

**Blessed Dina Bélanger (1897-1929):
Musician and Mystic
Feast Day: September 4**



Her Life

Dina Bélanger was born in Quebec City on April 30, 1897. She was the only daughter of Séraphia Matter and Olivier Bélanger. She attended elementary and secondary school with the sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame at their convent in Saint Roch and then at Jacques Cartier School. At the age of 14, she asked whether she could be a boarder at Bellevue Convent, where she wanted to complete her studies. She made the following prayer: "O my God, grant that, during my stay here, I may not offend you by even the least serious sin." Also at 14, she consecrated her virginity to God.

When she finished school, she returned to live with her parents and studied piano. She developed a personal rule of life that was based on prayer, mass, communion, the rosary, and meditation, and kept it all a secret. She helped her mother with the parish's outreach to the poor and the sick. She was active in the Work of the Tabernacles (its members made altar cloths and liturgical vestments for poor parishes and for the missions). She became an active member of the Apostleship of Prayer and joined the Third Order of St. Dominic. In 1916, she was admitted to the New York Conservatory, where, for two years she studied advanced piano and harmony. When she returned to Quebec, she gave concerts and continued to study of harmony by distance education.

When she was 24, she entered the novitiate of the Religious of Jesus and Mary in Sillery. She took the habit the next year under the name of Marie Sainte-Cécile de Rome, and made renewable vows on August 15, 1923. That September, she was appointed as music teacher at the Convent of Saint-Michel-de-Bellechasse on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, across from the Island of Orleans. Her stay there was interrupted by bouts of illness.

From the age of 11, Dina had deep prayer experiences and an intimate relationship with the Lord. Her superior in the community asked her to keep a journal of her spiritual experiences, which she began to do in 1924. She pronounced perpetual vows on August 15, 1928. The following April, she had to go to the infirmary. She died on September 4, 1929, at age 32, the victim of pulmonary tuberculosis which had first been diagnosed in the spring of 1926.

Dina Bélanger was beatified by Pope (now Saint) John Paul II on March 20, 1993, at the same time as Saint Claudine Thévenet, the founder in France of the religious congregation to which Dina belonged.

Her Spirituality

Dina was sensitive and had a delicate conscience that at times was troubled with scruples. As a child, she learned how to lift herself to God in prayer, in the silence and beauty of nature. She made first communion when she was 10 and from that time she sought recollection, meditation, and intimacy with Jesus. She expressed it thus: "Only God! Like the deer that pants for running streams, so my soul sighs for you, O my God! My God, I am suffering because I am not suffering. I am dying, because I am not dying."

She received abundant grace, and prayed ever more fervently and performed acts of love as Jesus communicated himself to her by voices and visions. She thirsted for silence, and had to force herself to socialize with other teenagers. "I was a person of extremes," she would later write in an autobiography, "and once I started on something good, I would decide to take it as far as I could." But her independent nature meant that she struggled with her "selfish desire for isolation and peace".

As a student, Dina loved every subject. She was passionate about art and the beautiful and her aim was always perfection: "I wanted to find the God-given talents within me," she wrote, but her ideals were so high that she never felt she deserved the praise she received. She was naturally oriented to meditation, and did not believe that she would find spiritual nourishment in books: "Jesus himself gave this to me. He presented the book from which shone forth to my eyes, in large letters, the secret of happiness and the knowledge of love." The Autobiography of Saint Theresa of Lisieux helped her learn how to abandon herself to God.

At the beginning of the Great War, "afflicted with the moral evil" that threatened the world, she offered herself to the Lord in a spirit of reparation and love, "in order to console him a little and to save souls." She had moments of inner turmoil and had to struggle against her "sharp and sometimes angry nature" so that her desire to excuse herself would not triumph. As a novice, she offered herself as a victim, martyr and apostle in union with Mary following the example of Father (now Saint) Louis de Montfort.

Her spiritual life deepened as she discovered the depths of the Trinity: "For God to be able to pour his grace in profusion into the soul of a person, he has to find Jesus living in them. ... To become an abyss able to be filled with the Infinite, one must be open to the annihilation of one's

being on the level of the spirit.” She was given a deep understanding of the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Jesus revealed to her that “you will not possess me any more fully in heaven, because I have completely absorbed you.”

Dina was open to apostolic and missionary life and had a strong desire to help others, especially priests and religious, deepen their relationship with Jesus. “In all my actions, my words, my thoughts, and my desires I find myself to be passive, as if under the influence of the Supreme Being, as if the Spirit of Love had his soft yet strong guiding hand on me. My freedom is total, and in that state there is no conflict. His grace is simply so strong that I cannot resist.” Her sole occupation became one of continually directing her attention to God. “Have confidence in my mercy. It is because you are weak and unhappy that I have chosen you,” Jesus said to her, as she recounts in her autobiography. Her union with him was so profound that she could write, “Jesus Christ lives in place of me on earth. He has substituted himself for me, and now I am nothing.” Thus she was one with the apostle Paul who wrote, “It is not I who live, but the Christ who lives in me.”

For further information:

<http://jesus-marie.ca/centre-dina-belanger/>

Image: Dina-Bélanger Centre, courtesy of the Congregation of the Religious of Jesus and Mary
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