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**Venerable Servant of God VERONICA ANTAL,
Virgin and Martyr, Young Secular Franciscan**

“What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we are being slain all the day; we are looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us” (*Rm* 8:35-37).

Our Order rejoices again over the upcoming beatification of the Venerable Servant of God, Veronica Antal. She was a young girl and a prominent member of the Secular Franciscan Order, who exactly sixty years ago, in northern Romania, had the courage to give her life in defense of her faith and the vow of chastity she secretly professed. This beatification is even more beautiful because she was raised in the faith by our Conventual friars in Moldavia. They ministered at both the parish of Nisiporești where she was born, and the parish of Hălăucești, in whose territory she was martyred.

The Venerable Servant of God, Veronica Antal, was born on December 7, 1935, in the village of Nisiporești, the first of four children of Gheorghe and Evei Antal. Veronica was baptized the next day at the parish church of Hălăucești, run by our friars who have been present in that area since the 13th century. After attending the village school for four years, she stayed at home to help her parents doing housework and working in the fields—as was customary in those days. Around the age of sixteen or seventeen, she enrolled in both the Secular Franciscan Order and the International Association of the Militia of the Immaculata. In a short time she became a fervent promoter of the spirituality of the Poverello of Assisi, as well as the cult of the Immaculate. She also wanted to consecrate herself to the Lord through the Institute of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Assisi (also known as the Del Giglio Sisters), but this would not be possible for her, because at that time, all the religious orders in Romania had been suppressed by the Communist regime. She decided to offer herself to the Lord by making a private vow of chastity, and by beginning to live as a "sister" in a cell built next to her father's house. She would pray for hours, especially for bishops, priests, our friars and the laity, whom the regime had already imprisoned by the thousands, under the false accusation of hatred and subversion against the social order. She visited the sick of her village, tending to their needs and consoling those who were suffering. But the source she drew upon for this life did not come from men, or from destitution, or persecution of the faith, but rather, from the Eucharist which she never failed to receive. Every morning, at 4:00 a.m., she began walking in order to attend the 6:00 a.m. Mass at the parish church of Hălăucești. She traveled with a group of friends and Franciscan sisters whom the regime had sent back to live with their parents. Veronica walked about fifteen kilometers [nine miles] round-trip, with the sole desire of communicating with her divine Spouse. Only after having refreshed herself with Jesus would she return and enthusiastically resume her

prayers and her visits to the poorest of her town. She began and ended every day with Him.

The day of her supreme trial came on August 24, 1958. She was returning from Mass with the rosary in her right hand, pondering one mystery and then another, when she took a short cut through some fields in the hope of getting home sooner. She had walked about halfway when a young man from the village, his passions inflamed, attacked her, intending to steal the lily of her chastity. In her enormous effort to fight him off, she received forty-two stab wounds. She fell victorious on the battlefield. The killer placed another sign of victory upon her shoulders: a cross made out of corn stalks.

Some villagers found her the following morning, bearing all the marks of her struggle, and everyone cried out: *"the saint is dead"*! From then on, she was recognized in the minds and hearts of everyone as Saint Veronica.

The dark days of Communism prevented any regular road to promoting her fame of sanctity. However, help came from another Servant of God, the great witness of faith, Friar Anton Demeter, a Conventual Franciscan from the Province of St. Joseph, Spouse of the B.V.M. in Romania. Although his persecutors left him confined to a wheelchair, he continued to carry out pastoral ministry for forty-seven years. During that time, he managed to keep Veronica's memory alive among the people who had known her. He collected a great deal of testimony about her and presented her to the people as a model of faith and virtue.

Many people, especially young people, have since visited her tomb, now kept in the parish church of Nisiporești, where the rite of beatification will soon take place.

I like to think of this young saint as a little seedling that our friars have cultivated in the spiritual shade of our Seraphic Father St. Francis. She is the fruit of their fraternal and apostolic labors in Romania. However, she is also a catalyst for the rebirth of the Romanian Province; a Province with a large number of young friars. More than ever, they need powerful intercessors and models of holiness so that they might realize their own call with greater enthusiasm and evangelical zeal.

Finally, I would like to conclude by giving a nod of gratitude to the many witnesses of the faith, and of the Franciscan vocation, that the Romanian Province has given to the Church and our Order. Among them are Friar Iosif Petru Maria Pal, one of the co-founders of the Militia of the Immaculata; the Servant of God Friar Martin Benedict, a celebrated physician and a friar of holy life; and the Servant of God, Friar Anton Demeter, who, despite being confined to a wheelchair for most of his life, still served, imparting God's word and consolation to all who came to him from every part of Romania.

Let the Lord be praised and honored for all these true witnesses of the Gospel, and may their intercession and example of life inspire even greater desire for holiness among the Friars Minor Conventual.

Friar Marco TASCA
Minister General