusia and Castile. Though he was offered the post of Archbishop of Granada, he declined. In 1533, while serving as the Provincial of Castile, he sent the first Augustinian missionaries to Mexico.

The archbishop of Valencia resigned, and because Charles V was aware of the terrible state of that archdiocese, he decided to offer that See to a priest of another religious order. However, after requesting that his secretary draft a letter of nomination, Charles realized that his secretary had drafted the letter to Friar Tomás. When the error was discovered, the secretary offered to correct it, however, Charles responded, “By no means. This has happened by a particular providence of God. Let us, therefore, follow His will.” Friar Tomás tried to decline the nomination, but accepted when ordered to do so by the Augustinian Superior.

Wearing the original habit and hat given to him at his profession of vows, Friar Tomás left on foot for Valencia the morning after he was consecrated Archbishop, accompanied by another Augustinian and two servants. He stayed at a friary, where he spent several days in prayer and penance, begging God for the grace that he might serve worthily.

The very first visit he made as archbishop was to the prison. He then visited every parish to learn the needs of his people. While previous bishops had failed to properly form Valencia’s clergy, many of whom were lacking in moral character, Archbishop Tomás focused on formation of clergy, as well as care for the needy. He formed a provincial council, the first in many years, and, with his fellow bishops, took action to abolish the abuses he witnessed while visiting the clergy.

Though he spent much time in prayer, he gave his staff strict instructions not to keep visitors waiting but to summon him as soon as anyone asked to see him. About 500 poor people came to his door daily. Each received a meal with a cup of wine and some money.

He himself was so poor that he was given a large sum to furnish his new residence. He gratefully accepted the gift, then immediately sent it to a hospital to be used for repairs and for the poor patients. He even sold his mattress and donated the money to the poor. He explained; “Our Lord will be better served and glorified by your money being spent on the poor in the hospital, who need it so much, than if it had been used by me. What does a poor friar like myself want with furniture?”

Archbishop Tomás continued to wear the same habit and hat he received as a novice, which he mended himself, long after they could have been

replaced. His canons and servants were ashamed of him for wearing such poor clothing. When they tried to get him to wear clothes more suitable to his position, he would say: “Gentlemen, I am obliged to you for the care you take of my person, but really, I do not see how my dress as a religious interferes with my dignity as archbishop. You know well enough that my position and duties are quite independent of my clothes, and consist in taking care of the souls committed to me.” Eventually, they succeeded in replacing his cloth hat with a silk one.

Archbishop Tomás was known to give dowries to women whose families could not afford one. During his episcopate, “not one poor maiden was married without alms from the Saint.” He had a special place in his heart for destitute orphans, and would pay a crown for every foundling brought to him. He established a social justice plan that sought solutions such as giving work to the able-bodied poor. He wrote: “Charity is not just giving, rather removing the need of those who receive charity and liberating them from it when possible.”

In 1550, pirates plundered a coastal town. Archbishop Tomás immediately sent funds to ransom captives and buy necessities to help the inhabitants get back on their feet. Two-thirds of the archdiocese’s annual revenues went to the poor. When he was criticized because some of it found its way to vagabonds and people who didn’t want to work, he insisted it was his duty to relieve suffering.

He encouraged the noble and wealthy to protect their vassals and to see that they had all necessities. He exhorted them to not be showy about their wealth, but to be merciful and to use their possessions for the good of others. He would say: “Answer me, sinner, what can you purchase with your money better or more necessary than the redemption of your sins?” and, “If you desire that God should hear your prayers, hear the voice of the poor.” His example inspired many to become generous.

He founded Presentation Seminary, and a college for poor scholars at the University of Alcalá along with another in Valencia. He convinced the emperor to provide a fund to support some priests to work among the Moors. They were not successful in authentic conversions. Still, he founded a college for the children of newly converted Moors, and established boarding schools and high schools.

Though he was not harsh in trying to convert sinners, some of his words and actions, such as excommunicating a governor, brought him into