

## Saint Nicholas of Tolentino

# He raised 100 Children from the Dead

by Lucy Gordan



St. Nicholas of Tolentino depicted  
by Pietro Ricchi

**T**he famous Augustinian thaumaturgist or performer of miracles, St. Nicholas of Tolentino, died on September 10, 1305, hence also his feast day. One of several events to celebrate this 700th anniversary is the exhibition: "Image and Mystery: The Sun, Book, and Lily." On until October 9, some ninety works of art, dating from the fourteenth through the twentieth century, depict the saint and his iconography in the Braccio di Carlo Magno, the passageway from St. Peter's Square through which Charlemagne passed to his coronation in the Basilica on Christmas Day 800 AD. They include paintings by Raphael, Perugino, Guercino, Salvator Rosa, and Luca Giordano, sculptures by Pietro Lombardo and Alessandro Algardi, as well as prints, miniatures in illuminated manuscripts, and gold and silver reliquies including one (after 1446) conserving the Saint's blood on loan from the Church of St. Stephen in Venice.

Invoked against fires, Nicholas of Tolentino is the patron of sick animals, mariners, souls in Purgatory, babies, mothers, and the dying. He was born in 1245 at Sant'Angelo in the diocese of Fermo in answer to his mother's prayers. Childless and middle-aged, Amata de Guidani, and her husband, Compagnonus de Guaratti, had made a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Nicholas of Bari to ask for a son whom she promised to dedicate to God's service.

Already as a small boy Nicholas gave unusual signs of saintliness. From seven years of age on he would hide in

caves and pray like the hermits he observed in the Apennine Mountains near his home, in the Marches region, from where many of the works of art on display also originate. Then at age eighteen, Nicholas joined an Augustinian friary and was ordained at age 25. On account of his gentle manner his superiors entrusted him with the daily feeding of the poor at the monastery gates; at times he was so free with the friary's provisions that the procurator begged the superior to check Nicholas' generosity.

A few years later, in 1274, to be exact, while praying one day he had a vision of angels wearing white robes and chanting: "To Tolentino, to Tolentino," so he took off for this small town, not far from his birthplace, which would eventually give him his surname. He stayed there for the next thirty years—until his death in 1305.

During the Middle Ages, Tolentino, like most towns in central Italy, was being torn apart by civil war between the rival Guelphs, who supported the Pope, and Ghibellines, who supported the Holy Roman Emperor, in their struggle for control of Italy. Nicholas was primarily a pastor to his flock. He tried his best to make peace, and visited the sick and condemned prisoners. According to his biographer St. Antonine, Nicholas always told those he helped: "Say nothing of this. Give thanks to God, not to me. I am only a vessel of clay, a poor sinner."

"Image and Mystery": The Sun, Book, and Lily is divided into three sections. The first concerns the saint's iconography and includes works of art portraying the saint. Of particular interest here are a wooden panel by Giovanelli (1753), now in the Cathedral Museum and Treasury in Monza, and a wooden panel by Giovanelli di Paolo (c. 1445) on loan from the Robeletto family collection at the Léhman Collection in New York.

The second illustrates episodes from the saint's life and his miracles. Here altarpieces, triptychs, and predelle, depicting the resurrection of a child even unto Tisí, alias "Il Garofalo," Metroopolitan are two oils by Benvenuto Cellini and a chalice made by Rafaellino da Montelupo. Also on loan from the Detroit Institute of Arts, are also on display.

The third section is of paintings of saints such as the Virgin Mary, the Nativity, the Crucifixion and the Assumption, which include the scenes of the Masses and the life of St. Nicholas. This section is of paintings of saints such as the Virgin Mary, the Nativity, the Crucifixion and the Assumption, which include the scenes of the Masses and the life of St. Nicholas.

So as to prevent further attempts of the two bleeding arms, to the left, the friars then hid the rest of St. Nicholas's body so well that it has not been found to this day.

St. Nicholas led of a life of self-deprivation—lengthy

**Below, St. Nicholas of Tolentino, by Giovan Francesco Barberi  
by Gian Giacomo de' Alldio  
St. Joseph St. Augustine and St. Jerome,  
Mary adores the Child Jesus surrounded by St. Nicholas of Tolentino.**



Concluding his miracles, Nicholas died before his death, who had drowned together. Another time, when nine passengers on a sinking ship asked for his help, he appeared in the sky, wearing the black Augustinian habit, radiating golden light, and holding a lily in his left hand. With his right hand he quelled the storm. Another apparition of the saint once saved the burning Doge's Palace in Venice by throwing a piece of blessed bread on the flames. Speaking of blessings, Nicholas, a vegetarian, was once served a roasted partridge: when he made the sign of the cross over it, the bird revived and flew out the window.

Nicholas's relics (his arms), now in Tolentino's Chapel of the Holy Arms, were not rediscovered until 1926, although in earlier times they were known to exude blood when the Church was in danger. The most famous legend surrounding the saint's tomb is that it seems a German friar seeking relics for his native land broke into the Saint's tomb and hacked off his arms. The friar fled into the night, only to find himself the next morning back at the tomb—running in place and holding