



## Thomas à Kempis

Thomas à Kempis, a 15<sup>th</sup>-century German monk, is most widely known for writing two of the greatest spiritual works of all time – *The Imitation of Christ* and *The Passion of Christ*, among many other writings. He was a leading member of a powerful, late-medieval spiritual movement called the *Devotio Moderna*, and of the Canons Regular of Windesheim at Mount St. Agnes monastery for some 70 years, until his death.

Born in Kempen, Holland in 1379 into a family of artisans, he was known as Thomas of Kempen, then took the Latin form of the name – Thomas à Kempis – when he became a monk in 1399. He perfected his calligraphy, and spent his life copying manuscripts, reading and writing. In addition to his own compositions, he copied numerous treatises from the Fathers, especially St. Bernard, a Missal for the use of his community, and the whole Bible in four large volumes. À Kempis was ordained a priest in 1414, at age 34. He served twice as subprior of his religious community, The Congregation of Canons Regular of Saint Augustine, and it is estimated that he wrote *The Imitation of Christ* during his first tenure as subprior, around 1425.

À Kempis produced some three dozen devotional works, his most famous being *The Imitation of Christ*, which rapidly gained a wide circulation and deep respect among both lay and religious readers – a reputation which has spanned the centuries in both the Catholic Church and broader Christian world. Other popular favorites by à Kempis include: *Prayers and Meditations on the Life of Christ* (the second part of which is *On The Passion of Christ*), *The Soul's Soliloquy*, *On the Three Tabernacles*, *The Little Garden of Roses*, *The Valley of Lilies*, *On Solitude and Silence*, and *Sermons to Novices*. He likewise wrote biographies of the founders of *Devotio Moderna* (Geert Groote and Florens Radewijns), and at the time of his death, was near completion of his *Chronicles of the Canons Regular of Mount St. Agnes*.

He died at age 92, on July 25, 1471.