

took place in me a divine transformation that no pen could ever describe; I was lost in sentiments of gratitude and humility. I no longer had to look outside myself for the Host and the Star, Jesus and Mary, for I possessed Them within me. Since that moment, I have acted and loved with the Heart of my Savior and that of His Blessed Mother.”

She summed up in three phrases the plan of her new life: blind obedience, to suffer joyously, and love unto martyrdom. Soon after she professed novitiate vows, Dina contracted scarlet fever and entered isolation. In 1927, she received the wounds of the stigmata: “During my meditation before the Blessed Sacrament exposed, I suddenly felt myself enveloped in profound peace...I felt that Our Lord was granting me a great favor: the Stigmata of His Sacred Wounds. From His Divine Heart flames radiated on the feet, hands, and heart of my annihilated being. The Blessed Virgin applied these flames to my hands and feet, and Jesus imprinted on them the Stigmata of love of His Sacred Wounds. He was granting me one of my most cherished desires, but He astonished me by granting it at this moment when I was not expecting [it] and in this manner which I could never have imagined.”

The Stigmata remained invisible as she wished. After her death, nurses testified in the Beatification Process that they had noticed an expression of pain when her hands and feet were rubbed. The feet became so sensitive that it was impossible to rub them as before; the pain was too severe.

She died in her thirty-third year, consumed more by love than tuberculosis. In the last entry of her ‘cantic of love’ (July 1929), Jesus spoke to her; “No invocation responds better to the immense desire of my Eucharistic Heart to reign in souls than: *Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, may Thy Kingdom come through the Immaculate Heart of Mary*; and to my no less infinite desire to communicate my graces to souls than: *Eucharistic Heart of Jesus burning with love for us, inflame our hearts with love for Thee*.”

At her death, she promised to be at the service of all of us, her brothers and sisters on earth: “In heaven I shall be a beggar of love: that is my mission, and I am beginning it here and now. I shall give joy”.

Socials with the Saints

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Sources incl.: Congregation of the Religious Jesus-Mary, Dr. Robert Stackpole, *Catholic Online*, *Aleteia* (Susan E. Willis), and *Mystics of the Church* (Barb Finnegan).



Bl. Dina Bélanger

Little Flower of Canada, Martyr of Love

Born: 30 April 1897 (St-Roch, Quebec)

Died: 4 Sept 1929

Beatified: 20 Mar 1993 (St. John Paul II)

Feast/Memorial: 4 Sept

A daughter was born and baptized on 30 April 1897 in St-Roch, Québec, to Olivier Octave Bélanger & Séraphia Matte. Her parents lived at 168 Notre Dame des Anges in the Parish of Jacques Cartier. Known as Dina, the little girl would have only one younger brother, Joseph-Simeon-Gustave, who died at the age of 3 months. Dina’s father was an auditor, and her

grandfather operated a grocery store in the St. Malo district of Québec.

She was surrounded by love and showered with blessings, as seen in her complete given name Marie-Marguerite-Dina-Adélaïde: for the Blessed Mother, St. Marguerite-Marie Alacoque, and in honor of her paternal grandmother. Dina’s parents provided her tender care, religious formation, and an example of Christian virtue. She would say her prayers leaning against her father’s knee, head bowed, and hands joined. She loved the Angelus prayer, and whenever she heard the bell ring while playing outside, she’d run upstairs in time to say ‘Amen’—which was all the Latin she knew!

Her mother would take Dina on her errands of mercy; both parents rendered all sorts of services to the poor and needy. They were discreet and often asked to remain anonymous in their charity. Several of their relatives were in religious orders, and often Dina would go with her mother to visit them.

She received her First Communion two days after her tenth birthday. During her retreat to prepare for it, she heard that “a fervent First Communion was a sure passport to Heaven, and a lukewarm one a ticket to Hell”. Since she wanted to, in her words, “take the train to Paradise”, she prepared for her First Confession with the help of her mother. She accused herself of many faults, but she was certain she had not lost her Baptismal innocence, expressing an intense gratitude to Our Lord and Our Lady for this favor. The same day as her First Communion, Dina was Confirmed and invested in the scapulars (perhaps customary at the time).

In the following days, Dina grew more recollected at prayer, not moving unnecessarily or taking her eyes from her prayerbook. She had a very tender conscience. In this period, she fell prey to the trial of scruples, but she had a wise and holy priest, Fr. Philemon Cloutier, to help and direct her. She found peace of mind and soul in obedience to his counsels.

On March 25, 1908, which was Holy Thursday that year, Dina heard the ‘voice’ of Jesus for the first time. She says, “During my act of thanksgiving after Communion, Our Lord spoke to my soul by means of a new light. This was the first time I heard His voice so well; interiorly, of course, a soft melodious voice which overwhelmed me with happiness.”

At the age of 13, she was admitted to the Sodality of Our Lady, and took as her personal motto ‘Death Rather Than Defilement.’ At about the same time, she consecrated herself to Our Lady by means of the *True Devotion* of St. Louis-Marie de Montfort. This consecration brought her great joy and peace. Dina wrote: “Would that I might consecrate all souls to [Mary]. It is she who leads us to Jesus; it is she whom we must allow to live in us in order that Christ may substitute Himself in place of our nothingness.”

Between the ages of 16 and 19 while Dina lived at home quietly with her parents, she adopted a personal ‘rule of life,’ with times for morning and evening prayer, Communion, Rosary, meditation, and weekly confession. She strove to conceal her “exclusive interest in the spiritual life,” leaving the Divine Craftsman of her soul to lead her in secret. During this time, Dina also became involved in parish life. She joined the Tabernacle Society, where she, her mother, and other ladies would make or embroider holy vestments. Dina joined her mother in the Apostleship of Prayer, which spread devotion to the Sacred Heart. She helped to distribute the monthly prayer leaflets.

When World War I began, seventeen-year-old Dina offered herself to Jesus “in a spirit of reparation and love in order to give Him some consolation and save souls.” She was especially distressed “at the moral evil threatening the world.” And a little later, she offered herself as a “victim of Divine love.”

At age eight, she had begun taking piano lessons from a private teacher, who regularly came to the family home for four years. Dina plunged into music “with great zest, though always in moderation, on account of my health.” She advanced rapidly in piano and in musical composition, so that even her spiritual guides encouraged her to glorify God by pursuing this as a career.

Therefore, at the age of 19, her parents sent her for musical studies to the New York Conservatory of Music, where she and two friends from Québec

lodged at a convent of the order of the Religieuse de Jésus-Marie. All the while, Dina was deepening in prayer and growing in virtue. She would go to the convent chapel often to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament: “How often, late in the evening, by the pale flickering of the sanctuary lamp, have I come close to Jesus and there, leaning against the altar rail, listened to His voice and poured forth the secrets of my heart!”

Amid her deep spirituality, Dina experienced the ‘dark night of the soul,’ where she entered spiritual aridity and dryness. This began while she was still in New York. Spiritual exercises became occasions for distractions and struggle, but she was still faithful in doing, and even increasing them. She gave twenty, then thirty minutes for daily meditation; she had no permission to extend it any longer. There was ten minutes of spiritual reading, often from *The Imitation of Christ*, *Daily Rosary* or the *Little Office of the Blessed Virgin*. She made frequent use of short prayer phrases. Dina prayed the Stations of the Cross and had a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament. To get all these things in during the day, she curtailed her hours of sleep.

Finally, she accepted a vocation to the Religieuse de Jésus-Marie, a teaching Order, at Sillery, Québec, entering at age twenty-four on August 11, 1921. She received the name *Mère* (which means *mother*) Marie Sainte-Cécile of Rome and took her final vows on 25 August 1923. She taught music.

Dina says that on her entrance day, her soul was filled with darkness and repugnance, yet she had scarcely crossed the threshold when an inward force made her say, ‘THIS IS HOME’. These words were not inspired by any ‘natural’ feeling; she ‘felt’ nothing, groping her way in spiritual darkness.

A retreat she made before Novitiate gave her consolation. The meditation that struck her most was on “fidelity to little things.” She says, “I was imbued with the thought that I should never be able to practice abnegation [another word for ‘sacrifice’] in important things if I did not generously accept small sacrifices.” She received two graces in this retreat. First, she seemed to begin a new life. She plunged her past life into the Precious Blood of Jesus and drove it from her mind. The break with her former life was so complete that she felt as if she had died and had been reborn.

The second favor was remarkable. Dina was praying in the chapel at dusk on the last night of the retreat. Jesus spoke to her, filling her with love and with peace. “Then,” she says, “my good Master took my heart—picking it up as when one removes an object and replacing it by His Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. That was another ‘picture’, but there certainly