

## SAINT PETER OF ALCANTARA

### INSCRIPTION:

SAINT PETER OF ALCANTARA WAS SO EXHAUSTED\* BY HIS PENANCE THAT HE WAS ... TO HIS DISCIPLE TERESA... TO A DRY ROOT OF [A] TREE, WHERE GOD... GAVE... REFRESHMENT... TO SHAPE OF A PEAR[GR]INO, WITH...

\*Destroyed, exhausted

### IT IS TOLD THAT...

Pietro Garavito was born in Alcantara, Spain, in the province of Extremadura, in 1499. At just sixteen years old, he joined the Observant Franciscans and strictly followed the Franciscan Rule. After being elected provincial minister, he attempted to initiate the reform of the Order to counter the Protestant movement. However, his efforts were not well received, leading him to resign from his position and live as a hermit for two years.

Numerous friars were attracted by his lifestyle and joined him. After seeking approval from Pope Julius III, Peter founded the Order of Reformed Friars Minor of Spain, called "Alcantarine Franciscans," who strictly adhered to the Rule without mitigation.

Peter's example was followed by Saint Teresa of Avila. They met in 1560, and he became her confessor and counselor. Peter's incredible and superhuman asceticism is vividly described by Teresa in a chapter of her autobiography. She wrote that Peter's penances were "incomprehensible to the human mind."

### SAINT TERESA OF AVILA TELLS...

"He was very kind, yet he was very taciturn, except when he was asked a question, and then he was charming, for he had a keen intelligence. More than all the mortifications, it cost him at first to overcome sleep and for this purpose, he always remained on his knees or standing. The scant rest granted to nature was taken by sitting, with his head resting on a piece of wood fixed in the wall and, if he had wanted to lie down, he could not have done so, because his cell was only four and a half feet long. For all those years he never covered himself with his hood, no matter how hot the sun was or how hard it rained; he never used footwear and never wore a dress of coarse cloth, without petticoats. However, I learned that for twenty years he wore a sackcloth made of white wire without ever putting it down. The dress was as tight as possible and over it he wore a cloak of the same fabric. Often he only ate every three or four days and, showing surprise, he told me that it was an easy thing for those who had gotten used to it. His poverty was extreme and his mortification was such that he confided to me that he had spent three years of his youth in a house of the Order without knowing any of the religious, except by the sound of their voices, because he had never raised his eyes; therefore he would never have been able to go where the rule called, if he had not followed the others. He had the same modesty on the street and when I met him his body was so exhausted that it seemed made of tree roots."

The *Treatise on Prayer and Meditation*, written by Pietro da Alcantara, was defined by Pope Gregory XV as "a shining light that guides souls to Paradise and a doctrine suggested by the Holy Spirit." Peter died in Arenas in 1562, and was canonized in 1669 by Pope Clement IX. He is the patron saint of Brazil. As in many other images, the elegance and splendor of the context (the whiteness of the tablecloth, the refinement of the crockery, the clothes of the angel and Jesus) contrast with the sober and severe habits of Saint Peter, Saint Teresa, and the Franciscans.