

The Scientist and

BLESSED NICHOLAS STENO

(IN DANISH, NIELS STEENSEN)

1638-1686

After a youth spent in studying and then in scientific research, Nicolas Steno at age 28 converted to the Catholic Church while watching the Corpus Christi procession, thus realizing the greatness and magnificence of the Eucharist; the Real Presence of Jesus in the Host. He then decided to become a priest and missionary in his own country.



Portrait of Blessed Nicholas Steno



St. Nicholas of Flue, better known as “Brother Klaus,” was declared patron saint of Switzerland by Pope Pius XII in 1947. He was born of a farmer’s family in 1417 in Flueli, in the Alpine foothills above Sachseln, in the region of Obwald. He married, had ten children, and conducted a normal life until he was 50. Then he felt a very strong call from God to leave everything and follow Him. He therefore asked for three graces: to obtain the consent of his wife Dorothy and their older children; to never feel the temptation to turn back, and finally, God willing, to be able to live without drinking or eating. All his requests were granted. He lived for twenty years in the forest as a hermit with no food except for the Eucharist, as many witnesses testified.



In Belgium, at Bois-d’Haine, the Servant of God Anne-Louise Lateau lived for twelve years without eating or drinking, and without sleeping, starting on March 26, 1871. On January 11, 1868, she received stigmata at her feet, hands, head, the left side of her chest and at her right shoulder. She lived thus conformed to Our Lord until the end of her life. On April 23, 1873, Pope Leo XIII made the following declarations regarding Anne-Louise’s case, “The Bois-d’Haine event is an extraordinary one. You can affirm on my behalf that medical science will never be able to explain such a fact.” Anne-Louise died on August 25, 1883 at age 33. In 1991 the cause for her beatification was officially opened.

Nicholas Steno was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, on January 10, 1638. Since his youth, he was greatly involved in natural science studies - to the point of being considered among the founding fathers of geology, paleontology and crystallography. His prolific scientific activity caused him to travel all over Europe. On June 24, 1666, in Livorno, Italy, Nicholas Steno received the grace of conversion to the Catholic faith. His biographers wrote, “He observed with curiosity and perplexity the procession for the Feast of Corpus Christi and the fervor around it. The large Piazza d’Armi was bursting with colors and sounds. A loud, prolonged ringing of bells could be heard. The young man was recalling another procession he watched three years before in Lovanio, Belgium, where many students were lined up and dozens of black-robed professors were walking. He could perceive some-

thing different here. Maybe it was a sense of joy, a new warm feeling... or maybe his eyes had changed? Long lines of men in white tunics were processing and singing. Gonfalons and banners were swinging in the gentle breeze coming from the sea. Friars and priests were processing too, dressed in their white surplices adorned with laces and fringes. Even more priests were part of the procession, wearing their copes shining in the sun, and children holding incense burners. Finally, a big golden canopy passed by, and under it a minister of the Church, solemnly dressed, absorbed in his thoughts, carrying close to his chest the precious monstrance with the Sacred Host....

“People knelt as the Blessed Sacrament passed by and eyes were sparkling with love as they gazed upon the Host, all heads bowed down in adoration. Petals and flowers were showering from all corners.

The young Nicholas Steno spent the whole day with a deep uneasiness in his heart. He remembered the Jesuit priest in Paris with whom he had discussed the Real Presence of Jesus in the consecrated Bread. The Jesuit priest had emphasized the value of Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, ‘This is my Body’, and then St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. That day Nicholas Steno decided to convert to Catholicism. He immediately entered the seminary, and after nine years of study he was ordained a priest. He described his conversion: ‘As soon as I attentively pondered God’s favors to me, these appeared to be so many that I couldn’t help but offer to Him the best of myself and in the best way, from the bottom of my heart... Therefore, having come to know the great dignity of priesthood... I asked and obtained that I may offer the Immaculate Host to the Eternal Father for my good and the good of others.’”