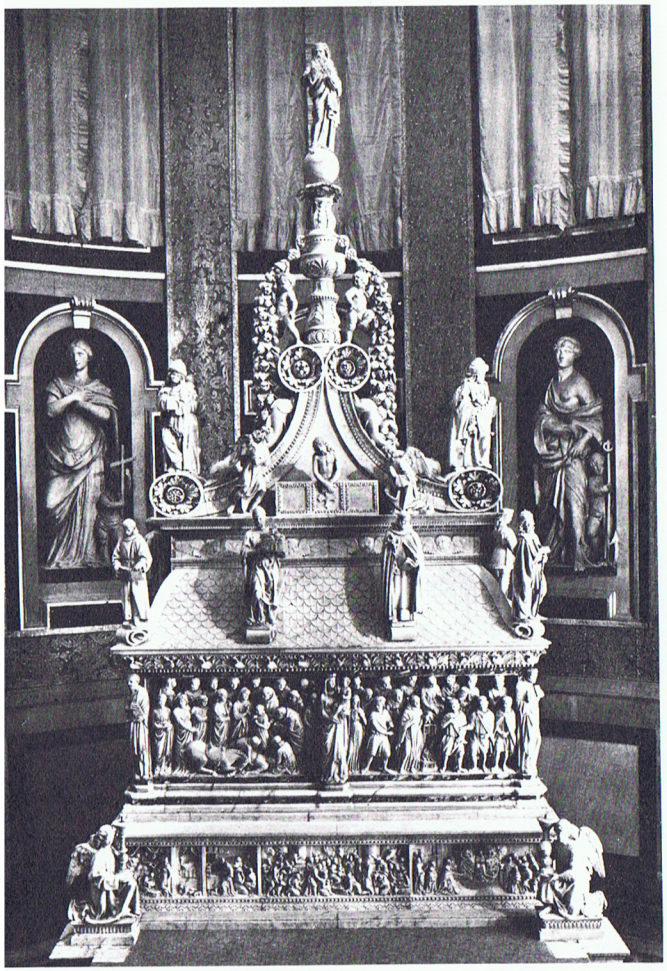
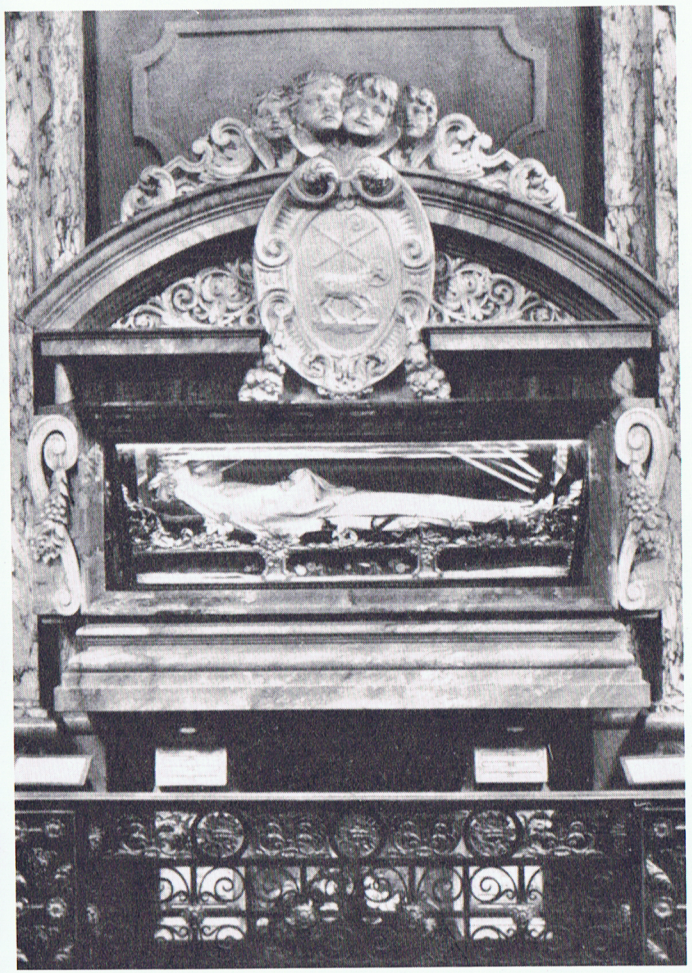


Tomb of St. Dominic
Masterpiece of Nicola Pisano, Nicolò dell'Arca, and Michelangelo.



Tomb containing the remains of Blessed Imelda Lambertini in the Church of San Sigismondo.

BLESSED IMELDA



Patron Saint of First Communicants

"Hurry, Sisters, hurry! Time is running out. Napoleon's troops are heading this way. They'll close down our monastery." It happened in 1799. The anti-clerical agents of Napoleon were suppressing the Religious Orders, confiscating their monasteries and dispersing the Religious. The Dominican nuns in the monastery of St. Mary Magdalen at Val di Pietra fled for shelter to nearby Bologna. With them went their heavenly treasure, the body of their darling "saint" known today as Blessed Imelda. Little Imelda was God's precious gift to the Lambertini family, one of the oldest and wealthiest of Bologna. The count and countess Lambertini were illustrious for their generous benefactions to the Church and their service to the State. Count Egano Lambertini had served as governor of Perugia and ambassador of the Republic of Venice. In the genealogy of the Lambertinis are bishops, nuns, and even a pope, Prosper Lambertini, the scholarly Benedict XIV.

"Next to God, thy parents." Imelda's early years were spent in the wholesome environment of an exemplary Christian family. Together with her mother she assisted at Mass every day, visited the sick, succored the poor and prayed the psalms of David. At the age of nine, she entered the Dominican monastery of the Magdalen at Val di Pietra to be educated by the daughters of St. Dominic. She became the sunshine of the community by her innocence, her candor, her modesty and obedience. Despite her tender age, she took part in all the community exercises except midnight Matins and holy communion. Like the thirteen year old child martyr St. Agnes, her love for Jesus was to prove stronger than death. She was consumed with longing to receive the eucharist. She would gaze in awe as the nuns received the sacred species forbidden to anyone under twelve years of age. She would often say: "How can anyone receive Jesus in his heart and not die?" Then a miracle happened, a prodigy rare in the lives of the saints. Her first communion on May 12, 1333, was her last.

It was the vigil of the feast of the Ascension, 1333. The nuns had heard Mass and left the choir. Imelda remained alone weeping softly with eyes fixed on the little golden door which was for her the gate of heaven. Her heart was burning with holy desire. How could Jesus possibly refuse her! It was a heart-warming scene so beautifully portrayed in the Song of Songs.

> The voice of my beloved!
> Behold, he comes!

Suddenly like the sunrise at dawn, a shining white host appeared over the head of the enraptured girl.

> Arise, my love, my fair one,
> and come away; for lo, the winter is past,
> the rain is over and gone . (2.10)

The brilliance and fragrance of the sacred host flooded the monastery and attracted the nuns back to the chapel. They saw Imelda in ecstacy at the foot of the tabernacle. They hastily summoned the chaplain who, with trembling hands, placed on the tongue of the enraptured girl the body of him "who feeds among the lilies."

> My lover belongs to me
> and I belong to him.
> I held him and would not
> let him go. (3.4)

With arms crossed on her breast and her divine hunger satisfied, Imelda departed this world to solemnize her nuptials in heaven.

> Who is this coming up from the desert
> leaning upon her lover? . . . .
> Come with me, my bride, come with me.
> You have ravished my heart,
> my sister, my bride. (4.9)

Many miracles have attested to the sanctity of this seraph of the eucharist. Even in our own day, Imelda hears and answers the prayers of all who invoke her. Her remains lie in the little church of St. Sigismund in the heart of Bologna. Pope Leo XII beatified Imelda on December 20, 1826. Felix Billiard, bishop of Carcassonne, erected in honor of Imelda on March 7, 1891, the Archconfraternity for First Communicants at the monastery of the Dominican nuns in Prouille, France. Pius X transferred the headquarters of the confraternity to the Eternal City and placed it under the jurisdiction of the Dominican Order on January 28, 1911.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, when you espoused Imelda,
your victim of divine love, she winged
her flight to heaven. Grant the favor
I now ask through her intercession . . . .
and the joy of seeing her one day raised
to sainthood, through the merits of your
passion and death. Amen.

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Please pray for the canonization of Blessed Imelda