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PALM BEACH DIOCESE

Future saint? Who is Blessed Titus Brandsma?

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PALM BEACH | Anno Sjoerd Brandsma, later known as Father Titus Brandsma, was born Feb. 23, 1881, in Oegeklooster, near Hartwerd, in the province of Friesland in the Netherlands. He was one of Holland's leading churchmen and a great Carmelite priest arrested by the Nazis and imprisoned in Germany. He died a martyr July 26, 1942, was beatified in 1985, and became "blessed." In order for him to become a saint, one bona fide miracle is needed.

Anno Brandsma was born to farmers Titus Brandsma and Tjitsje Postma. In 1892 at age 11, he entered the Franciscan Minor Seminary for boys in Megen. After six years of studies and living the Franciscan life, young Anno felt called elsewhere. On Sept. 17, 1898, he entered the Carmelite monastery in Boxmeer, Holland, and professed first vows the following year.

In a letter, he told his parents, "I am happy now. I believe God called me here." Anno took his father's name, Titus, when he entered the novitiate. He completed studies and formation and was ordained June 17, 1905.

He wrote a few words from Luke 12:48 on his ordination cards. "When a man has had a great deal given him, a great deal will be demanded of him." These words clearly represent the true spirit of this man, who eventually gave everything, even his life, for the good of God and Church.

Father Brandsma entered the Gregorian University in Rome, where he studied philosophy. He received a doctorate in philosophy Oct. 25, 1909, and returned to the Netherlands to begin ministry. He began teaching at various schools in Holland, becoming known as "The Professor." In 1923, he joined Catholic University of Nijmegen, which he helped establish. The man, who was a prominent philosopher, poet and writer in mysti-

cal theology, was appointed rector of the Catholic institute in 1932. He was noted for his constant availability to everyone.

Writing and the Catholic press were his passion. When he entered the Carmelite monastery, Father Brandsma began writing and working on poetry. In 1916, he led a project focused on translating the writings of St. Teresa of Avila into Dutch. He also wrote a series of meditations on the Stations of the Cross and a magazine for the Carmelite community in the Netherlands. In 1935, he was appointed ecclesiastical adviser to Catholic journalists and Catholic newspapers.

An article appeared in the April 10, 1942, issue of the *Florida Catholic*, which read, "The Rev. Dr. Titus Brandsma, one of Holland's leading churchmen and one of the outstanding Carmelites in the world today, has been arrested by the Nazis and imprisoned somewhere in Germany, according to dispatches from London received

at the Carmelite headquarters of the Scapular Bureau here."

Gestapo agents arrested Father Brandsma and he was taken to a prison at Scheveningen, where he remained for six weeks and was constantly interrogated. He was transferred to a prison in Amersfoort and then in Cleves, and finally to Dachau concentration camp in Germany.

He wrote about prison life while at Dachau: "Blessed solitude. I am quite at home in this small cell. I never get bored here, just the contrary. I am certainly alone, but never was Our Lord so near to me. I could shout for joy because now, when I cannot go to the people nor the people come to me, he reveals himself to me so often. Now, he is my only refuge, and I feel so secure and happy. If he ordered it, I would stay here forever."

Pope John Paul II beatified Father Brandsma Nov. 3, 1985. His feast day is July 27, and is observed by the Carmelite community worldwide. ■



A poster of Blessed Father Titus Brandsma hangs on a wall at St. Jude Parish, home to a small Carmelite community. Father Brandsma was a Carmelite priest and journalist, who fought for freedom of the Catholic press.