

Father Tusino R.C.J.

# The Father's Soul

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WITNESSES FOR PRIVATE USE  
“pro manuscripto”

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GENERAL CURIA OF THE ROGATIONISTS FATHERS

With the approbation of the Superior General  
Fr. Pietro Cifuni R.C.J.

September 8, 1973  
Birth of Mary  
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*To the Father's sons and daughters:*

***THE FATHER'S SOUL** is such an alluring title as to raise thrilling expectations, which could end in disappointment, however.*

*To avoid it, we specify that this work is not concerned with the Father's psychology, which deserves a research from professionals. We hope that one day some of our brethren will undertake it gladly. Being the psychological aim beyond my intentions, and I am not qualified for such a work, I have confined myself within the bounds of a humble collector of documents, which will enable the experts to weave the story.*

*Therefore, I beg the readers to emphasize the sub-title: **Witnesses**, because I aim at making the people know how the persons who lived, or knew the Father, have judged him. After the Father's death, the superiors gathered the evidence from those who had spontaneously written concerning him, or were invited to do so. Such reports deserve our trust even though they are not sworn upon.*

*I myself bear witness to some episodes, while other events have been related to me by reliable persons.*

*Logically, I could not neglect the evidence that the Father himself has prompted to us through his own writings, which like a mirror reflect his soul.*

*Because Father Vitale has employed some of the documents in **Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia - his Life and Works**, my project is not entirely original. Still, with the blessing of the o Baminella Mary,)) we hope it will help the communities by kindling in our hearts the wish to imitate our Father, becoming sons and daughters worthy of him.*

**Father Tusino R.C.J.**

**The Father's writings are quoted according to the number of the volumes of the first collection, which have been submitted to the Sacred Congregation. The second collection is quoted by the abbreviation S.C.**

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# 1.

## **THE SECOND CONVERSION**

1. Becoming always a convert
2. The prayers for the conversion
3. Resorting to the saints
4. Holiness without illusion
5. His own cooperation
6. Specifying the Father's spirit
7. The last resolves
8. Notes.

## 1. Becoming always a convert

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Usually, we combine the idea of conversion with the idea of a previous sinful life from which people recede. For instance, when we talk of conversion, the image of Mary Magdalene from whom the Lord had cast out seven devils (Mk. 16,9), as well as the image of Augustine who surrendered to the grace after 30 years of corruption cross our mind immediately.

By itself, however, conversion does not imply moral corruption. For instance, Saint Paul was obstinate because of his extreme enthusiasm for the traditions of his ancestors (Gal. 1, 14). Saint Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrow converted from worldliness, in which he lived indulgently without jeopardizing his Christian duties; Saint Louis Gonzaga called the year he spent in Florence « year of his conversion, » because Our Lady increased his fervor in that time, and yet he lived his youth innocently and angelically. Saint Theresa of the child Jesus received the grace of conversion on Christmas night 1886, when Jesus « changed her heart, » giving her the « spiritual courage she had lost at the age of four and half. Such gift she retained ever since » (Autobiographical manuscripts, page 122). People's fancy could freely play on « this spiritual courage, » but history tells us that detachment from the Christmas gifts was the point!

Because conversion starts a dynamic process, a growth, a continuous increase in the spiritual life, people look at it from its goal and from its aim. Let us call to mind Saint Paul's saying: « You must run ...meaning to win (1 Cor. 9, 24). He says of himself. « That is how I run, intent on winning; that is how I fight, not beating the air,...because I should not want to be disqualified » (Ibid. vv. 26-27).

Surrendering oneself to God and to his grace; persisting on achieving spiritual growth for holiness; continuously renewing the resolve to become holy, that is what conversion is all about.

Ascetics distinguish the first conversion from the second one. In the former, a person settles in the grace of God; in the latter, he commits himself to perfection, according to the gospel. We quote the following episode: « So he called a little child to him and set the child in front of them. Then he said solemnly, " Unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven " » (Mat. 18, 2-3). « Here, Jesus is speaking to the apostles who are sharing in his ministry, who will receive Communion at the Last Supper, and three of them have been with him on Tabor. They are in the state of grace, and yet he speaks to them of the necessity to convert in order to enter the kingdom, i. e., the divine intimacy » (GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, *The Three Ages of the Spiritual Life*, book 3, ch. 2). To be specific, the scholars define the second conversion as the state of a person who transfers from the purgative life to the illuminative one.

The second conversion which the Father invokes continuously with tears has an ampler meaning; it engages all of his life and strength. Conversion for him is « hunger and thirst for what is right >> (Mat. 5, 6), which we cannot satisfy in full on earth! He writes:

The persons committed to the divine service are like those who are going to some destination. The more they think of the short way they have covered and of the long way to be traversed, the more they hasten toward their goal. The same happens to those who are in the mystical way of the virtue. If we think of having covered a long way, because we have taken some steps in this regal path, and if we think of being on top of the virtue when we are at its foot, we run the risk of losing our fervor and our zeal, slowing down. Meanwhile death comes and breaks our journey at the beginning of our way! Therefore, the consideration of how little we have done and of the great deal to be done helps us always to perform better things. It is useless to say that seeing things in such a way degrades the soul; this is true for those who are seeking themselves, not for those who are seeking God. God wants our resolve: « Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God >> (Lk. 9, 62). David said, « Today I start! » (Ps. 76, 11) (1) (Vol. 22, page 72).

When the Father was a boy, he was drawn to commit himself to piety, nourishing a special devotion to Jesus in the Sacrament and to the most holy Virgin. Even though he had not yet received divine enlightenment on his vocation, he felt himself drawn to a great union with God. Ever since he retired from attending the theater where Maieroni recited, and gave up bird hunting, a diversion he used to do now and then with his relatives in the

near country. He went more often to the churches, especially the ones having the Blessed Sacrament exposed, and in the time when Jesus was alone. Those were the best hours when he even gave vocal free play to his soul. This is his conversion. Ever since he strove continuously and untiringly to grow in holiness.

I relate the episode Canon Barsanofio Chieti told us. While walking together with the venerable Bishop Di Tommaso along the avenue of Oria station, they saw the Father coming with difficulty - he was in the last years of his life. Pointing to the Father, the bishop said to Canon Barsanofio, « That man wants to become holy at any cost!>> He was referring to the Father's strength and perseverance in pursuing holiness.

The Father, however, was unaware. He rather thought of having buried the divine gift, of having disregarded the plans of God, of being tardy in the path of his life. Like a lazy worker, he saw himself as letting the weed and the thorns suffocate the good seed that the Lord had abundantly sown in his soul. Not to be deceived by him when he calls himself « a wretch, a monster of iniquity, the most unjust man, » and the like, we must always bear in our mind that this was the habitual state of his spirit, which is common to all the Servants of God.

When the saints speak of themselves, they are severe judges. Listen to Saint Bernard: « How many useless, false, and unbecoming things I have vomited from my loathsome mouth! » (*Lectures on Our lady's feasts*, Pauline Editions, page 155). The humble saint calls his famous lectures on the topic *Missus est useless, false, and loathsome*. And yet, these lectures are among the most beautiful pages that the holy Fathers ever wrote in honor of the most holy Mother!

The Father insisted by words and by writing, « Do not forget to pray to the Lord and to the most holy Virgin for my true conversion >> (Vol. 35, page 1). « Pray for my conversion. >> The people who marveled at his request, were told again, « All of us need conversion until the last moment of our life... Though we may have achieved a high degree of virtue, still it costs exertion and renunciation... The Lord tests our faithfulness in the battle, whence the merit springs. » Writing to Father Callisto Bonicelli in August 1906, he wishes that the Monfort be canonized, and adds, « But he must work some miracles, and the miracle of my conversion will be a resounding one which would exempt him from any other! » (S.C. Vol. 7, page 145).



## 2. The prayers for the conversion

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Unless the grace of God helps us, we can do nothing. Our Lord states explicitly, « Cut off from me, you can do nothing » (John 15,5); and Saint Paul writes, « No one can say, " Jesus is Lord " unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit >> (1 Cor. 12, 3). Still less can we think of the conversion as a work of ours: « It is God, for his loving purpose, who put both the will and the action into you » (Phil. 2, 13). For this reason the prophet implored from the Lord, « Bring me back, let me come back » (Jer. 31, 18).

The Father held the conversion as the outcome of the prayer. Through many prayers, therefore, he meant to force heaven to grant it to him. We quote some gleanings from his various, long prayers, picking up some periods particularly interesting. He resorts to the Lord, the Madonna, the angels, and his dear patron saints with such an impetus, fervor, and fire that he sometimes seems to mobilize all of paradise.

On February 2, 1887, he begins the offering of 33 masses asking for. 1. The grace that the divine majesty likes most in order to better achieve sanctification. 2. The true, sincere, fervid, constant conversion of himself to the supreme goodness, Jesus. 3. The gift of making his frequent, clear, detailed confession with compunction, humility, sorrow, and resolve. 4. The divine forgiveness for not having answered the new call quickly because of laziness. 5. The effective grace to perfectly answer the new call (Vol. 4, page 13).

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He appeals to the Heart of Jesus, « Do not let me be separated from you. O my Jesus, I want only you. May I die to creatures, and creatures to me. May I truly say, " I only glory in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world " » (Book 6, page 9).

To the child Jesus:

My dear Jesus, please convert all of myself to you. I want to belong to you, knowing and loving you so much in this life, both because you deserve it and because I want to know and love you so much in heaven. I mourn over my enormous sins, and desire to atone for your love I outraged and betrayed! I want to detach myself from any creature, to destroy my worst nature, and to unite myself to you by love. May the great miracle of your eternal charity come true; i. e., the guilty soul of

this most wretched among all human beings and the perfect soul of the holy of the holies may be one... But I am not satisfied by loving you superficially. I want to love you with a particular, burning, devouring love stronger than death, in order to penetrate and to burn the senses of my spirit, the fibers of my heart, and the marrow of my soul. May this love be the spirit of my life. May it consume, regenerate, and transform me into you. My Jesus, I want to love you so strongly and fervently, with the charity of your loving heart that no one, except your most holy Mother and the glorious Saint Joseph, may say that he loves you more than me!... Give me your love with unlimited generosity. King of eternal origin, let me enter your winery and elate me with charity! Make me strong enough to destroy myself in order to face suffering, mockery, and any opposition with love. Please do yourself for me what I don't know how, cannot, and don't want to do... My Jesus, convert all of myself to you: gather my thoughts in your presence, for they are spread like water running through the streets! Fix my mind in you, for it withers day by day. Heavenly Doctors, place my ulcerated heart in your hands and cure it quickly with the salutary balm of your grace, as you did with leprosy men... O God, create a pure heart, and renew an upright spirit in me: a humble, meek, docile, simple, contrite, ardent, strong heart; sensitive to the gentlest motions of your grace; compassionate for your sorrows; insensible to any uncharitable affection; and sharing in the feelings, the sorrows, and the secrets of your loving heart! My child, hear the inexpressible wail of my spirit; hear me, hear me, hear me. Amen. Amen. Amen.

He insists on begging the grace from the child Jesus through the intercession of the vast paradise:

I beg you to grant me this grace for your sake, for the sake of the Virgin Mary, your Mother and mine; for the sake of the glorious Saint Joseph; for the sake of Magdalene, John the Baptizer, Peter, Paul, Francis of Assisi, Teresa, Peter of Alcantara, the Capuchin Veronica, and Saint Alphonsus M. Liguori. My Jesus, saint of the saints, angel of the great council; for the sake of the holy martyrs, the holy confessors, the holy virgins, all saints, and all angels, hear me, hear me, hear me. Amen. Amen. Amen !!! (Ibid. page 136).

How tenderly he resorts to the Madonna!

O Immaculate Heart of Mary, convert me to the most holy Heart of Jesus !... Immaculate Heart of Mary, deliver me to Jesus, who made me his prey and minister; deliver this lost sheep to the Good Shepherd; deliver this prodigal son to the loving Father! I return worn-out, wounded

and dirty! True Rebecca, cover me with the merits of the purest lamb; please cure, purify, and set me free to Jesus! Break any string tying me to creatures so that I may say, « My string is broken, and I am free! " My deliverer, redemptrix, mediatrix, and Lady, you did not stop loving me! Therefore, I do not stop trusting in you! Mary, my hope, let me totally belong to Jesus!)> , (Ibid. page 9).

Elsewhere:

Do not look at my demerits, my most holy Mother; I should cooperate efficaciously to convert myself to God, but I often do quite the opposite, becoming unworthy of the grace of a sincere conversion. This is the reason I resort to you, my most holy and loving Mother. Be pleased with this prayer that I am addressing to you from the innermost of my heart; may it be a complete and effective cooperation to the grace of conversion. Do not ask me for anything else, because I am unable to it; may your merits before your Son make up for my demerits (Ibid. page 120).

To Saint Joseph:

O very glorious, powerful Patriarch Saint Joseph, I come to your feet to submit the needs of my soul to you... O holy patriarch, I tell your fatherly heart that I want Jesus only; may I die to all creatures, and all creatures to me... Set me free from the hellish wolf's snares and from the consequences of my nasty behavior... O glorious patriarch, hear my poor, ardent prayer for the sake of the loving Jesus, for the sake of Immaculate Mary, for the sake of your paternity of the Son of God, and for the sake of your inestimable privilege of being the spouse of the Immaculate Mother of God. Amen (Vol. 6, pages 10, 11).

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To the Guardian Angel:

Abstract me from the vile transitory things of this poor world. Loose me from the worldly bonds originated from my sins... correct me with your heavenly, effective inspirations... speak strongly and effectively to my heart in order that I avoid the bad suggestions of the devil and of nature, but follow your salutary counsels!... Fix my thoughts in the loving Jesus in such a way that I never depart from his presence. Being free from any earthly attachment I may seek, long, sigh, find, embrace, and possess only Jesus, only Jesus, only Jesus ! See to it that I languish and die out of love for Jesus only! Please kindle in my heart a holy, living flame for the loving Jesus, so that my affections, suffering, and wishes be for Jesus only, completely forgetting all creatures and myself (Ibid. page 12).

To Saint Raphael, physician of God:

My spirit is sick. Please give me the heavenly drugs to cure it. A deprived spirit surrounds me; please remove it with your powerful hand, casting it far away, and keeping it from tormenting me. Defend and free me from the ancient murderer. Preserve and keep safe even my temporal health in order that I may be faithful in the divine service and in my priestly duties of justice and charity (Ibid.).

### 3. Resorting to the saints

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The Father's resorting to the patronage of the saints in the events of his life depended on his devotion to them and on his trust in their intercession. We can imagine

how fervently he engaged them to attain the grace of his conversion !

He wrote six prayers to Saint Alphonsus to attain the conversion, asking for a grace so < effective and triumphant, » that he might not resist to it: « Obtain for me living enlightenment and affection so that I may know myself and God, and make the decision of becoming holy... See to it that I belong totally to Jesus as a priest of Jesus Christ must, and as he wants » (Vol. 6, pages 124, 125).

To Saint Veronica Giuliani: « O my particular advocate and protectress, your Crucified Love showed you his holy wounds, saying that he would grant you any grace through them. I beseech you: pray, entreat Jesus, our supreme goodness, to grant me the following grace: my sincere conversion... » (Ibid. page 128).

While in rapture, Saint Veronica found herself in the presence of our Lord, who asked her to make a general confession of her sins in the presence of the most holy Virgin Mary and her patron saints. After doing so with great confusion and contrite heart, Jesus forgave her sins in full through the intercession of the most holy Virgin, making the saint very happy. Then Jesus dismissed her by saying: « Go in peace, do not sin any more! »

Such forgiveness the Father implores through a long prayer to the saint, entreating her: « Grant me the grace of making a general confession of my entire life at the feet of the minister of God: an entire, humble, clear, detailed, exact, precise, sorrowful confession of the sins I have unluckily committed in my life. » He also asks the favor of becoming such a priest as the saint wants the priests to be while ministering the most holy Eucharist:

I beg and entreat you for the sake of your spouse in the Sacrament: make haste to help me, the poor! Obtain for me fire and flames, flames and fire ! See to it that I become such a priest as you think the priests who minister the divine mysteries every day should be! In the solemn moment when the Word of God made man descends from heaven to earth on the altar, through the words of this poor wretch... in that solemn moment may I be transmuted in the infinite God who hides and annihilates himself out of love! May I then become living fire of charity, burning with ardent love! (Ibid. pages 129-130).

To Saint John of the Cross:

« ... I beg you to obtain for me the conversion I long for: the divine union of love with the supreme goodness, Jesus, the favor to walk on the path of the divine will, the grace to mortify, overcome myself, and to leave everything in order to find God » (S.C. 10, page 3). Furthermore: « I beg you to obtain the conversion I long for and the grace to begin a new life through the mortification of the senses, mind, memory and will, in order to achieve the perfect union of love with Jesus, through the work of grace and my own cooperation. » Because he must be a model in the community, he worries and prays: « I beg you to let me avoid those defects which scandalize the poor and the children, keeping me from grieving the most holy Heart of Jesus even in the least. Lead me to perfect detachment from everything; and in my suffering and any test be my guide, comfort, help, support and teacher o (Vol. 6, pages 14-15).

He relies on Saint Placid under a gracious pretext: « It is true that I am plunged into tepidity, indifference, negligence, bad habits and defects, but also you were plunged into the water when God's omnipotent hand pulled you out. » Then he implores the miracle for himself. « Come to the water of my iniquity and save me so that I may belong totally to Jesus >> (S.C. 10, page 11).

In the original prayer to Saint Anthony of Padua, he interprets in a way of his own the saint's privilege to find the lost things - *resque perditas* - We quote it entirely:

O beloved of God, O sublime and glorious saint, wonder-worker, benefactor of the people and my benign benefactor! Rapid hearer of those

who implore you, I kiss your feet that always walked to spread goodness and to evangelize the peace; wailing and sighing, I resort to you for help. For the sake of your love toward Jesus, obtain from divine mercy the restoration of my lost inheritance so that God, who is the inheritance of the elects, return to me with all the favors, mercies, and blessings which I have dispersed or didn't deserve! You cannot deny me this favor, O glorious wonder-worker, because those who resort to you to recover their lost things are granted the grace of recovering them. I myself am a witness along with the seraphic Bonaventure who wrote: « *Resque perditas petunt et accipiunt iuvenes et cani* ». Then, if you are so eager for helping people find their lost things, sometimes the least ones, how is it possible that you are so reluctant to help the persons who want to recover their lost graces, the rejected mercies, when they are contrite and pierced by sorrow? Oh, it is impossible that you are indifferent to them! I am sure, very sure, because if you are able to make the people find their trifles, you are abler to make them recover the heavenly treasures unhappily and unluckily lost! Wailing at your feet, I resort to your power and entreat you: O glorious saint, let me find my lost inheritance! *Tu es qui restitues haereditatem meam mihi* ! Let me find the Supreme Goodness I searched for in vain until now, because I searched for him coldly. I forced him to leave me by dint of disgust and unfaithfulness! You can deny me the treasures of grace and glory I have unluckily lost, but let me find my Supreme Goodness! Oh, give me back Jesus. Let me recover Jesus, my God, my creator, and my savior!!!

O my glorious Saint Anthony, please pray, pray for me! Do not stop praying for me until I obtain my lost inheritance and when I obtain it, see to it that I never lose it again. Amen. Amen (S.C. Vol. 10. page 46).

How many are the saints of Messina enjoying the glory in paradise? Don't they feel obliged to help a fellow-citizen who appeals to them? He invokes the saint priests, martyrs, virgins, penitents, and the triumphant church of Messina by saying:

My dear saints of Messina, who were born, lived, and became holy here, I appeal to you to attain the effective grace of the new, true conversion to God. Remember that I am a fellow-citizen of yours and a son of the Messina church. I really need a true, intimate detachment from creatures and conversion to God! For this I entreat you, my dear saints of Messina! (Ibid. page 12).

On January 15, 1888, Leo XIII canonized a group of saints: the Seven Founders of the Servants of Mary along with Saint Peter Claver, Saint John Berchmans, and Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez. The Father considered that event as a wonderful opportunity

ity to take advantage of the saints' intercession! After congratulating them upon their canonization which was for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, he humbly prayed to them for the Pope, the holy Church, and for his conversion:

O neo-saints, kneeling at your sacred feet I entreat you from the innermost of my heart to grant me a sincere and profound conversion. Please obtain the conversion I long for, because I languish! I am a priest, but I have betrayed my divine Savior as Judas did; I have denied him as Peter did; I have blasphemed him as the two crucified thieves did! O my dear saints, look at my extreme misery from your eternal glory, from your high happiness, and have mercy on me! Plunged into the mire, worn-out, wounded, poor, sick, oppressed, in debt with the divine justice, deaf, mute, blind, leprous, paralytic and perhaps fetid as a four day dead, customary sinner, obstinate, relapsing, overflowing with malice: I fall at your feet imploring grace and mercy from your kindness and charity! Please pray, pray efficaciously to the most holy Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary for my true conversion! Grant me such a conversion to atone for my nasty behavior following upon my first conversion! Grant me the second conversion by shaking, permeating, and restoring me to God and to his love. Captivate and render me a victim of his divine will! If my unworthiness, bad habits, perfidious will, corrupt nature, and aged malice are such that I am unable to convert, your powerful intercession, O glorious neo-saints, can obtain the effective grace to convert me! What favor can the sweetest Heart of Jesus deny you? What the most merciful Heart of Immaculate Mary ? Everything is granted to the neo-saints who go before the throne of mercy! Therefore, pray, pray efficaciously for this wretch, obtain for me the desired conversion! I beg you for the sake of Jesus, you loved so much on earth; for the sake of Immaculate Mary, to whom you were fervently devout. Hear me, hear me! Dear neo-saints, hurry up, obtain my sincere, intimate, and perfect conversion to God! Amen. Amen (Ibid. pages 17-18).

## **4. Holiness without illusion**

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The continuous longing for conversion turns into the intimate, profound, constant wish

for holiness. The Father implores the conversion with all his soul. He writes in a prayer: « I put myself at disposal of your divine will. My Jesus, see to it that I serve you faithfully. Render me apt for your divine service. I beg you to give me holy virtues,

especially humility, obedience, and holy detachment from earthly things. Give me the holy fear of you, your love, and the desire to become holy and to belong totally to you. My Jesus, concentrate my thoughts on you when I pray. » He asks the Madonna for the same grace, and concludes with the ejaculatory prayer, < O Mary, my mother, let me belong totally to Jesus! » To Saint Joseph, « I long for becoming holy, for belonging to Jesus totally, and for serving him according to his will in this pious institute. Please grant me these favors so that Jesus may act with this wretch as he wants » (Vol. 4, page 18).

What is holiness about?

The Father writes,

According to the shallow view of some persons, holiness cannot stand without a long retinue of severe penances, of transcendent deeds and works, of wonders and first rate miracles. But they are wrong.

Holiness is the perfect union of our will with God's will out of love for him and of pure intention in order to please his divine majesty. When a person achieves this happiest state, he only longs for hiding together with his beloved. In such a case this person does not need to work great wonders through the suspension of the law of nature, because he has already worked the greatest among the miracles by giving up himself to God. The people can say of him, « His glory is within him. » And that person can exclaim, « My life is hidden in Christ o (Vol. 45, page 132).

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The Father aimed at this sort of holiness, and he pledged himself for it, as the following prayer testifies:

Lord Jesus, for the sake of your mercy let me perceive the motions of my nature and of the temptations, and give me the grace to detest and overcome them. Let me also perceive the motions of your grace so that I correspond to them.

Lord, I beseech you, help me elude the motions of nature, the inclination, whim, passion, my own will, and the hellish suggestion; and help me follow the move and the guidance of your Holy Spirit as you did. May the same Spirit guide, lead, enliven, and let me belong to you, let me know the path leading to you. Free me from my enemies, for I have appealed to you; teach me to do your will, because you are my God. See to it that I may comply with your Father's will with fullness of sentiment and affection as you did on earth.

My Jesus, may no thing on earth be of value for me, except you.



Close my eyes to vanity, but open them in order that I may see you in everything. Close my mouth to the malicious words which offend charity, prudence, and simplicity, opening it to speak of you and to sing your praise. Close my ears to the voice of nature, selfishness, passions, and temptations which whisper, trying to seduce me; but let them hear your sweetest voice in order to follow your will in everything. Keep my hands from performing noxious and unjust works, being at your disposal to do what you like. Keep my feet far from the path of fallacy, deceit, and iniquity, and let them always follow you, the purest truth.

My Jesus, do not abandon me, do not leave me in my own hands, because if you leave me for a moment, I will fall into a thousand defects, precipices, and mistakes. Jesus, accept me as your disciple. Be my teacher. Instruct and lead me to the path of perfection and holiness. Let me achieve through your guidance the perfection you want from me. My Jesus, place true holiness in my heart, that I may not feed on selfishness and passion, nor satisfy my senses and illusion, but follow your loving spirit, which only you may give. Amen (Vol. 6, page 135). (2)

## 5. His own cooperation

Holiness is from God, who demands the cooperation of man. The first, indispensable form of cooperation is given by prayer, which enables the people to grow in the grace and to become stronger. Prayer must be combined with works, however.

Saint Bernard teaches, « Not going forward in the way of the spirit is recoiling, because we cannot keep still. Perfection demands of us to always stretch forth (cf. Phil. 3, 13), to continuously long for doing better, confident in the divine mercy, which cures our failings. We must avoid deceiving ourselves by thinking of having achieved perfection » (*Sermons for the Feasts of the Madonna, Pauline Editions, 1970, page 282*).

The Father was engaged to seek perfection in everything, letting any grace be fruitful, and giving a personal interpretation to the following words of our Lord: « What, then, will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life ? » (Mt. 16, 26). For ruin, the Father did not mean the perdition of the soul, but any prejudice, because the acquisition of the whole world would end in a pure loss if it would happen to the prejudice of the soul,

even in the least.

As the prophet carried his soul in his hands (Ps. 118, 109), so the Father was sedulously attentive to purify and to render his soul more acceptable to the Lord by the practice of the virtues, which he continuously implored from God. In a prayer he says; « O sweetest child Jesus, kneeling before your cradle, I present my poor heart and all myself to you... My Jesus, sanctify me. For the sake of your incarnation and birth, please grant me the following: 1. Pure intention. 2. Detachment. 3. Sorrow for my sins. 4. The grace to know and see the living saints for my spiritual profit. 5. Holy humility. 6. A holy death. 7. The spirit of prayer. 8. Faith, hope, and charity. 9. Love for you, Saint Joseph, and Mary » (Vol. 6, page 28).

Prayer to the child Jesus to be liberated from the earthly affections:

O my blessed Jesus, child of my heart, do not leave me alone! For the sake of your holy infancy, free me from all the earthly affections!... You see how my heart is bound, unable, and poor! O heavenly child, put your love within my heart. May your love burn any earthly affection in me by burning my soul! Oh! if only I loved you, my Jesus! If I had the heart of the saints and the angels to love you! Oh ! how little do I love you! My love, my child, I know that you love me; therefore, see to it that I return your love! My Jesus, where are you ? Soul of my soul, where have you hidden yourself, leaving me alone in my inability ? I know that I am good for nothing; I know and confess it! But you, my child, you can do everything. Take my poor heart in your hands, put it in your purest heart, kindle it with the love of the cherubim and seraphim, and destroy in me any earthly affection so that I may say,

My sweetest loves, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I belong to you, not at all to me; I suffer and die for you! » (Vol. 4, page 1).

We read in his notes a work schedule for his spiritual growth. To be illuminated, he premises an invocation, < Show me the way in which I should walk » (Ps. 143, 8). Then he notes: 1. Sacrifice. 2. Humiliation or abject poverty. Beggary. 3. Interior mortification. 4. Annihilation in God. 5. Silent patience. 6. Silence. 7. Calm in the oppositions. 8. Patience and meekness with the poor and children, gently coping with the latter. 9. Prudence and prudent demeanor. 10. Vocal and written prayer. 11. Spiritual reading. 12. Detachment from comfort, especially from food and bad habits. 13. Mortification of impulses, anxiety,

and worries. 14. Sorrow and fear of past sins, as well as redemption of the past life. 15. Interior tribulation and spirit of compunction. 16. Patience when I see my work lost. 17. Perfect union with the commanding or permitting divine will. 18. Suppression of, or refrainment from giving free play in the oppositions » (S.C. 10, page 2).

On November 20, 1889, he implores the redemption of his past life from the Lord:

Oh, my Jesus, who can give me the power to give up my life in order to redeem the time I have lost? Who gives me again the fine opportunities to practice patience, humility, contempt of myself, through which I could have died to myself in order to live in the knowledge and in the divine union with you, supreme goodness? I have lost the most beautiful of my years in idleness, dissipation, distraction, ignorance, indifference, and defects, making the Holy Spirit wail in my heart! I have neglected so many graces, inspirations, and gentle impulses through which you called me to you, O supreme goodness! My Lord and my God, now I am confused at your feet, imploring mercy! As the prodigal son, I return to the loving father, saying, " I have sinned against you and heaven! " I am unworthy to be called your son; place me at work as the last of your servants.

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Meanwhile, he thinks of having deprived God of the glory that God expected from him; therefore, he prays to the Lord to make up for his failure by creating another man who will be faithful to God since his tender age, and continues: « My Lord Jesus Christ, God of all mercies, I beg you to redeem my past life. Endow another person with your particular blessing from his tender age; redouble the graces, the inspirations, and the impulses I disregarded; lead this soul through an irresistible gentleness to the divine union of love, to which you would have guided me, if I had answered your grace! » (S.C. page 27).

He chooses the following saints as his patrons during Lent time: John of the Cross, Dominic, Anthony of Padua, Alphonsus M. Liguori, Camillus de Lellis, Theresa, Veronica Giuliani, Catherine of Siena, Blessed Margaret Alacoque, and Eustochio.

In a retreat or reflection time, in September of the same year, he made additional resolves, whose aims are the following: « September 10, 1891: Aim of my *resolves*: 1. To become a perfect slave of the divine will under Jesus Christ's feet, being unknown and dead to everyone and to everything. 2. I will seek the pure love of God, for the sake of God. 3. To destroy the bad habits. 4. To cover the multitude of my sins. 5. To atone for the wrong

I have done to souls and the grief I have caused to the divine Heart. 6. To be helpful to my neighbor and to the house: a) To be edifying. b) To prepare myself for preaching, c) To obtain the divine mercy through prayer, wails, sighs, tears, penance, vigils, nightly prayers, etc. 7. To foster the pious institute in the most holy Heart of Jesus. 8. To answer the sublime call to priesthood. 9. To seek the eternal interests of Jesus » Heart (Ibid. page 35).

In 1890 he opened his heart to his spiritual director:

Father, I feel a great desire for Jesus Christ, and his divine presence is very pleasing to me. I wish I could do a great deal for his glory and for the salvation of souls, becoming a great saint to achieve this goal. But my miserable state disheartens me, because God once called me in a special way, and I corresponded with him for some time. Later, however, I declined and heaped up such bad habits that now it is very difficult for me to become holy.

The spiritual director responded to him,

« Ask the Lord to rehabilitate you in his grace, and humble yourself. Humility must be interior and exterior. Humble yourself before God, imploring his mercy, and acknowledging that you are guilty of the state of your spirit. Serve your neighbor even in the most abject things, and be meek with people. »

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« He exhorted me not to dishearten, because with God's help I can glorify him as he wants. As for the divine presence and my wishes, he told me to pray in order to increase them. »

SUMMARY: 1. Humility. 2. Prayer. 3. Humiliation. 4. Meekness. 5. Courage and trust.

« October 31, 1980, eve of all saints >> (Ibid, page 6).

« The Father is ruthless in laying bare the faulty movements of the spirit, laying the blame upon himself even for the miseries belonging to human needs. For instance, he lays the blame on himself for being a glutton, a sleeper, a lazy man; but, when a person works intensely, is it surprising that he happens to be hungry, sleepy, and tired, especially if he never eats nor sleeps to his full, nor rests enough? In his retreat in Noto, he points out his chief defects: 1. Rising of anger. 2. Little mystifications. 3. Grumbling and Jeering. 4. Inclination to speaking in order to say a joke, or express an opinion, or contradict someone, or

disclose a secret, or repel a reason, or give, free play. 5. Gluttony. 6. Sleep. 7. Laziness. 8. Resentment shown by indiscreet zeal because of selfishness. 9. Disregard of my duties and of the dutiful formalities. 10. Little respect for other people's property. 11. Antipathy, little aversions. 12. Little prides. 13. I dislike to be despised >> (S.C. Vol. 10, page 33).

*The little respect for other people's property is* noteworthy when it is related to the Father who gave up all his own to other people, as well as the *antipathy and little aversions* when it is compared with the practice of the Father who spent his life in works of charity toward any class of people! But the Servants of God have a special enlightenment about the motions of their nature in order to abhor, submit, and overcome them through grace.

To understand well how the father was engaged in bridling the impetus of irascibility, we report an evidence: « 1. I will restrain myself in any impetus of perturbation in order to see whether restraining oneself helps the settlement of a matter. 2. I will refrain myself by saying, " Didn't I have to repent for giving free play ? For sure, I would have to repent if I give free play now! " 3. I wills say to myself, " Charity is patient. Patience makes the work perfect. " 4. I have to edify through meekness, because anger and pride scandalize. 5. I will note the defeats I suffer: may the good Jesus free me! 6. As to the reproaches, I will say together with Saint John Chrysostom, " It is better to be lacking in severity than in mercy. " 7. During the enemy's temptation I will say, " My enemies will exult if I am shaken! " And I will add the ejaculatory prayer, " O Jesus, meek and humble of heart,... " 8. When I am at fault, I will do a penance. » At the end he concludes with a stanza:

Refrain! See whether refraining is better.  
As always, you will repent for giving free play.  
Charity is patient: I should rather  
Make up for any scandal, which I did convey.  
If my enemy happens to make me totter,  
He will be very happy of my prey!  
O meek and humble Lord,  
Put my heart on your accord!

## 6. Specifying the Father's spirit

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The conditions of the Father's spirit are better described in his two following reports.

Exact report upon the defects of my spiritual life which hinder my perfect union with the supreme good: 1. Strong and steadfast attachment to the little comforts *NECESSARY* to maintain life, such as food, clothes, dwelling, satisfaction of the needs such as hunger, thirst, sleep, etc. (Italics are by the Father). 2. Extreme, perhaps sinful, surely most faulty pusillanimity, which originates in a) execration of suffering and b) extreme fear of death. This fear gives rise to: a) a great care of the bodily health and b) a strong attachment to life. 3. Indolence, i.e., great spiritual and temporal laziness, and faintness, which originates from a) inconstancy in doing good. b) Indifference. c) Transgression on many duties. d) Anger, when I am removed from laziness by force. 4. Strong attachment to my own will and right opinion, which originates from: a) Anger. b) Indignation. c) Pique. 5. Anger, which gives rise to frequent lack of meekness and grudges (Ibid. page 39).

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We quote the 1896 report:

Scrutiny of my spirit: « 1. Hostile disposition to suffering: I always seek to avoid and try to send it off. 2. Attachment to the comforts of life: not only I seek them, but I feel disturbed when I lack them. 3. Gluttony: I do not become detached from several tasty bits, I am rather so attached to them that people notice it. I like to find pleasure in food; in fact, I am concerned with various qualities of paste, with variety of cooking, etc. 4. Excessive fear of death, which originates from immoderate attachment to life. 5. Some pride or selfishness, which causes a great aversion when I have to humble myself or to surrender in certain circumstances. 6. Attachment to my opinion. When an idea or opinion or event is true in my judgment, I regret being contradicted and I defend myself boldly, taking trouble because the others do not accept my reason. 7. Nuisance and indolence to doing good, working, confessing, etc., which sometimes causes serious consequences. 8. Plenty

of defects through my tongue... Love for God is too much self-interested! » (Ibid. page 41).

Untiring of searching and researching into his soul, on January 7, 1901, the Father draws a new report on the same miseries, which bind him in a daily battle:

« Know yourself gluttony, laziness, food, sleep, rest. » That's odd! Did he want to do without ? He continues: < Strong attachment to the things necessary to life, not to the superfluous ones; very sensitive inclination to anger, inconstancy, levity, selfishness and pride, which hinder me from humbling myself, but give rise to many motions of anger in the oppositions, and lead me to behave imprudently and harshly with my neighbor. Habit of simulation, falsehood, rashness, great reluctance (I would rather say loathing) for suffering, and weakness in the resolves. » Summary: pride, anger, gluttony, and indolence are predominant.

He asks the Lord for five favors:

« 1. Strength in love. 2. Patience without complaint. 3. Meekness. 4. Temperance. 5. Repression and victory on the first motions of anger. » To attack the motions of anger more resolutely, he makes new resolves after meditating on the Passion of our Lord: « After considering the opprobriums our divine redeemer Jesus Christ suffered out of love for me, when people wrong or disgust me: 1. I will refrain from anger. 2. From resentment. 3. From vengeance. 4. I will lay the blame on myself, deciding in favor of others. 5. I will return good for evil » (S.C. Vol. 10, page 35).

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The Father would have liked to erase the defects of his past life in order to begin a perfectly holy life. During the retreat with the Redemptorist Fathers at Paganì in September 1900, he conceived and explained the nature of a religious practice aimed at renewing the spiritual life. He called it:

« **Recreating practice for making for the past life** »

*What does the word re-creating mean?* It is worth for those who after entering the way to God, understand the mistakes they have committed in their past life, wail for the time they have lost, the grace they have dissipated, etc., and wish to have known, loved, and served God since their infancy, or even since their conception. *Cor mundum etc.*

*What kind of practice is this one?* Suppose that a man is told that he is going to be annihilated in order to be created again, but endowed with a perfect intelligence, a perfect power to do

either Good or evil from the time of his conception. He also will be endowed with a 'clear knowledge of God, Jesus Christ, his holy mysteries, and his own last end. He also will have the opportunity to redress the wrong he did in his past life, to atone for the duties toward God he did not fulfill, and to recover the celestial good he would have inherited if he had been faithful in loving and serving God.

What would this man do in such a case? I do not know what everyone would do, but I would do so... (S.C. Vol. 10, page 58).

Sadly, we ignore what the Father would have done, because he didn't write it. Surely he told the Lord his resolves, but he denied the inquisitive eyes to examine the mysteries of his soul. However, we are more fortunate about another writing on the same subject that the Father wrote on July 6, 1901, on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday, but is unfinished. Its title is:

### **Exercise of spiritual rebirth**

Most high God, my Lord and creator, yesterday, July 5, at 9:00 p.m., I reached the age of fifty. Alas, what have I done with these years? How did I spend them for you? My God, what a series of wastes, wickednesses, losses, and offenses I have committed in your eyes! How will I repair your divine heart? How will I repay you? How will I recover what I have lost? Oh, I wish I were born again in the world in order to love and to serve you from the moment of my conception ! Oh, infinite beauty, eternal truth, why didn't I know and love you from the very beginning of my existence ?

Oh, most adorable Jesus, I am just dust and ash. Still I speak to you, who are eternal and infinite. My beloved, because past, present and future times are instantaneous before you, let me do this exercise of love. For instance, if in the moment of my conception in the motherly womb you had infused in me the knowledge that I have now; if from the first instant, through your free mercy, I had known you as much as I know you now; I would have lived in the following way, my beloved Jesus, my life, light of my eyes.

1. As my head passed from my mother's womb, I would have breathed and wailed. Through that breathing and wailing I would have performed an act of love for you, my God. Then, by means of sighs, cries, and tears I would have said what I can say now: My God and creator, adorable savior of my soul, I am a little creature, an imperceptible atom. I adore you! Newborn, I kneel at your feet, kissing them lovingly, and adoring you! I acknowledge and confess that you are my God, my Lord, my all. I adore you! Newborn to the world. I adore you with my soul,



my body, and my senses! Adorable Jesus, I love the most holy Trinity in you! I adore you, God the Father. I adore you, God the Son. I adore you, God the Holy Spirit. O most holy Trinity, together with the Sacred Heart of Jesus I adore your infinite perfection, your divine attributes, and your most holy operations. O my Jesus, through you I offer myself, body, soul, senses, mind, heart, spiritual powers, will, freedom, and all to the most holy, august Trinity.

How will I thank you for having creating me ?... (Vol. 4, page 63).

## 7. The last resolves

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An additional list of resolves! On July 24, 1906, after premising the following quotation: « Show me the way in which \*I should walk » (Ps. 143, 8), the Father writes,

I will not approve with pure will any taste, pleasure or satisfaction of feelings, or pleasure of the lower spirit, even though such a taste, pleasure, or satisfaction is licit. If they are spiritual, I will approve them within bounds. If I break this resolve, I will renew it mildly and strongly as if it were for the first time.

I will not let my natural instinct alleviate a serious or a light pain, or trouble, or annoyance... until I am able to endure it. If enduring it diverts from prayer, or religious service... then I will remove it mildly and tranquilly, humiliating myself because of my inability to endure the least pain such as a bit of hair or a mosquito landing on my face, etc. If I am unable or it is improper to remove it, then I will implore the divine help trying to conform and to endure the thing with patience. Just in case, I will pray to be liberated, always humiliating myself, because of my inability...

I will endeavor to deprive my senses of what delights them even licitly in eating, drinking, etc., and when I do not succeed in doing so, I will humble myself quietly.

I will ask the divine mercy to enlighten and help me give my senses the basic necessities, or what is useful to my spiritual good or the good of others, without consenting etc. If I lack effective enlightenment, I will humble myself deeply and quietly, acknowledging that such a lack is due to the abuse of my senses, to my bad habits which allowed them to grow according to nature instead of grace, and to my failure in prayer and self-denial. Given all this, I will humble myself before God entreating

him to give me good will and complete victory over myself through sacrifice, strength, contrition ... and the merits of my crucified Lord and our Lady in sorrow!

In every action and moment, I will endeavor to pay careful attention to these resolves and to get used to the divine presence, the meditation upon divine truth, the scripture, or the sayings of the saints. By renouncing pleasure and everything according to nature, I aim at achieving the happy disposition of the spirit pointed out by the apostle: « Those who weep, as though they were not sad; those who laugh, as though they were not happy)) (I Cor. 7, 30).

These resolves are the beginning of the spiritual life that I have not yet begun at the age of 55. May divine mercy, that has been tolerating me, call me in the last hour. Amen (Vol. 43, page 37).

Obviously, this is not the beginning of the spiritual life: everyone perceives that these resolves characterize the Father's perfection at the age of 55. This appears more clearly from his notes on September 7, 1907:

*For the divine union:* 1. Purification of the soul. 2. Prayer. 3. Detachment. 4. Mortification of the senses. 5. Disposition to suffer a thousand pains and persecutions for Jesus Christ. 6. Continuous meditation on the Passion of Jesus Christ. 7. Meditation on his most holy life and divine words, imitating his virtues and works, and loving him fervently. 8. To abstract oneself from occupations and to concentrate on God in very quiet silence with such a perfect submission (at least in the will and intention) as to resemble a dead person in everything, only wanting God's will in everything. 9. Being in this state, to love God and everyone in him, only seeking his honor and his consolation. 10. To treat friends and enemies with great meekness, humility, kindness, and holy love (Vol. 43, page 44).

In the last 20 years of the Father's writings we do not find examinations of conscience and reforms of life, nor prayers for the conversion or rebirth. Is it a sign of tiredness or slackness? Not at all! On the contrary, the longing for holiness was always alive and ardent in him, and the impetus toward perfection was always more compelling. But the constant work of so many years on his soul had already matured its fruits. The habit of virtue had become second nature in him. His spirit had become more simple; and a rapid, interior look at the copious, divine light,

which was pouring into his soul because of his habitual union with God, was enough to purify and to regenerate his soul in the fervor of charity.

## Notes

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(1) The Father quotes the old translation by Martini, in common use in those times. The new official translation of the Bible is derived directly from the Hebrew, not from the Vulgate, and has a different meaning.

(2) The following prayer for holy mortification is noteworthy:

My sweetest savior Jesus, you told us that your kingdom has been subjected to violence and the violent are taking it. Kneeling at your feet I beseech you to give me the grace to mortify myself in order to take your kingdom.

I sigh, long for it with all the strength of my spirit. I stare at it, stretch out my hands ...But I do not know how to reach it, how to gain it, how to take it, because I do not know how to mortify myself in order to overcome my bad inclinations, to embrace the suffering, to destroy my passions, to generously overcome my reluctance and hellish suggestions.

My virtue abandoned me! I have become like a man dreaming of running, and yet, he does not move. I am lying down on the ground, please lift me up. O Jesus, touch me with your powerful hand and lift me up. My merciful Jesus, for the sake of your pure charity, instill in my soul the powerful, triumphant grace, which leads us where you want with strength and gentleness without destroying our free will.

For the sake of your divine strength, through which you won the human reluctance, tedium, and sadness, I beg you to fortify my most feeble nature so that I may win myself, embrace any suffering with love and patience, and repress even the first motions of selfishness and passions. May I overcome my reluctance and the devil's temptations; mortify my senses; detach my heart from any created thing; oppose my will radically, and renounce my opinion. Let me practice the Christian virtues continuously; work for your glory and for the salvation of souls; destroy the bad habits, of my spirit; humiliate my pride both before you, who are my God, and the creatures that are your images. Above all, may I humble myself before the people from whom my pride flees not to humiliate itself!...

O my omnipotent Jesus, give me your most holy helping hand to get rid of this lukewarmness, inconstancy, laziness, and extreme weakness! My Jesus, render me apt to take your kingdom! You said that the path leading to life is narrow, and its door straight. See to it that I walk through this narrow path, subside, and strive to enter through the straight door.

My God, create a pure heart, and renew an upright spirit in me! Give me a new mind and a new will to know you, to act against my nasty nature

vigorously and generously, to seek the good, and to mortify myself in order to take your kingdom. You said, 'Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross every day, and follow in my steps.' Please grant me the effective grace to entirely renounce myself, to carry my cross, to embrace suffering with love, and to follow in your footsteps by imitating your divine virtues. My omnipotent Jesus, I am unworthy of this grace; I am rather worthy of your indignation, and even of your rejection! But, for the sake of your sorrows, for the sake of your most holy mother, for the ransom you paid for my soul, I beg you, my dear Jesus: come to my assistance, because I am perishing. O my loving Jesus, make haste, make haste. Enliven me in your way and mercy. I believe, but I rely on you to help my feeble faith ! I want to belong totally to you according to your will in order to please you only, to become a victim of your divine will and love. My Jesus, hear me. Infuse in me the effective grace of mortifying myself in any circumstance so that I may take your kingdom. " Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. " Work with your omnipotent hand this miracle of infinite mercy so that I may win my reluctance, the temptations, and everything which hinders me from obtaining perfect union with you, who are the supreme good. I long and sigh ardently, uniquely, and continuously for having you. Amen. Amen. (Vol. 6, page 133).

(3) Obviously, the Father is referring to the « Exercise for the new life » he had written for everyone: 1. On the established day everyone goes to confession. 2. That day is supposed to be the day of rebirth. 3. The following day they renew the baptismal vows, choosing a patron saint, making protestations of faithfulness, and promising new life, etc. 4. They redeem the past life by doing practices of piety for as many months there are years to be redeemed. 5. They apply to each month the merits of one year of Jesus Christ. 6. After renewing the baptismal vows, they start the spiritual infancy, which lasts seven months. 7. They begin the first year of infancy with the practices of piety lasting one month. The second year of infancy they exercise other practices of piety lasting another month, and so forth. 8. When a month corresponds to a more sinful year, the people increase the practice of piety for expiation. 9. To shorten the practice of the new life, one can consider a day as one year. 10. The daily mass, prayers, mortifications, the reception of the sacraments, the practices of piety, etc., are the chief points to atone for the past life and to regenerate the spiritual life. 11. Special prayers and practices of piety are made at the passing from one age to another, such as infancy to puberty, puberty to youth, youth to manhood, etc. 12. The application of the years of Jesus Christ to the person who practices this devotion may be varied according to the age of the person. 13. « Before starting this practice, one can premise nine days both to remember the nine months our Lord Jesus Christ was carried in the womb, and to keep him company. To prepare oneself for the confession of the past life, one could spend these days in spiritual retreat. When people practice this devotion by days instead of months, they may premise nine hours instead of nine days. During the nine days the faithful recite the Miserere psalm, every day » (July 29, 1889 - Vol. 40, page 121).

# 2.

## **“FAITH SEEING THROUGH ANY VEIL”**

- 1. Beginning and foundation**
- 2. I am faithful to my uniform**
- 3. The catechist**
- 4. Longing to spread the faith**
- 5. The faith he lived**
- 6. Love of the Holy Scripture**
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- 11. Against a spreading superstition**
- 12. Notes**

# 1. Beginning and Foundation

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The council of Trent teaches that faith is the beginning, the foundation, and the root of justification (Densinger Ranher, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 801). The Vatican Council tells us that faith is our free answer to the revelation of God (*Dei Verbum*, 5). Consequently, the study of a Servant of God's life begins with his faith.

What was the Father's faith?

If we listen to him, we will be disappointed. Father Vitale reports: "He once told me: our Lord said, " If you have as much faith as a seed of mustard, you will be able to tell a mountain to move and it will obey " (Mt. 17,20). Then the padre added,"It means that our faith is less than a seed of mustard: oh, if we had faith "!(Father *Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 297). In his last will, he wrote of himself: "He was feeble in faith "(S.C. Vol. 7, page 242). We know, however, know that bearing witness to oneself is suspicious, especially in this case, because the people who knew the Father judged him objectively and differently.

Those who knew the Father, repute him as a man of a living, supernatural faith. Preaching to the faithful, to make them understand the nature of faith, he explains very plainly:

Through faith we believe in God and in what he has revealed. The merit of faith consists in our believing in the religious truths without having seen them. In fact, we never saw God. We never saw Jesus Christ. We do not see the work of grace in the sacraments. For instance, in the Eucharist we only see the species of bread and wine. And yet, we are sure that God exists, that Jesus Christ came into this world, that grace works through the sacraments, and that Jesus is present under the species of bread and wine.

The merit of faith is due to our believing in what we do not see. Those who believe in what they have seen, have no merit, because believing in what we perceive with our senses requires no sacrifices, nor labor. On the contrary, the merit is ascribed to the one who says: "I

believe because God wants me to believe, even though I have seen nothing of what I believe. Furthermore, I believe in it more firmly than if I had seen it with my eyes! “However, our eyes can deceive us; faith does not! How many times we are mistaken because of our bodily eyes!

Isn't it true that a far off square tower is seen as a round one? That an oar in the water seems to be broken, but it is not? The result of our vision sometimes does not correspond to reality, whereas, what we believe is always true because faith never deceives... Besides, a person pays his respect to his Creator by relying on his divine word (Vol. 10, pages 30-31).

The Father's faith was so alive that it seemed to turn into a vision. When he talked of the eternal truths, they seemed as unveiled to him, as if he could touch them. In his ingenuity, he said that despite his sins, God endowed him with the spirit of faith, and he was so aware of his divine presence as to cry out in consolation while thinking of God's greatness and kindness. One day, seeing two probationers absent-minded in prayer, he reproached them with these words: “It is obvious that you do not believe in the presence of God. “Father Vitale writes: “Sometimes the Father told me, “I do not know what temptation against faith means.”As a matter of fact, he did not know it, because he was carrying God within himself, living for him, and hoping in him”(*Bulletin*, 1928, page 51).

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Untiring of thanking God for the gift of faith, on every anniversary of his baptism he went to Saint Mary of Providence church, where he was baptized, to thank the Lord. He did so until 1908, when the church was destroyed by the earthquake. When he celebrated with the community, before the penitential rite he used to invite the faithful to thank the Lord for the grace of holy baptism.

While preaching at the end of the year, he recounted both the general and the particular benefits the Lord had granted, first of all the baptism, for which everyone should thank the Lord untiringly.

On March 25, 1922, he mailed a circular to the houses, recommending the Holy Childhood, and saying,

Many children in the savages and infidels' lands perish in the streets, or at the foot of the trees, or are drowned in the rivers by their cruel parents; their souls fall into Limbo instead of going to heaven, never seeing God, which make us cry with emotion!

He points to our fortune for having been born in Christian countries by God's mercy.

Was our adorable God bound to create us in conditions so different from those of the children who are born of savage parents in corrupted regions? We are born instead in the holy Church's womb; we are baptized, instructed in the holy religion, guided to the holy altars; we are called to the religious life, to the divine service; we are supported by so many celestial means for our sanctification! And yet, we have to love all souls as much as ours, concerning ourselves with them as with ours. God wants it!

Recommending the Holy Childhood along with the readings of its printed matter, he excites in the youth faith and charity:

I am not urging you to contribute to this holy work through alms; if you could, you would with great pleasure; I am more concerned with fostering charity and zeal for winning souls to Jesus, because if you were apathetic, you were not Rogationists of Jesus' Heart, nor Daughters of Divine Zeal! (S.C. Vol. 5, page 57).

## **2. I am faithful to my uniform**

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The faithful must profess before men the faith they have received from God through the Church... Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread the faith by word and deed “(*Lumen gentium*, 11, 17-35).

Let us see how the Father complied with these duties.

The several volumes of prayer he wrote to the Lord, the Madonna, the angels, and the saints are a profession of faith. Profession of faith refers mainly to the two religious orders that sprang from him, as well as all the works he did, because his firm faith in God emerges from them. While we were in stormy events, he used to say: “In such circumstances, the only thing we can do is pray. “Specifically, I like quoting the letter he wrote on August 12, 1902. By partisan spirit, the city council denied the Father help on the feasts of the Assumption, and he wrote the



following trenchant letter to the Mayor, Anthony Martino:

...You are already convinced that the councilmen quarrel with my ideals, aspiring to make me compromise my principles and buy their own for three thousand liras! But in case they do not understand, if they are rationalists, or atheists, or enemies of priests, I am a Catholic, an apostolic, a Roman priest, faithful to my uniform. I am proud of the principles of religion that support me in the tremendous fight to save so many unhappy creatures who would otherwise be either in jail or in houses of prostitution, despite the polemic from my adversaries! (S.C. Vol. 1, page 81).

### 3. The catechist

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Now we dwell a little upon his catechetical apostolate.

From his tender age, the Father longed to teach catechism. On Feb. 5, 1878, on the occasion of the first catechetical awards in Saint Philip Neri's church, he was the speaker. He revealed his thoughts on the teaching of Christian doctrine, on its importance and sublimity, on the individual and social advantages of this teaching, in which great men engaged themselves, such as Gerson, Bossuet, Fenelon; as well as great saints, such as Jerome, Augustine, and Alphonsus M. Liguori, all of whom preached the miracle of understanding and holiness. The latter "wrote a booklet of catechism for children during the missions, and he himself, sometimes taught it in the churches of his diocese. "The Father points out that teaching catechism is a noble ministry by itself and because of charity, which makes such a teaching possible. "So much self-denial is the daughter of charity: it is through charity that the Christian loves his neighbor as himself, willing to bestow the treasure of his faith on others, to suffer and to bear everything, feeling himself rewarded when he succeeds in making a poor child know that there is one God who created everything "(Vol. 45, page 419).

In 1882, Archbishop Guarino asked the Father to see how the project of teaching catechism was implemented or conducted in the city. The Father wrote a report, submitting a plan of his own to implement the method already in force, and to help children. In conclusion, the Father said:

The plan I have submitted is somehow general. Therefore, it requires work and a teaching staff to carry it out. Nevertheless, always trusting in God, author of any good, and in the most holy Virgin of the Sacred Letter, under whose patronage is the *Teaching of the Christian Doctrine*, we can achieve improvements, step by step. The benefits we can reap from a well-guided teaching program are great. They include the salvation of many souls. We have to pray and work (S.C. Vol. 7, page 262).

The Father was a theorist and a practitioner of teaching catechism, which he did throughout his life with all his love. Besides, his institutions sprang from his teaching catechism to the children and the poor of Avignone quarter, whose minds he enlightened with the light of faith. At the beginning of such ministry he wrote the booklet, *Little summary of catechism for children* (S.C. Vol. 7, pages 244-253).

After so many years, I remember seeing him affable and smiling in the midst of our children or the poor, teaching catechism in his last times with so much love.

He began redeeming the Avignone quarter by teaching catechism, which he warmly recommended to the sisters. He chose religion as the foundation of his educational system. Therefore, he requires to start the orphans' education with catechism, recommending the Rogationists and the Daughters of Divine Zeal to learn the best and the more effective methods of teaching it.

Brother Louis M. Barbanti, an assistant to the orphans for so many years in Messina, recalls that the Father supervised the teaching of catechism and the orphans' improvement every week by questioning and instructing them. At the end of each visit, he concluded the supervision by relating some edifying story and by awarding the most diligent of the orphans.

A former orphan, Rose De Blasi, gives a piece of news about the Father's family. She says, "While teaching catechism to the children, he explained the effects of baptism and its necessity, because the children who die without having this sacrament go to Limbo. And he adds, "I, too, have a little brother in Limbo!" Then, he lifted up his eyes as though he were supplicating the Lord to take the little brother to heaven! "In his writings to the communities, the Father insists on the teaching of Christian doctrine:

The orphans must be instructed in Christian doctrine from their

tender age. The sisters will avoid teaching the elements of faith mechanically... Because teaching the doctrine to children mechanically is almost nothing “(Vol. 1, pages 252-253). “The sisters will fulfill the aims of the foundation by teaching Christian doctrine to the young girls with zeal and holy fervor. They will teach catechism diligently, in support and in compliance with the parish program by giving appropriate explanations and lessons of history “(R. A. page 436). To the Rogationists: “They will apply themselves to the teaching of Christian doctrine with love and zeal, following the best methods in order that their teaching be complete and fruitful. They will foster the catechetical contests, will award children, and will use various means to win the love of them. They will apply the same strategies to the celebration of first and frequent Communion “(Vol. 3, page 28).

Any means is good to infuse “in the tender heart of the children the fear of God, the dread of sin, love for our Lord Jesus Christ, the most holy Virgin, Saint Joseph, the angels, the saints, the holy Church, and the Pope, as well as charity for our neighbor, mercy on the poor, and fondness of virtues. “

## 4. Longing to spread the faith

What can we say of the Father's longing for spreading the faith? He ardently desired it from his tender age. His zealous teaching of the catechism, the aim of his two orders, the spreading of the *Rogate*, the assistance to the unprivileged classes and to the poor show how the Father's heart was burning with spreading the faith.

Later we will touch upon his preaching from the time he was a cleric; but he also thought of the real missions to the infidels' lands in the hope that numerous missionaries would rise from among his communities.

Writing to the mother superior of the Sacred Side about the training of the missionaries, he said,

It is necessary to form their spirit of obedience and sacrifice in order to avoid what happened to the volunteers of the past war. They enrolled themselves enthusiastically; but, in the trenches, in the terrible risks of

the war, and in the hard labors they exclaimed' " I wish I never enrolled myself! " The sacrifices in the missions are numerous. Therefore, cultivate the wish of the sisters, but first get them used to sacrifice themselves in the office to which they are appointed (Vol. 38, page 91).

The sisters still remember the *evening missions* in the house of Trani, where the Father explained to the communities the importance of helping the foreign missions by prayer and other means. Waiting for when the Lord would open the missionary field to his institute, he established some rules for the missionary house in order to train the sisters appointed to this most holy end. He wrote, "Only the mission enthusiasts who are firmly resolved to face travels, inconveniences, want, and perils; who feel the divine impulse to bear witness of their love toward Jesus through martyrdom will be appointed to such an apostolate"(Vol. 1, page 187).

To foster such a wish in the communities, while teaching he insisted on the witness of love to God. "In his exhortations, he often asked us, "Would you die for the faith in time of persecutions?"Readiest to give up his life for Jesus Christ, he took pleasure when we declared ourselves ready to follow him, especially when he was exhorting us to be firm in the coming persecutions against the Church. "

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"One sister relates, he wished the faith to spread, especially through the missions. One day he asked us, "Who wishes to go to China?"I answered immediately, Me! "But you must pay the fare!" he said. Surely not, I answered. You are the Father. Therefore, you must take care of it. And he concluded, "You will pay by saying one Hail Mary ". "

Was the Father inclined to martyrdom?

We read in his will: "Envious of the martyr's fortune, he was far from making a martyr of himself, even though he trusted in God; and in case of martyrdom, he would be given strength and courage "(S.C. Vol. 7, page 241).

Sometimes, however, he betrayed himself by declaring that he was ready to face death for God. We often heard him saying that he was ready to die for our Lord. "Oh, if I had the grace to be a missionary!"He also said he was ready to face death as many times as there were persons to be converted; but he used to add, "God considers me unworthy of martyrdom!... "He was

also envious of the missionaries' fortune, and used to say that if he died and the order stopped existing for any reason, his property should be given to the missions. In the will of 1918, he appointed Propaganda Fide (the Congregation for the Evangelization of People) as heir of his goods (S.C. Vol. 7, page 237).

I report this touching episode: “Many times he talked to us about the bliss of giving up life for Jesus Christ, and, usually, he concluded by narrating the martyrdom of Saint Ignatius, to whom he was very devout. He commissioned an artist to paint the saint among two lions and published a booklet of prayers along with songs in his honor. In November of 1917 (during the war), when he was leaving from Oria to Sicily, he came to say goodbye and to bless us. Suddenly, he said, “My children, I am leaving, but none knows what may happen to us by the Lord's will. How happy I would be if while passing through the Messina strait the Turks would take me prisoner, bind me with chains, and command me to deny Christ, threatening me with the sword at the throat! No! No! Would I cry, long live Jesus! Then, my head would fall down by the sword, and my blood would glorify the holy faith. What a fortune! “Then he asked each of us whether we wished for martyrdom. Happy and radiant with delight for our readiness, he suggested the reading of the book by Saint Alphonsus, *Victories of the Martyrs*.

## 5. The faith he lived

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How did the Father live his faith?

The life of faith, says Pius XII, requires that the faithful “accept submissively and in full the divine teaching, applying it to their lives so that the faith be always the light of their behavior, and their behavior be the reflection of their faith “(*Menti nostrae*, no. 14).

Witnesses assert that the Father lived his faith in the practice of Christian virtues, especially charity, and that his life along with his activity was the manifestation of his faith.

The Father describes the life of faith,

The man who lives according to his faith rises above all earthly things with the spirit, and takes advantage of his senses to soar to God.

He sees the fertile country covered with various grass, flowers, and fruits. He watches the foaming seas stretching out as far as the horizon. He contemplates the sky flooded by the flashing light of the sun or decorated with innumerable stars; and in the midst of the beauty and wonders he lifts up his eyes to the sky to bless God, who created marvelous things. When he hears the sweet sounds of music or the warbling of the early-riser birds; when he takes delight in the tasteful food, or smells the gentle fragrance of roses and jasmines, he praises and admires the Creator's omnipotent kindness.

Whoever lives on faith esteems the earthly things as nothing. He loves no riches, because faith teaches him that the grace of God is the precious pearl to be gained at any cost; and that it is better to heap up riches which thieves cannot steal, nor rust waste. He seeks no honor, because it is better to be humble in the house of God than to dwell in the sinners' abode. He is not greedy, but is frugal even in the use of licit pleasures, because he has already got rid of the illicit ones. His spirit guides the body, his reason masters the passions, and he lives a pure, simple, spiritual life: the life of faith (Vol. 45, page 312).

Unwillingly and unaware, the Father describes himself in the above word-picture.

He liked so much the *litany of the soul living on faith*, which begins, "My Jesus, free me from the wish of being esteemed, "and he ordered the communities to say it every day in March, to help the spiritual life.

Father Vitale writes,

In familiar colloquies, he admitted that he felt himself in God's presence from childhood. He said, "The Lord has granted me no supernatural gifts, except spirit of faith and the awareness of his divine presence. Since I was a child when I was with the Cistercian Fathers, He visited me with gentle emotions-interior joy. When He excited me to love him, I knew that it was God's will to stay in his presence "(Father *Mary Hannibal Di Francia - his life and works*, page 275). Awareness of being in the presence of God became quickly a habit of his spirit.

The persons who approached him were quickly impressed. Just by looking at him, they had a glimpse of the man whose mind was so absorbed in God that even his features disclosed it. His speeches and conversations exuded his habitual union with the Lord.

In an article of our Bulletin, Father Vitale reports his first

encounter with the Father,

About the year 1883 I was a young student, and was talking with a very pious, fervent friend of mine on the threshold of a shop. We were discussing spiritual topics. Doubtful whether to leave the world or not, whether to aim at a worldly occupation or at consecrating myself to the Lord, I do not remember exactly the subject of my chat with that friend who took the cassock before I did. Suddenly, a young, tall, slender priest with a seraphic face passed nearby with long, slow steps, as if measuring the street. More than putting his feet on the soil he seemed skimming it in order to take off.

I can hardly express what I felt at the sight of that ascetic, but I am sure of one thing: I heard like a voice within my heart, saying, "You need to detach yourself from earth"; and I was somehow afraid, because I am attached to earthly things. My friend knew that priest, and greeted him reverently. To be polite, I, too, took off my hat. Then, I asked, "Who is that priest?" "With grave, respectful voice he told me, "He is Canon Di Francia, a man of God, a priest of great virtue. "I loved him ever since (*Bulletin*, 1928, page 17).

In the biography, Father Vitale recounts the Father's interior life: "Walking and talking with him, people occasionally noticed what he would do when he had grounds for praising God and for instilling holy principles in people's hearts. At little tidings, he would say, "How good the Lord is!" At the roaring thunder, "It is God's voice!" Before the sea rolling out to the horizon, he exclaimed, "Let us remember that God is infinite"! "(Father *Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 278).

Father Fazio, S. J., bears a wonderful evidence: "On the whole I feel that Canon Di Francia was a man of supernatural principles. He was a man of God imbued and saturated with piety and devotion as always to act in a supernatural way... I think he was a saint endowed with a simple, interior life. It was his second nature, which always appeared in the charity toward the unhappy. "Because of his supernatural spirit he continuously exhorted his children to live in the divine presence. On the feasts, his gift was exhorting us to keep the holy fear of God. On his saint's name, birthday, Christmas, Easter... when we were around him giving our best wishes, he showed his gratitude and reciprocated our wishes by saying, "May you have the holy fear of God, the fear of offending him, the fear of meeting him as an inexorable judge. "He often quoted Saint Paul, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"(Heb. 10, 31). Then, he reminded us that the hour of death is unknown. Following Saint Philip, he unmasked the dreams of youth by asking, "And after

that? And after that? “But, he did not infuse sadness or horror, because even his firm word was always accompanied by a gentle smile, sometimes by a joke, and by the explanation of the reasons leading us to trust in the Lord's kindness.

## 6. Love of the Holy Scripture

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The Father nourished his faith with spiritual reading, and recommended it as a great means of sanctification, saying that, “Well done, it is like a gentle, beneficial rain penetrating the soil of the heart, giving pleasure, and helping the soul “(Vol. 1, page 90). He suggested the books written by the saints and Rodriguez, never getting tired of the books by Saint Francis of Sales and Saint Alphonsus.

Above all, he drew nourishment from the Scripture, the purest fountain of God's word, which he handled from the time of his earliest youth. He was sorry because the affairs along with the works of charity hindered him from dedicating himself to such a study in order to deepen his understanding. More than once we heard him saying that he was eager for the study of the Holy Scripture, but he concluded with this submissive grief, “The poor children overwhelmed me!” Knowing by heart many passages from Scripture, he quoted them as the rule of his behavior in various circumstances. (1)

Father Vitale writes, “From the time he was a boy, the Father delighted in the reading of Holy Scripture having asked the Lord for a deep understanding of his commandments. He knew by heart many sentences from Scripture, and he quoted them in various circumstances, drawing enlightenment from them to do good”(*Bulletin*, 1928, page 50). Father Santoro remembers that one day he made a remark, and the Father quoted many biblical sentences about the topic of his remark. Our students of Oria, at the beginning of the theological study, were exhorted to study and meditate upon the Holy Scripture, the chief fountain of theology.



On the Silver anniversary of the Pious Institution, the Father wrote an *Epithalamium of the Celestial Love of God in the Sacrament with his Elects*, a sacred play which wonderfully applied the *Song of Songs* to the pious institution.

While visiting the houses of the institute, he often gathered the sisters to read the Holy Scripture, especially in the winter evenings. From the Old Testament, he liked best the patriarchs' lives. From the New Testament, the Gospel. Usually, he commented upon them properly.

I remember the first time I listened to him speaking of the Bible.

I had been in Oria a few days. It was a hot afternoon in August when the Father went to the grove to meet us. We rushed around him with an inquiring eye at the big book he was carrying under his arm. "Do you want to know this book?" He asked kindly. "It is the Sacred Scripture, the word of God..." "We sat down on the ground, beneath the shadow of the pine trees. Resting upon the rock, he read and commented on a passage from the prophet Jeremiah. The following sentence remained fixed in my mind, "It is good for a man to bear the yoke from youth onwards" (Lam. 3, 27). He stretched out his hand, seized a piece of wood, and put it on his neck to mimic the oxen's yoke.

Father Drago recalls that when he was a youth, while reading the Bible he met the Father, who asked him what he had read and understood. The Father listened to him, expressed his satisfaction, and promised to give him a better edition. He kept his word by giving him an illustrated Bible in hard cover. Some time later, the Father asked him where he had arrived in the reading of the Bible. To his amazement, he was told that Father Vitale had taken away the book. Handling the subject with Father Vitale, who upheld the principle that the youth at his age would have understood nothing, the Father closed the little dispute by saying that the Holy Scripture is bread for everyone. The book was given back to the reader.

The Father demanded greatest respect for the Bible, and he never let the people quote its inspired words for profane use, nor for inappropriate meaning, nor by levity. When someone of us ventured to quote a biblical sentence by joke in his presence, the Father called him to order by saying that the Holy Scripture must be used seriously and devoutly.

## 7. His preaching

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Reading the Father's preaching, we realize that he is breathing deeply the air of his faith from the Scripture. Still a youth, the Father manifested his ideas about preaching in an article on *The Catholic Word* (January 2, 1978).

It is our hope that many are the persons convinced about the real value of the gospel preachers. Please reject the vain boasting of the entangled scholasticism and of the nebulous philosophy. When a parable of the gospel is explained well, it is worthier than all redundant declamations. The Christian morals are so rich that you can always draw from them successfully with a little work.

After touching upon the great preachers of the Christian eloquence, he concludes,

Please accustom yourselves to these models. Draw sound theological doctrine from the Bible, the Fathers, and the Gospel. Plan the contents of your preaching, beautify and make them pleasant. Cope with the ministry of the divine word with pure intention, contrition of heart, order, clarity, opportunity, sobriety of decoration, and you will improve souls! We must keep in mind that we must preach Jesus Christ crucified, not ourselves! (S.C. Vol. 1, page 22).

The Father preached this way. He gave himself to this mission from his very youth, preaching in the churches of the city and of the villages with warm, vibrant, charming voice. Even though not very strong, his voice was piercing, almost cutting, and penetrating to the hearers like a blade. His measured and expressive gestures along with the fire of his heart made the people remember his preaching. Besides his sacred speeches, we have many of his funeral orations, some of which marked an epoch in Messing, such as those on Canon Ardoino, Ludwig Windhorst, Cardinal Guarino, and Pope Leo XIII. He believed

strongly in the word of God, and spread it generously in his communities. As long as he was able to celebrate mass for the communities, he announced every day the intentions of the mass and remembered the mystery or the saint of the day along with his virtues and works. On holidays, he had the colloquy before Communion; after Communion, the homily. To spread the seed of God's word he made use of novenas, triduos, retreats, monthly devotions, etc:

Out of respect for this word, he never spoke extempore to any audience, except in unforeseen cases; and yet, he was a fluent, trained speaker. Many outlines of his preaching pertain to just a few children or very modest sisters. One of his resolves was:

“Before preaching, I will prepare my sermon and will pray to the Most High to give success to the divine word. I will also make a special invocation to the most holy Virgin of Good Counsel and to my guardian angel. “Zealous for being very clear, he wrote: “Even though I may sometimes use a higher style due to the supernatural themes I treat, nonetheless I must be very clear so that everyone, even children, uncouth and ignorant people may understand the spirit of my preaching even when they cannot understand some words “(Vol. 44, page 133).

In 1887, he presents a petition to the Lord, asking for 69 favors. At the number 17 he implores “the gift of proclaiming the divine word worthily for the edification of souls “(Vol. 4, page 14). In the midst of his writings we find two prayers for the preachers. One of the prayers has been drawn out of the *Acts of the Apostles* (4, 4-30), where the faithful implore from the Lord the grace to proclaim his word with certainty. The other one is conceived by the Father. We quote some passages,

Please give me the grace to cope with the ministry of the word, which has been entrusted to me, an ignorant weak man... Because I need enlightenment, I shiver for my inability when I have to teach the faithful. However, I undertake this sublime apostolate for the sake of your name and by virtue of holy obedience... May your grace strengthen me so that the divine word be free from my selfishness, human respects, my foolishness, and I proclaim you, the crucified, not me... Give me the apostolic word, which overthrows the people without vilifying them, triumphs without making violence, kills sin, but saves sinners. O Lord, give me the holy science, the understanding of the Scripture, which surpasses worldly study. See to it that I proclaim the divine word to your people in such a way that while children feed on it, the great receive at their fill; and while I speak to the learned persons, the ignorant too understand... Vol. 6, page 36).

To conclude this topic, we quote another prayer for the ecclesiastical science:

Give me the celestial wisdom, the science of the saints and of the ecclesiastical discipline... Grant me enlightenment, graces, and opportunities to achieve the knowledge necessary to my priestly ministry so that I worthily administer the holy sacraments and the divine word without prejudice to the interests of your divine Heart and to souls. Jesus Repairer, repair my past life. For the sake of your pure charity, grant me good will, understanding, and opportunity to achieve what I am asking of you, what I need, and above all, what you want. Amen (Vol. 6, page 142).

How did the Father judge his own preaching? We quote from the funeral oration he made for himself. "His preaching had its ups and downs. Sometimes it was vibrant and touching. Other times it was trivial! He himself said that the results of his preaching were two: some yawned and others cried "(S.C. 6, page 241).

We know that his witness here is suspect, because no one can judge for himself.

The Father's preaching was always sacred not only because of the subject, but also because of the way he treated it. He always proved his assertion with Holy Scripture, Holy Fathers, and the examples of the saints or events of ecclesiastical history.

Children were very impressed by his living, penetrating, but very simple reasoning, fit for their mental capacity, especially when he treated the figures, the symbols, and the prophecies about the Messiah and the most holy Virgin Mary.

As we have seen, he was very intent on being clear to the adults and to children. The audience loved his preaching for the simplicity of his exposition and for the fervor of his accent.

When he talked about the Passion of the Lord, the sorrows of Mary, and offenses against God, his tears and the tears of the listeners were the best comment on his preaching.

Simple and plain in form, his speech was profound in contents, affecting laity and clergy. Father Cosimo Spina reports that when the Father preached the retreat to the Franciscan tertiaries in Francavilla Fontana in 1908, he hastened from Ceglie to feel the spiritual delight of hearing the Father. Also other priests, attracted by the word of the Servant of God, came from afar. "All of us knew what he was saying, but we were subdued by his spiritual unction, and we had a glimpse of the saint in him. "

Father Risi of the Divine Providence Sons testifies that when Don Orione invited the Father to say some words to the novices and to the priests of his order in Bra, he delighted in what the Father said and in how he said it.

Let us quote a wonderful writing of Father Vitale on the Father's preaching:

One day he said to me, "If you knew how much I preached in Messina in my youth! "

I was in the early days of my priesthood when the Father recommended me not to weary myself through the works of ministry. "For the next five years, "he said, "dedicate yourself to the study of the ecclesiastical disciplines to strengthen yourself on them. "

The Father knew the qualities that a preacher of God's word must have in order to improve the faithful. If I am not blinded by my affection to the venerable Founder, I can assert that none of the many preachers of Messina penetrated souls so deeply as the Father did.

To announce his word, the Lord endowed the Father with special gifts. Everyone knows that a sacred orator must be a man of prayer, because none is able to convince his fellows of the evangelical truths without being himself imbued with them, nor can he illuminate the listener's mind, without having his own mind illuminated, nor can he lead the faithful to virtue and to the hatred of vice, without being himself imbued with these feelings. The good effects of the preaching depend on prayer.

We know what a man of prayer the Father was, and how zealous he was for the salvation of souls. His works showed the Father's most pure aim at achieving their salvation. Whether when he made a simple appeal, or an important panegyric or whether when he taught catechism, or treated apologetic and moral topics, he always sought the glory of the Lord and the salvation of souls.

The Father never sought to become a great theologian, nor a deep moralist, but he engaged himself in the study of the Holy Scripture and in the Gospel, because these books are the living word of God. There he found his nourishment for achieving the intimate union with our Lord. He was so ready to quote wisdom's sayings with so much understanding in a variety of circumstances that he seemed to perceive those truths in God, as in a vision.

He combined the knowledge of the Scripture with the knowledge of the lives and works of the saints through continuous reading and meditation. This exquisite sacred knowledge was the subject of his preaching and made of him a teacher of asceticism and mystics.

If we consider that sacred knowledge was also supported by a literary culture the Father fostered in the delightful studies of his youth, as well as by the elegant, but sober and austere speech which adorned his talking, we can realize how effective his sacred preaching was. Owing to his deep understanding, his sensitive heart, and to the delicate topics, the Father easily touched the hearers, drawing tears from their eyes while his own filled.

The great works of charity he undertook to answer the call of the Lord forbade him to continue his preaching in public churches. He climbed the pulpit only on occasional invitations when he could not decline them, drawing the people who were eager to hear him.

But he never stopped preaching in his communities, until his death. Triduos, novenas, panegyrics, explanation of the Gospel, moral ascetic and mystical subjects never failed the Religious and the orphans. He was so zealous for infusing in our heart the love of Jesus that he never became tired. Holidays and Sundays without preaching were a nonsense for the Father.

His preaching transformed the people. We priests of Messina remember the retreats he preached to us when we were seminarians, the spirit he infused, and the resolves we made as a result of the word of God! I was so impressed by his sermons that when I became a Priest I repeated them almost word by word to the clerics and to the faithful, as I had heard them from the Father's mouth!

Declamation was another faculty that the Father cultivated in his youth.

He applied the declamation of classical poetry and of drama to sacred preaching. He was attractive also for the dignity and the solemnity of gestures, voice, and movements.

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The wish Father Vitale expresses at the end of his article is also our wish: “May the Father Founder infuse from heaven the true spirit of preaching in his Rogationist priests so that we and the souls entrusted to us may foster our love for God and holy perfection “(Bulletin, 1928, page 268).

## **8. Respect for holy things**

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His respect for holy things was derived from his faith.

First is the respect for the most holy name of God. The padre pronounced the name of God and Jesus with the utmost reverence, allowing no one to utter His name in vain, even inadvertently. Among many examples of this reverence, we remember that he once protested against the Gazzetta, because the first letter of God was written in lower-case

in a quotation by the poet D'Annunzio. If he happened to see on the ground pieces of paper with the name of God or of the saints written on them, he picked them up so they would not be trampled on or slandered. These pieces of paper should be preserved or burnt “(*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 275).

The Jesuit, Father Raimondi, a spiritual director at the seminary of Messina, once asked for a few religious papers to adorn the walls of the seminary on the occasion of a Eucharistic procession. He also wished some strings to be thrown down with the flowers at the transit of Jesus. The Father answered, “Very willingly, save the strings: while we honor Jesus in the procession, we have not to trample on his name, even though materially.” (2)

The Father held priests in great respect. A manservant reports that the Father attracted his attention because of his free, confidential behavior with a priest friend of his. He said, “Be careful. You must see in him a priest and a minister of God more than a friend. “As soon as he saw a priest entering the house, he paid a great respect to him with humble gestures, such as kissing his hand and asking his blessing. He also exhorted us to behave devoutly with the priests.

The Father's respect for holy things at the end of his life moved him on February 1926 to mail a circular to the bishops of Italy at his own expense in order to remedy the anomalies in their dioceses. He relates three episodes. Once, celebrating in a renowned sanctuary, he saw the name of the Madonna written on the footboard of the altar. “I was confused, because I did not know where to place my feet in order to avoid trampling on the beautiful, venerable title of the most holy Virgin. “We harm no one by revealing that the sanctuary is that of Mary Helper of the Christian in Turin. The footboard was there from the time of Don Bosco. Neither he nor his successor realized any inconsistency. But the Father felt that way, and he endeavored to obtain it from Don Rinaldi, the major rector. The Father replaced it with another one at his own expense. The former footboard is now in Messina, restored in a place of honor.

On September 21, 1897, a tornado hit the town of Oria (Brindisi), Italy. Eighty persons died and hundreds were wounded. The stone statue of Immaculate Mary which was on the Hebrews' door, was beheaded. The statue remained in such a state for about twelve years. After the 1908 earthquake, when the Father opened his houses in Oria, he saw that indecent view, and wrote, “I was shaken with terror. After asking permission, I commissioned an artist to remodel the Madonna's beautiful stone head with fluent hair. Now, seeing the statue of Our Lady crowned with twelve stars is fine. “

The third episode happened in Gravitelli district. << There is a church dedicated to the most holy Virgin. On the threshold were the words, " Hail Mary ." Out of necessity, people stepped on her name as they entered the church. So, many people trampled on the greeting of the angel who announced the human redemption and on the august name of the most holy Virgin !

I easily had that step removed and substituted by another at my expense. The former one with the greeting of the angel and the sweetest name of the most holy Virgin is placed at the foot of Our Lady of Lourdes in a recess of the Holy Spirit institute. "He concluded, "If in your diocese there are such abnormalities as the names of our Lord or the Virgin Mary in places where people step on them harshly, I am ready to replace them at my expense on the condition that the old words be sent to me upon their replacement, because our institutes will atone forever. "

Someone could say, "These are childish trifles... "People, however, should see in them the light of faith and the finesse of love from which spring the spiritual infancy to which the kingdom of God is promised. To understand it, people had to see the Father in these circumstances... Sister Prisca bears witness to how the Father received that step. "He gathered all of us in the parlor, placed the step at the foot of Immaculate Mary while we were praying and singing. Then he made a speech about the Madonna. At the end, we kissed the name of the Virgin written on the step, and returned to our work. "The same sister points out that the Father ordered a novena when the footboard arrived from Turin. At the end of the novena, they walked bare footed to pay a visit to it and to thank God for the granted grace.

## **9. The Sacred Images**

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Owing to his great love for the Lord, the Madonna, and the saints, the Father revered their images.

Today, some would like to return to the iconoclasts' times and eliminate the sacred images from the churches. And yet, the holy Church fought so long to defend them. The second Nicene Council decreed that the respect for



the sacred images is licit, and the Council of Trent confirmed the Nicene decision against the protestants. The second Vatican Council has confirmed the Catholic doctrine, but recommended moderation to avoid surprise and improper devotion among the faithful. However, it prescribes to keep the practice of exposing the sacred images in the churches for the veneration of the faithful (S.C. 125; cf. L.G. 67).

The Father confessed, “We feel a special transport for the sacred images “(S.C. Vol. 1, page 187). Sometimes, he may seem excessively devout, but it was customary in those times, and the liturgical rubrics even permitted additional pictures on the altars in front of the chief image!

But, the Father wanted the images to be fitting for fostering devotion. Indeed! He was fond of sacred art and he never liked papier-mache' statues. He wrote,

“A great means to lift up our mind to God and to keep faith and worship alive are the images of our Lord, the most holy Virgin, and the saints. So that sacred images may produce this beneficial effect, they must be beautiful and expressive. A beautiful, artistic, devout image showing a divine, celestial mark draws our heart to contemplate and pray, exciting our hope and trust. But, if the sacred images are not beautiful, they produce quite the opposite effect “(S.C. Vol. 1, page 187). (3)

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He sometimes showed original pretensions. Acknowledging receipt of Saint Luke's Madonna, the Father wrote to the artist he had commissioned, “Even though I would have preferred greater eyes, I liked it; but compared with the image, the eyes are somehow small. “So far, we do not find any originality, but he adds, “The Madonna had big eyes, because she had to watch the whole world and all the creatures! “(S.C. Vol. 5, page 125).

We also recall the remark the Father made to Father Callisto Bonicelli of the Monfort Fathers, editor of *Queen of Hearts*, who in March 1917 printed a picture by Sianese Girolamo of Pacchia (1477-1538), a minor artist of the fifteen century orbiting around Raffaello and Sodoma.

The picture presents a double image: the Annunciation and the Visitation. The Father writes to Bonicelli,

To tell the truth, I did not like the picture at all. I enclose it. Please examine it. I am sure that you will agree with me on the fact that the picture does not reproduce the sublimity and excellency of Our Lady, because no celestial, sacred, divine feature transpires from it. It is worthless to say that Girolamo of Pacchia is an artist of great repute,

because the reproduction lacks the aesthetics which fosters devotion. It rather leads to lose it.

If the picture is a perfect replica of the original, the author made something inconsistent, his ability notwithstanding.

I took the liberty to mail this letter, begging you to pardon my sincerity for the sake of my passionate love toward our celestial Mother (S.C. Vol. 7, page 154).

Father Bonicelli seeks a justification,

Let us concede that the most holy Virgin assumes a strange posture... *de gustibus...* we cannot debate our taste... However, because we are dealing with two images, if you do not like the first Madonna, consider the second one, being lenient with Girolamo of Pacchia and with ourselves... (*Queen of Hearts*, 1917, page 380).

## 10. Sacred relics and sacramentals

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The Father paid extraordinary reverence to the holy relics, above all to the holy cross, preserving them in the house and providing them to the communities he founded. On the day of the ordination to priesthood, the Father gave to the first two Rogationist priests a crucifix ornate with several relics. The relic of the cross was in the center.

The Father had a great reverence for the relics of the saints. Hoarding them devoutly, he sometimes said special prayers about them and with them because a relic, to his way of thinking, could save a house, a family, or a city from divine punishment. When in the presence of renowned relics, he celebrated the feasts of the respective saints solemnly “(*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 114). After the 1908 earthquake, he and Father Palma searched the destroyed city for pictures, statues, and relics.

The Father thought of being favored by God when he happened to receive and preserve the relics in his institutes before

transferring them to the chancery office or to the rectors of the churches; and he paid them daily reverence. On February 21, 1909, he wrote from Oria to Messina for the stone on which Saint Anthony whipped himself, sprinkling it with his blood, according to tradition. He recommended “to carefully preserve Saint Anthony of Padua's stone, and to give it to no one. Were any priest to ask for it, tell him that I will come back in a few days (Vol. 34, page 248).

He preserved with greatest devotion Saint Alphonsus' skullcap, the warming-pan and the mask of Saint Veronica Giuliani. Sometimes, he made us kiss Saint Alphonsus' skullcap before giving it to the Redemptorist Fathers of Francavilla Fontana. How he behaved in his last years, when he obtained from the generous Pius XI the body of Saint Giulia, virgin and martyr, for his neo community in Rome! “The remains were received enthusiastically. Songs and hymns to the saint were performed by the padre. The tomb was placed in the sanctum sanctorum, where it is revered by the community and by the faithful “(*Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 262).

The Father had great faith in the sacramentals. He used holy water in his room, signed himself in the morning and in the night, and sprinkled his bed with it. When someone was sick, the Father suggested < a pious, effective expedient “: drinking holy water, “because it has the power to stop sickness. “

In his booklet *Preservation from Divine Punishment*, the Father recommends the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God). “It is a mold of wax, in which the shape of the divine lamb is impressed. Its sacred value is great. “The production of them is entrusted to the Cistercian Monks of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem in Rome, while the Pope reserved to himself to “bless the Agnus Dei, imploring from the Most High that the persons who wear or honor them in their house be free from storms, falls, snares of the enemies, sickness, and any evil; and the parturient give easy birth. Thousands of examples show the Agnus Dei's effectiveness. “The Father adds some considerations,

I think that by means of this sacramental the Church wants to eliminate superstitions, such as the horns of the bull, grass against the evil eye, the good-luck-charm, and so on. The Christians must get rid of these superstitions, which weaken, destroy their faith, and attract divine punishments! How pitiable it is to see great men, such as scientists, who disdain to accept Christian dogmas and the liturgy of the holy Church, but are superstitious. They are punished in their conceit by God! On the contrary, the people who wear the Agnus Dei with faith, behave as good Christians, and fulfill the other conditions. They receive

the good effects we are talking about. Otherwise, it can become a superstition. God forbid! (Preface to *Preservation from Divine Punishments*).

The Father had a collection of Agnus Dei: the small ones, which the persons wear enclosed in a case, and the greater ones that are exposed in the houses. When he was invited to bless a factory, especially if there were machines, he had a beautifully framed Agnus Dei hung on the wall. In the 1915-18 war, his children who went into the army were given an Agnus Dei and were exhorted to wear it with faith. How many Agnus Dei the Father distributed to the persons running perils! In the early years of the century, when people made an attempt on Alphonsus XIII, king of Spain, the Father mailed to him an Agnus Dei enclosed in a silver case, and recommended him to wear it with faith. He did the same with Benito Mussolini.

Today the sacramentals are of little importance for the faithful. The Church's teaching, however, through the Second Vatican Council says, "By them men are disposed to receive the chief effects of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy... There is scarcely any proper use of material things which cannot thus be directed toward the sanctification of men and the praise of God. "Furthermore, the Church suggests the institution of additional sacramentals: "When rituals are being revised as laid down in Article 63, new sacramentals may also be added as necessity requires "(S.C. 60, 61, 79).

## 11. Against a spreading superstition

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I am closing this chapter by recalling a superstition which the people practiced in the Father's time, and against which he raised his voice. We are hinting at the chain letters that people mail inviting to say specific prayers, and to write a replica for other persons, or else. Besides preaching against this practice, the Father also wrote an article on *God and*

*Neighbor* to enlighten the simple and the ignorant. We quote a few passages:

Such a propaganda is abominable, because it aims at weakening the faith directly and insidiously! Compelling the people to say specific prayers or to perform a religious act under pain of misfortunes is a big superstition, and those who believe in it become superstitious and sinners.

Superstition is the most suitable means to weaken the most holy faith! The man who is afraid of an anonymous person threatening the people who do not say a prayer, does not fear the Lord any longer, nor trusts God. Consequently, sin matters little to them, even under the pain of divine punishment; but stupid anonymous threatening matters too much.

Doesn't it lead to loss of faith in God? For instance, many women who are afraid of anonymous threatening do not fear God for dressing immodestly. They even receive Communion at the altar in that attire!

And if preachers threaten them with divine punishments for sins, they do not believe!

Threatening with misfortunes the people who neglect a specific prayer and its propaganda influences the simple. The Father warns them,

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Be quiet!... Misfortunes are averted by the holy fear of God, because it is written, "If a man fears the Lord, evil will not come his way" (Si., 33, 1).

What is the fear of God all about? It is avoidance of sin, observance of the commandments of God and of the law of his Church, love for Jesus and the most holy Virgin, doing good to our neighbor, respect for people, reception of the sacraments, and prayer. This is the real preservation from misfortunes! Some persons instead would like to live in their own way, and to be free from God's punishments because of a superstitious work or prayer.

The Father explains the difference between the punishments of God and the tribulation of life, which we have to accept from the divine hand in order to achieve eternal life. At last, he shouts,

Long live Jesus and the most holy Virgin! Long live the Catholic faith! Long live the Catholic, apostolic, and Roman Church! Long live the Pope, Vicar of Jesus Christ! Down with deceit, superstition, and hellish snares of the enemies of God and the holy faith!>) (S.C. Vol. 1, page 183).

# Notes

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(1) These are some of the Father's thoughts on the gospel, from his panegyric on Saint Mark: "The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the divine covenant gentlest, and loving mysteries of incarnation, birth, infancy, life, passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the delightful mysteries of our redemption and eternal happiness. The light of the gospel dispersed the darkness of death looming on miserable humankind. The clear source of the gospel watered the Church of Jesus Christ, making her blooming and pleasant like a pretty garden. The beauty of the evangelical doctrine opened new horizons of peace and love to man, making him love the true, eternal good and making his nature nobler. In short, the gospel is the restoration of fallen humanity, its salvation, its earthly and eternal happiness. The redemption itself would be fruitless without the gospel "(Vol. 145, page 256). The following thoughts are from his panegyric on Saint Euplio deacon, martyr for the gospel. "The Gospel! Here is the divine code, which amazed the wise of the world, replacing the teaching of the Areopagus and of the Peripatetics. It manifests the greatest mysteries with greatest simplicity. It is the holy book which revealed the eternal destiny of man and proclaimed that all human beings are children of the same Father! The gospel is destined to triumph over human bias and to redeem the peoples from the darkness of death by being preached over all the world. " The power that has conquered the world is this faith of ours ". "(1. John 5, 4). The Father recalls that meditation on the gospel in the first centuries of the Church: "Christians died for the gospel to confess the divine truths. However, they had already meditated on these truths before facing trial. As a matter of fact, the Christians gathered even in the catacombs, where the deacons read and expounded the gospel. The Supreme Pontiffs supervised everything, and moved by the Holy Spirit they directed this divine teaching of knowledge and salvation with infallible "magisterium ". In those times the Christians held in such esteem the holy books that they did not convey them to the pagans, even at the cost of their lives. If one yielded under pressure of persecution, he was considered a traitor o (Ibid. page 332). May the gospel be the rule of our behavior: "Let us conform our life to the principles of the gospel, bearing in our mind that in the judgment day, we have to give an account to God who will judge according to the teaching , the rules, the precepts, and the examples of that divine book "(Ibid. page 344).

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(2) A sister writes that on the occasion of a Eucharistic procession the Father made people throw out slips of paper with the inscription, "Jesus, heal us! "Obviously, the sister does not remember well.

The invocation, "Jesus, heal us, "took place in 1914 in an extraordinary occasion, i. e., the international Eucharistic congress of Lourdes, which ended

with the solemn procession among files of sick people imploring healing from Jesus.

On that day, the Father ordered a Eucharistic procession in our communities to be in spiritual communion with the procession of Lourdes. Moved by faith, he planned an original practice. Along the way of the procession, some groups of persons should represent the activities of the institute: the religious congregations, the orphanages for boys and girls, the poor, etc. Each person should bear on his/her chest a badge indicating the specific activity of the institute, and all of them with raised hands should implore Jesus, while passing in procession, by saying, "Lord Jesus in the Sacrament, have mercy on us, heal us, heal us!" The Father wrote, "All of us are sick in the soul more than in the body. Therefore, we have to long for healing our spiritual more than our bodily sickness" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 26). Obviously, the slips of papers have nothing to do here.

- (3) The Father introduces the painter, Basile of Taranto, to the public with these words in an article: "More than once she vividly painted pictures of particular beauty for our churches... We have presented the famous artist to the public esteem and to the pastors of the churches of Italy so that they may take advantage by commissioning beautiful pictures according to their necessity" (Ibid.).
- (4) He had written before: "Pure Christian behavior, holy fear of God, prayer, devotion to the Sacred Heart and to the most holy Virgin, alms, and then prudent human means and surrender to God. "





# 3.

## “SON OF THE CHURCH”

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2. To understand one another
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4. Contributing to *The Catholic Word*
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# 1. Love for the Pope, sign of predestination

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Our Founder inherited faithfulness to the Church and love for the Pope from his family. We remind that his Father was appointed Pontifical Vice-Consul in Messina and honorary captain of the papal navy for his orthodoxy of principles. His uncles, the Priests Joseph Toscano and Raphael Di Francia, in the stormy times of the revolution when quite a few of the clergy were sympathizing with it, openly declared themselves defenders of the papacy and became co-founders of *The Catholic Word*. It was the only Catholic periodical of the city; it defended the rights of the Church and of the Pope in an environment so hostile that the lay authority condemned and suspended it.

One day, dressed in his Sunday clothes, Hannibal dashed toward a young ruffian who was shouting profanities against the Pope Pius IX before the people in the cathedral square, assaulted him quickly, and thus silenced him. The love for the Church and the devotion to the Pope vibrated strongly in his heart. In his own funeral oration he bears an open witness to these feelings:

He loved the Church, humiliated himself very lovingly before the Pope, was sorry when evil progressed but was glad when good did “ (S.C. Vol. 7, page 241).

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In a prayer, he presents to the most holy Trinity the praises and the blessings of the angels and the saints, of the most holy Virgin Mary and Jesus in hypostatic union with the Word, and adds:

Through these praises and blessings I intend to thank you, up to the consumption of myself because through the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ and through the sorrows of his most holy Mother you established your Church for the salvation of souls: the Catholic, apostolic, Roman Church endowed with the priesthood, the sacraments, and the merits of your

incarnate Word” (S.C. Vol. 9, page 228).

The Father thought that love for the Pope was a sign of predestination. Let us quote the wonderful closing of his funeral oration on Pope Leo XIII in Messina Cathedral:

When our Lord Jesus Christ, betrayed by Judas, condemned by the impious Jews, and nailed to the cross breathed his last crying aloud, a beneficial change of heart resulted in a few. One of the two thieves crucified at Jesus' side, touched by the patience of that just one who died forgiving his enemies, repented, acknowledged him as God and asked that he be allowed to share in his kingdom. Contemplating at the foot of the cross the celestial features of the divine victim, the centurion exclaimed: “He really was the Son of God! “ Some of the Hebrews standing there came down from the hill beating their breast!

Recently, Jesus Christ' Vicar died after a wretched, crucified life inside the walls of his uninterrupted dwelling, and his last day appeared to be a test of the judgment on the reprobate and the elect.

Many adversaries of the papacy, who opposed the Pope through the press, and others who disagreed because of different religious ideas awakened exclaiming before the venerable remains of the sacred, illustrious dead: “He really was Jesus Christ's Vicar! “ But, others remained impassive! There are Hebrew crucifiers that persist in their devilish hate against the Pope, whatever may be his name, Pius or Leo or Gregory; others are hopeless; others run to hang themselves as Judas did!

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“These are children of perdition, destined to the Gehenna's fire; but those of gentle heart who love Jesus Christ's Vicar, have their name written in the book of life !” (Vol. 45, page 59).

## **2. To understand one another**

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Before continuing our topic, we need to recall the Father's times.

“The current process of secularization repudiates the past and even charges of fetishism the manifestations of respect and the dutiful obedience to authority. This is the reason why some difficulties spring in the Church's womb; indocile, unfaithful ministers, and consecrated souls cause sharp grieves” (Paul VI, October 9, 1971).

These persons try to justify the spirit of contradiction and revolt in the name of the Council, interpreting falsely and abusively; as though the Council wanted to break off the doctrine of the tradition, repudiating the pre-Council Church in order to conceive a new Church from within: "new in the constitution, in the dogma, in the morals, and in the canon law " (Paul VI, June 23, 1972). In the name of democracy, they seem to want a clean sweep even of the personal institutions of our Lord. Paul VI declares: "The government of the Church cannot assume the aspects and the rules of the temporal governments, which today are sometimes guided by excessive institutions of democracy, or by totalitarian forms which are contrary to human dignity. The government of the Church has its own original form which aims at expressing the wisdom and the will of its divine Founder " (October 11, 1969). Therefore, "the constitution of the Church cannot be changed in such a way as if the authority should originate from the basis or from the majority, and not from Christ by the will of God " (June 18, 1972).

The Holy Father feels that the "smoke of Satan entered the temple of God through a leak; that something preternatural came into the world to perturb, to suffocate the fruits of the Ecumenical Council, and to hinder the Church from singing the hymn of joy for having recovered the awareness of itself " (June 29, 1972). Specifically, the enemies < seem to aim at dissolving the ecclesiastical " magisterium. " They so by equivocating on the pluralism. As though the pluralism were the free interpretation of the doctrine and the free co-existence of opposite ideas. Or by equivocating on the concept of subsidiariness. As though subsidiariness were synonymous of autonomy. Or by equivocating on the local Church. As though the local Church were cut off, free, and self-supporting. Or by leaving out of consideration the doctrine defined by Popes and Councils " (June 24, 1972).

In the Father's times it was different: " Satan's smoke " did not enter the Church. The Father is a traditionalist: he sees in the bishops the successors to the apostles; he sees in the Pope the successor to Saint Peter, the successor to the same Christ. He sees in the Pope the Sweet Christ on earth, according to the expression of the seraphic Catherine of Siena. The Second Vatican Council reaffirms the perennial teaching of the Church: "These apostles he constituted in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from them " (L.G.,

19). And: “Just as, in accordance with the Lord's decree, Saint Peter and the rest of the apostles constitute a unique apostolic college, so in like fashion the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are related with and united to one another “ (L.G. 22). The Catholic will listen to their teaching this way: “Bishops who teach in communion with the Roman Pontiff are to be revered by all as witnesses of divine and Catholic truth; the faithful, for their part, are obliged to submit to their bishops' decision, made in the name of Christ, in matters of faith and morals, and to adhere to it with a ready and respectful allegiance of mind. This loyal submission of the will and intellect must be given, in a special way, to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he does not speak *ex cathedra* in such wise, indeed, that his supreme teaching authority be acknowledged with respect, and sincere assent be given to decisions made by him, conformably with his manifest mind and intention “ (L.G. 25).

The Father lived this doctrine with spirit of faith. We will prove it later.

### **3. Love and subjection to the holy Church**

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In a chapter of the 1914 constitutions for the Rogationists the Father wrote:

“The Rogationists of Jesus' Heart will be very loving, obedient children and most humble subjects of the holy Church, which is represented by the Holy Father, the Roman Sacred Congregations, the prelates, and the bishops who have juridical power over their religious houses.

They will nurture such a reverence, subjection, and greatest tender love as to reach veneration (1) toward the Holy Father, holding him as our Lord Jesus Christ, whose Vicar he is, and his word, either written or spoken, as Jesus Christ's word. They will make almost no distinction between *ex cathedra* and *not ex cathedra*, holding even the Holy Father's private opinions and sentences as venerable. Heartily concerned with his

vicissitudes, pains, and works, they will recommend him to the most holy Heart of Jesus in their prayer in common. On his patron saint's day, his birthday, and the like, they will present their homages and wishes, also publishing articles through the institute's periodicals. While preaching or teaching Christian doctrine or educating the youth, they will inspire love, reverence, and obedience to the Holy Father, giving lectures on the doctrine about the Roman Pontiff and his infallibility, as well as calling to mind the ecclesiastical history's glorious events, which are related to the Supreme Pontiff “ (Vol. 3, pages 32, 33).

## 4. Contributing to “The Catholic Word”

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Let us see how the Father showed his love for the Church and for the Pope.

When a youth, the Father used *The Catholic Word* to publish his works. During the First Vatican Council he published in installments a poem in black verses, under the title *The Church and the Ecumenical Council of 1870*. The author sings the praises of the Church, its holiness and grandeur, gradually recounting the triumphs of its chief events from Christ to the Nicene Council, and to the First Vatican Council:

Hail, Church of God! On your forehead,  
Crowned with eternal flowers,  
The majesty of your triumphs shines!  
Like a queen wrapping up her tresses  
With manly band, you flash the royal eyes  
To the warlike clangors of the battle.  
Untamed and severe empress,  
More beautiful in your holy fury,  
You are shining with triumphs, hinting  
At a victory, which an immortal angel  
Is preparing for the bow of your holy days,  
Where God is resting, waiting for you!

After singing the battles and the victories of the Church

through the centuries, he ends wishing its triumphs all over the world with the Council:

...Oh, come,  
Come, O Lord; here the world summons you  
Through the voice of thousand famous children  
Gathered in the divine temple! Oh, come and unify  
The world in your Church!

On July 18, 1870, when the papal infallibility was proclaimed, he ended his dedication to the Pope with this wonderful adhesion:

We join the Catholics' universal vow, and looking at Peter's infallible cathedra we say: we greet you, immortal Pius IX, the universal Church's doctor, Christ's Vicar, the mystical bride's sublime guardian, Peter's boat's celestial pilot. At last, we greet you, glorious Pontiff, that in 24 splendid years sublimated your name, which is a new pearl of the coming history and a sacred glory of posterity. We greet you, loving father, and with the five regions of the earth we salute you five times great! Five times infallible! (S.C. Vol. I, page 10).

The Father's youth reminds times of great tribulation for the Church: the fight against its temporal power and “magisterium. “ These are the Syllabus' times, when the hellish powers awakened, filling the Pope's heart with bitterness. The Father seized any opportunity to protest his faithfulness to Pius IX, through filial, passionate verses springing from his heart.

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He shares in full the Pope's sorrows in those sad times:

O saint,  
Look at me; kneeling at your feet  
I wail, hope, and pray. In my youth,  
Worn out by the fight of the shuddering abyss,  
I felt the execrable, inevitable hurricane  
Rushing upon my soul!  
It was the madness of the fool, and the cruel  
Arising of an Erinys in the midst of the camp  
Of the boiling spirits, and the idea  
Of an Italian grandeur! O mournful  
Stories of blood! May they fall into  
The eternal oblivion, O Father: so gloomy a remembrance  
May never return to your angelic heart! ...  
... Watered  
With tears is my life; either I delight  
In the gloomy notes, or I seek

A joyous song, I always feel  
The string of the sorrow under my fingers,  
Error enraging !

The name of Pius IX will give splendor to his poems:

...Inspired by your holy picture,  
I will sing, girding my strings  
With the most beautiful roses, reaped  
In the early morning, in my native valley;  
Pilgrim of songs, I will move around  
To awaken the sons of men.  
Of my song, your name will be  
The most beautiful note;  
As it is true that the poet has a faithful  
Future, secret echo of his song  
Running on the winds, I will broadcast  
The harmonious note of your name  
Through the immensity of the world,  
Awakening the sweetest affections;  
For in your name I find something  
Holy, fondling with celestial breeze  
And worthy a thousand songs!...

(Vol. 47, pages 112 and 114).

We have the verses for the *Golden Priestly Anniversary of Pius IX*, on April 11, 1869; those of August 23, 1871, when the Pope fulfills the years of Saint Peter's Pontificate; and *Recollection in the City of Rome*, written after the occupation of the city by the Italian army. The poet hints at the grandeur of pagan Rome, singing the praise of the Christian city around the Vicar of Christ. Above all, we recall *Sorrows and Triumphs*, a long poly-meter song on the 25th anniversary of Pius IX's crowning, June 21, 1871; with fleeing touches, he describes the sectarian fight against the Church and the Pope. It is one of the Father's best works. Very fine are the octaves where the poet describes the condition of Italy betrayed by its children. We quote:

As one day on the impious Babel,  
The genius which deranges the world  
Terribly arising to the stars  
In the battle defied God.  
Here he came from the horrid hell,  
From its thundering abyss,



And from the Italian mountains  
To new battles he again defied God!  
Beautiful Italy, bearing divine eyes  
Wet with dewy tears,  
You are dragging yourself into error  
Like a merciless object.  
Where is the mysterious sparkle,  
Which enlivened you in your faith,  
Showing you the foreign eyes  
As the lady of great beauty ?

You, sublime in the great perils,  
You, celestial in the genius of art,  
You, generous mother of children,  
Were bearing the shining faith in your breast.  
Today, crushed by deadly fury,  
As a slave you are dragging out your life,  
Betrayed by your own children,  
Furiously binding your feet!

Among the elation and the new faults  
Of the folk that calls you great,  
That passes like a deadly wave  
Breaking the cross and the altar;  
While you are in the hands of a rebel mob  
Tearing your splendid dress,  
Tell me, O Italy, are these the glories  
That your children's zeal is giving ?

Unfortunate! Don't you feel  
The hideous combat of thousand rages ?  
Don't you see them offering you  
The poison hidden in the goblet of flowers ?  
The hand which interweaves and lays  
Delicate flowers on your high forehead  
Is the hand which tears your diadem,  
Is the hand which tears your womb!

Oh! Don't you see the hideous challenge  
Of a mob fed on blood,  
That directs the homicidal sword  
Against an incomparable angel ? But the horror of the serpent's children  
Has filled up the divine cup,  
Perhaps the day of God is coming,  
That day will be for all!

## 5. Dreaming of the reconciliation

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We know the events and the happenings following the end of the Popes' temporal power.

Writing about these events in a footnote to *Recollection in the City of Rome*, published in *Faith and Poetry* (1921, page 108), the Father expresses his ideas:

The author wrote these verses shortly after the Italian army took over the city of Rome, when the feelings of the Catholics lovers of the Pope were wounded in their attachment to the Vicar of Christ, being unaware of the future.

History has showed that, as usual, any event goes to the glory of God, who has permitted the end of the Popes' temporal power for the glorification of the papacy. In fact, since Rome has been joined to Italy, the enemies of papacy have realized its glory and the unshakable stability of its divine institution, against which human and hellish powers cannot prevail. The infallible promise of our Lord Jesus Christ has been confirmed in 20 centuries!

In the whirl of passions, in the clash of parties and the excitement of nations, the Vicar of Christ performed his noble, sublime duty as a pacifier and admonisher for over fifty years since the taking over of the city of Rome, being the generous, holy representative of Christ Redeemer and God!

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The Italian conscience remained enchanted at the foot of the unshakable Vatican rock, at the triumphs of an unarmed very old man, whom the world admires with amazement! The people who only knew the papacy through the mockery and the calumnies of the press were disenchanted and began admiring and loving what they now see and touch with their hands!

As for the *Roman Question*, the author of these poems relies completely on the Vicar of Jesus Christ and his successors, also longing that our mother Italy be great, generous, and powerful as the nation privileged by God.

The action of Providence is evidently marvelous, but it does not relieve from responsibility; if the papacy's temporal power in

those times seemed to be anachronistic, the Italian government's arbitrary taking possession of it perturbed the conscience of the Italian Catholics. The situation was made clear through the treaty and concordat on February 11, 1929, when, according to Pius XI's saying, "God was given back to Italy, and Italy to God." (2)

Oh, how long the Father dreamed of the reconciliation! One of our Religious had hardly heard the announcement of the great event in the afternoon of February 11, 1929, when he exclaimed: "I wish the Father were here now! The joy would have cured him! " But he was not allowed to see the day he desired, which made Italy envied among the nations!

In the funeral oration on Leo XIII, he said:

< O my Italy! O my Italy! When will you understand your great privilege, your glory for being predestined by God to be the center of the Catholicism, the See of the Supreme Pontificate ? Don't you realize how the world looks at you, how two hundred million Catholics all over the world palpitate when they hear your name, how the great powers wait for the divine oracle which is born and dwells in you, and almost always is one of your children ? O glory of the glories! The prophet was speaking of you, when he said: " He dealt not so with other nations! " O Italy, understand your divine fortune. If you were close to the throne of Peter, obedient to the Vicar of Christ, full of his blessings, and free from anathemas, you would be the queen of the world, and the nations would serve you as your maidservants ! " (Vol. 45, page 53).

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## 6. For the Pope's freedom

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The liberals and the sectarians who formed the Italian government after taking over Rome, thought that the match with the Pope was over. On the contrary, Pius IX and his successors did not accept the arbitrary action and the injustice that overwhelmed the Church compelling the Pope to live as a prisoner in the Vatican. Now and then the Pope renewed his protest against such a situation, and the Catholics could not help taking sides with him. In those years, the

Father continuously reminds the persecuted Church and the Pope as prisoner. On May 10, 1906, he conceives the “plan for a spiritual crusade, a universal association of prayer for the liberation of the Pope from his long captivity in the Vatican. “ Quoting, “The Church prayed to God... unremittingly “ for the liberation of Peter (Acts, 12, 5), among other practices he proposes that each associate consecrate an hour a day to this purpose in order to cover the daily 24 hours. Furthermore, the associate should face suffering and even death for the liberation of the Vicar of Christ, in order to comfort him through obedience, love, offering, pilgrimages, the press, etc.

The Father asks a question: “How can the Pope be free ? Through the breakdown of Italy ? Through a pact ? Through the conversion (of the government) ? “ Since he is not a politician, he offers no proposal. The solution of the question was so hard that more than one who suggested a proposal, failed... For this reason the Father says: “What God wants. He is able to change the hearts, the circumstances, and everything. We want to see the Pope free in his personal liberty, which he is lacking, even though he is the Vicar of Jesus Christ ! Let us consider the Pope as a person: this sacred, august person who embodies... is in chains “ (S.C. Vol. 9, page 158).

The plan of forming such an association wasn't put into practice because it would hurt the civil authority. The Father, however, did not forget it, and in 1908, when he founded the Pious Union of Saint Anthony of Padua, he also assigned to the associates the following intention: “That the present situation of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, who out of necessity stays like a prisoner in the Vatican, may come to an end quickly and he may go out and act freely. “

Among the intentions assigned to the spiritual pilgrimage to Paray in 1923, the intention for the Pope is worded in the following way: “For the reigning Pontiff and his holy freedom, as well as for the freedom of his successors up to the end of the world “ (S.C. Vol. 5, page 64). While writing, especially in the years nearer to the taking over of Rome, the Father often reminds the sad conditions of the Pope and of the Church.

When the Father was still a young priest, he wrote a prayer to Immaculate Mary, calling her “Type of the Church, “ which title has been given by the Second Vatican Council (L.G., 63). We quote: “O Mary ! As a priest I entreat you for the whole

Catholic Church! You were image and type of the Church! O Mary, see to it that the Church become pure and without wrinkles, as in the apostles' saying. Sanctify the clergy, recall the religious orders to spiritual life, crowd the Church with holy virgins! “ (Vol. 7, page 158). Here is a piece of incomparable apostrophe:

O Immaculate Mary, O conqueror of hell, look devoutly and benignly at the Catholic Church! See the vineyard watered by the red vein of your beloved Son. O Mary, see how the storm passed over it! The branches are broken, the trees thrown down, and all of it is covered by briars and thorns. Here is the city placed on the top of the mountain. O Supreme Queen, see how the murderers rushed in it: the temples are deserted, the religious houses crumbled, and even the stones of the sanctuaries are dragged in the mud!

The mystical fold is assaulted by wolves; the ewe lambs sway, disperse, ruin, and perish! O Mary! O Mary! Come, hasten! You are the army, the tower of David: the enemies of the name of God will disappear at your appearing!

You are implored by all the people; please come, do not be late! O Morning Star, bring the sun of grace and virtue! You are the star of the sea; Peter's boat is shaken by the storms; it cannot perish because of your Son's promise. The souls, however, perish, and Satan devours his victims! Come and crush his head. O Immaculate Mary, your will is enough; if you ask your Son, he will make his Church triumph.

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Oh! Why doesn't your Jesus come to untie the chains binding his Church ? Isn't his Vicar prisoner and wailing in the Vatican ?

But his judgments are holy, his ways unfathomable, and he is always as just as praise worthy. Flat on our face, we adore him. But we do not stop wailing, crying, howling, and spreading ashes on our head, because the enemies of the name of God are triumphing, keeping the queen of the nations as a slave! O Mary, O beautiful Immaculate Mother, remember that you are the glory of Jerusalem, the joy of Israel, the honor of the people of God! Therefore, hasten, come all at once to throw down and disperse the hellish troops, making the mystical spouse of your divine Son resurrect to a new life (Vol. 22, page 79).

On the occasion of **the national pilgrimage in the** 1881 jubilee, the Father wrote an article on *The Catholic Word for Leo XIII* (October 12, 1881), and after touching upon the obstinate war against the Pope, he said:

Unhappy! They do not know that your weapons are more powerful and terrible than theirs. They do not know that your sword is prayer, your shield is justice, your fortress is sacrifice, your armor is faith, and your lightnings are your words!... Your holy prayer is a sweetest

music when you are moved in the innermost of your Fatherly heart mourn over the misfortune of the poor, and pray to God to appease his anger. O venerable Pontiff of Jesus Christ, may God bless your lips; wording the wise and effective prayer! O august Chief of the Catholic Church, blessed be your heart which harbors the holy wishes of perfect charity. O holy, O great, O unconquerable Pontiff, please do not stop praying for the whole world. May the angels present your petitions in the odor of sweetness to God so that the Church raise from depression more pure and beautiful becoming again teacher of the people, queen of the nations, and salvation of all !

We have various works by the Father in prose and verses about several Popes, until Pius XI. Here we quote only two ideas concerning these times of general protest !

People speak so much of the Vatican's luxury ! Listen to the Father, who remembers his staying in the pontifical waiting-room, before going to the audience with Benedict XV:

What decorum, what majesty in these Vatican antechambers adorned with deep blue satin and arabesque carpets, as well as with checkered gilded vaults! Here we feel that luxury in its severe simplicity is not luxury, but demonstration, symbol, reflection of the superhuman pontifical grandeur. It is a slight homage to the Vicar, the vicegerent of Jesus Christ, the Pope, the ruler of the consciences, the emperor of all emperors. There, people long with thrilling reverential expectation to be presented to the chief of the holy Church, to the vice-God, to whom the divine Savior said: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven ! " (Mt. 16, 19). (S.C. Vol. 1, page 158).

In 1891, in the eulogy of Ludwig Windthorst, a valiant hero of the Church who opposed Bismarck's arrogance, the Father proposed him as a model of the militant Catholics who are unconditionally faithful to the teaching of the Church:

We must be valiant without letting us be frightened by human respect; we are not ashamed to be called Catholics, because Jesus Christ said, "The one who disowns me in the presence of men, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven. " We have to manifest our religion both in our works and in the purity of the principles. Far be from us the half-Catholicism which accepts the articles of the law reservedly; which respects the Vicar of Jesus Christ under condition; which compromises with the adversaries of the Church; in short, the Catholicism which is not pure, not entire, but mixed with the false

principles of the world. Those who belong to such Catholicism call themselves children of the Church, but are not afraid of being suitors and supporters of the Church's enemies (S.C. Vol. 1, pag. 70).

## 7. Affronts to the Pope

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The Father was very sorry for the affronts to the Pope; to atone, he ordered triduos of prayers. The Pope was Jesus Christ for him, as he often repeated in his preaching.

In Perugia he saw the monument built in remembrance of the 1859 revolution, named “the Perugia's massacre. “ This episode was widely exploited against the Church by diplomacy and by national and foreign liberal press through the image of the griffin (symbol of the city) crushing the tiara. The Father was wounded by that sight until his death.

When Father Santoro went to hear Father Gavotti of the ACI, who was responsible for morals, the Father recommended to him candidly and warmly to tell Father Gavotti to do his best to eliminate that obscenity, which was a perennial affront to the Pope and to the Church. People remedied this a few years later.

We know the Father's opinion about Carducci: “A scholar, a writer, a man of letters, but not a poet “ (Vol. 47, VI). Such an opinion is questionable, (3) but we cannot help agreeing with him when he disapproves the priests involved in the “conventional admiration of Carducci, “ hater of the Pope and of the Church.

When a writer, says he, brazenly exceeds the bounds of honesty, offending sacrilegiously and satanically God, or the adorable divine Savior along with his most holy Mother, or the saints, or the religion, or the Pope, we assert that even though such impious a writer be a real poet, or artist, or scholar, etc. etc.... if a minister of the religion, a priest of Christ admires, praises, celebrates him, he commits a misdeed. Making distinction between the poet and the unbeliever, the artist and the sacrilegious man in the same person is an irrelevant reason !... I compare these admirers to a man who while seeing his father being beaten, admires the skill of the beater in managing the stick by saying: I am sorry that my Father is being beaten, but I cannot help admiring the skill and the agility of the beater !

He concludes:

Are the children of darkness that admire the writings and the works imbued with satanic hate against God and his Church, even though these works have some literary or artistic value. Satan knows how to appear as an angel of light, breathing in the intellect and in the fantasy of the men associated with him!... And yet, even some priests let themselves be bound to the Carducci's balloon inflated by the sectarians! (S.C. 1, page 105).

## 8. Witnesses

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The Father was always very reverent to the dispositions of the Church. He often spoke to us of the Pope enthusiastically, exciting feelings of love and devotion to the Vicar of Jesus Christ, received the teaching of the Church with veneration, and required of us to make no distinction between teaching *ex cathedra* and *not ex cathedra*. In his last will, he specified that he was a devout son of the Church. Holding in veneration the definitions of the Councils, the ecclesiastical law, the decrees of the Roman Pontiffs and of the bishops, he never allowed people to deviate from the teaching of the Church... Among his writings, the *Letter to the Friends* follows the traces of the old apologists and bears witness to his perfect adhesion to the Catholic faith. When the Church had spoken through the mouth of the Pope, any distinction between dogmatic and disciplinary decisions was irrelevant for him.

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If people criticized the Pope, the Father blushed. He forbade his clerics to read the books which did not bring forth the exact teaching of the Church with veneration. For this reason he disliked Grisar's work on Saint Peter, which had a great vogue in those times, lest the youth deviated from full submission to the Pope.

A former orphan remembers that the Father went to Rome in the first days she had entered the institute: "We were wailing for his leaving, but he consoled us by promising a gift for each of us. On his return, he related to us a report, giving the blessing of the Pope and the promised gift. "



## 9. The prayers for the Pope

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In addition to the Father's protest of love for the Church and the Pope (cf. no. 1), we add his following words: "In my humble prayer... first I will remember the Pope and his holy intentions " (Vol. 44, page 123).

Sister Vittoria reports: < The Father loved the Pope with a singular affection. In the mass, Communion, rosary, and in all the feasts the Father exhorted the Religious and the orphans to pray first for the intentions of the Holy Father. How lovingly he spoke of the Pope, and how much he longed that one flock and one shepherd be made! "

In plenty of prayers to the Lord, the Madonna under various titles, and the saints, the Father implores for the Pope "perfect holiness, special consolations, and the grace to guide the elects to holiness and eternal life. " He also prays for the triumph... of the holy Church and for the "sanctification of its members " so that "they flourish everywhere like a pleasant garden of holiness and virtues " (S.C. Vol. 10, page 17).

Saint Pius X once sent an offering to the orphans through Cardinal Gennari, asking their prayers for a special grace. You can imagine how the Father fostered the children's fervor! He himself, on that occasion, wrote an ardent "petition to the Lord in the Sacrament to obtain the grace for the Holy Father through Saint Anthony of Padua " (Vol. 4, page 104).

When France parted from the Church, the Father ordered his communities to say a prayer for the conversion of that nation:

<< Draw France from the abyss in which it has fallen, give it Christian chiefs, who consecrate it again to your Sacred Heart... give it the faith: see that the first born of the Church may revive. " He also invokes several French saints (Vol. 6, page 53) and writes another prayer to the Madonna of La Salette to achieve the same goal (Vol. 7, page 90).

When Pius XI addressed an exhortation to the world in 1926, the Father wrote a petition. The communities said it every evening before the Eucharistic blessing. The intentions were the following: 1. For the end of the persecution in Mexico; 2. For universal peace; 3. For the return of the dissident nations to the Church; 4. For the holy Church, that through the Pope it may have proper supremacy on the sacred sites of Palestine (Vol. 5, page 116). (4)

Very concerned with the life of the Church, in his last years he used to have on his desk the *History of the Church* by Balsamo, to read it in his free time. That reminds me another book. The Father was not skilled in the rules of liturgy, but he over-states when he says: “Very unsuited to rubrics and liturgy and always absent-minded, he was a pity while performing sacred services “ (S.C. Vol. 7, page 241). On the contrary, while saying mass, he excited devotion; but, because he was not inclined to rubrics, on the side of the *History of the Church* he also had the handbook of rubrics by Ugo Mioni.

Resuming the topic of prayer, we let be known that the visits of the Father to the Pope were preceded by the servant of God's warm recommendations to his communities to pray for the success of his petitions.

A personal petition to the child Jesus and to the *bambinella* Mary on January 23, 1906, says:

I am going to Rome, and hope to arrive with your blessing. May I be at the feet of the holy Father and perform something good for the consolation of your loving hearts, for the improvement of these least institutes, and for the works connected with them. Please bless, guide, and support me, seeing to it that everything succeed according to your will (Vol. 4, page 93).

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## 10. Only asking for blessings

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In his relations with the Pope, the Father was only concerned with blessings. In the early times of the institute, directly or indirectly, he asked the Pope for some help, without receiving it. Writing to Father Cusmano, he said “My hope was deceived “ (S.C. Vol. 7, page 33). He never again appealed to the Pope for material help, not even when in serious need. Making reference to the period of 1890-1900, one of hard financial situation for the institute, Father D'Agostino says, “He never asked the Pope for money, but for blessings. “

That has been the Father's policy all his life long. Father Drago relates that Don Orione revealed to Father Vitale Saint Pius X's amazement, because the Father never asked for financial help, but only for spiritual favors and blessings. Really, the Father used to say, "The Pope has to provide for all the world; therefore, we appeal to him only for spiritual favors. "

After the 1908 earthquake, Pius X gave the Father a nice wooden church for Messina, and to the bishop of Oria a sum of money to help the Father's communities in Apulia, but the Father did not appeal to the Pope. Don Orione and Bishop Di Tommaso themselves did.

The Father instead used to give his offering to the Pope. He introduced in his communities the custom of "saving the first earnings of some works every day. " In July, the saved amount was distributed to sacred services. The first amount was sent to the Pope, and the Father asked him to accept the humble offering and to give his apostolic blessing "upon our wishes and hopes " (Vol. 28, 1). He desired the Pope's blessing "as a gift of heaven, as a copious compensation for our humble work " (Vol. 41, page 25).

On another occasion, the Father sent his offering with expressions full of love and faith:

By saving some coins from the earning of their small works, (my orphans) gathered 25 liras. They lay them at the feet of Your Holiness, asking you to accept them benignly as a sign of our deep love and very humble submission and waiting for your generous, paternal, holy apostolic blessing. May this blessing of the Vicar of Christ descend upon us as the blessing of Isaac descended upon the head of Jacob! (March 3, 1899) Vol. 28, page 2).

He entreated the Pope to pray, and how much the Father trusted in the prayer of the Pope ! Once, while under the weight of serious tribulation, he appealed to Leo XIII, who assured him of his "prayer to the Lord to free him from the present tribulation through celestial grace" (Jan. 11, 1893). The Father quickly points out: "Immediately we experienced the effects of the Pope's prayer! " The tribulation which seemed to threaten the institution with death disappeared, and everything ended in its favor (S.C. Vol. 10, page 212).

In 1909, he informs the Pope of the opening of a house in Oria, of the sickness afflicting the female community, and implores: "May Your Holiness give your paternal apostolic blessing to our entrance in this sacred place so that the Sacred Heart of

Jesus accept now and in the future our taking possession of it. May you also pray during the celebration of the mass, giving your blessing to these communities so that the Lord, despite my sins, have mercy on the sick and cure them according to his divine Heart through the intercession of his most holy Mother “ (Vol. 28, page 13). The same year he writes in the book of the divine benefits: “This year we have experienced a close approach to the Holy Father Pius X in private audiences for me and the sisters. Blessing and help “ (S.C. Vol 10, page 242).

Because things were going pretty well by God's help, the Father attributed the merit to the Pope's prayer, saying: “The Pope's words are true. “ When I complained about obstacles, hardships, sickness, and want of my children, he responded: “Be calm, Mr. Canon. Your work is of God, and the works of God go forth by themselves. “

## 11. Candid like a child

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While expressing his love toward the Pope, the Father showed some childish candor.

When the mill was opened, he ordered to send the first paste to the Pope, as he did with the first earnings of the works.

Once the year's crop of tangerines in Oria was abundantly blessed by God in quality, size, and taste. The Father conceived the idea of sending some to the Pope, and he himself manufactured the boxes gracefully, manifesting to the present community his smiling appreciation for the loving gift to the Holy Father and his candid, unreserved respect for him, which he always infused in us.

A picture of Jesus, his hands tied up, and the wording: “But Jesus was silent, “ (Mt. 26, 63) impressed the Father. To publicize it, he had many varnished copies printed in our typography, and distributed them to the people, bishops, and cardinals. He mailed

some of them even to the Pope, to whom he used to write candidly and confidently: “Your Holiness, we humbly beg your pardon and offer this precious picture of our adorable Savior before the tribunal; I had many copies printed to publicize it. I think that you appreciate it; therefore, I mail a box of them to Your Holiness “ (Vol. 28, page 19).

During the second world war, after a real or supposed attack to the ferry in the strait of Messina, he asked the Pope to obtain from the emperor of Austria not to repeat such attempts (Vol. 32, page 50).

When Benedict XV invited the faithful to fast severely for three days to implore peace, and he was the first to practice such a penance, the Father mailed a very touching petition on behalf of his communities begging His Holiness to spare himself from the fasting. With how much faith he did so!

All the persons of my least institute, shedding tears, beg you to accept their humble, filial proposal to fast in your behalf because of your advancing age and the duties to govern the Church. By the help of the Lord, the orphans and the ruling stall' will perfectly observe the three severe fasts and three more in behalf of Your Holiness (May 29, 1915).

His Holiness accepted the letter with supreme kindness, but he liked giving an authoritative example of prayer and fasting as well as an offering to God. The community, however, observed the six proposed fasts.

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The Father also offered his life for the Pope. He writes to Sister M. Nazzarena of the Daughters of Divine Zeal (July 8, 1919) about the trouble, rather the revolution of the post-war-period: “Time presses terribly! It is worst than war! Socialism and anarchism are getting the upper hand! The government is powerless, and no one knows where we will come to end! Inform the community about the perils; may they pray, fear God, and atone !... “ Then he continues: “Do not forget the Pope, our Holy Father Benedict XV. God forbid that they assault the Vatican ! Even though it is a far possibility, still the peril exists... Let us pray for the Holy Father, offering our life for the Pope's life! “ (Vol. 35, page 217).

Sister Vittoria reports that after the death of Benedict XV the Father gathered the community to announce the event. Eyes wet with tears, he told us to offer our prayers and sacrifices of several days for the repose of the Pope. In addition he ordered other prayers for the successor.

In those days the Father bought a wooden statue of the child Jesus and exhibited it to the community for veneration. The child Jesus was presented as a pontiff and king to be crowned with tiara the same day of the new Pope's crowning in Rome, Sunday, February 12; 1922.

The Father performed the liturgy of the coronation before the mass with the following formula:

We crown you as eternal pontiff, king of heaven, of earth, and of your Church. You are the invisible Pontiff supporting, illuminating, and guiding the visible Pontiff of Rome that has been elected as your Vicar, Pius XI.

He entreats the eternal Father:

For the sake of the child Jesus, defend more than ever your holy Catholic, apostolic, Roman Church; protect, defend, enlighten, and guide your visible Vicar, the Roman reigning Pope Pius XI; infuse in him unusual intrepid faith, and make him prevail over his visible and invisible enemies (Vol. 9, pages 58-59). He repeated the same rite in Taormina on February 26, 1922.

## **12. Above all, obedience to the Holy Mother Church**

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The son of the Church is proved by his obeying its laws and by being faithful to its teaching. This was the habitual behavior of the Father in any event, and he recommended us to do the same.

Let us listen to Father Vitale on this subject: "Following the law of the Church is like following holy obedience! We never go wrong. First of all, obedience to the holy mother Church " (Vol. 32, page 107).

His letter of February 11, 1926, to Mrs. Zuccaro, who had

considered the Father inclined to accept the doctrine of theosophy, bears witness of his attachment to the Church. The immediate and vigorous action of the Father proves his deep **feeling with the Church**. He writes:

I protest with all my strength that I was never inclined to that! If I had accepted this wrong, false doctrine for a moment, I would have committed a serious sin, denying my Catholic faith, opposing the teaching of the holy Church, and the Apostle Paul saying: “And let me warn you that if anyone preaches a version of the Good News different from the one we have already preached, whether it be ourselves or an angel from heaven, he is to be condemned” (Gal. 1, 8).

Theosophy is a false, fantastic doctrine, one of the heresies which appeared in the world since the beginning of the Church, failing one after another... It is temerity to trust in this queer teaching, whose doctrine and books oppose the Church, and are forbidden by the Church!... Dear lady, please take my advice: burn these books, which are the results of insane minds far off from God and the truth; simply adhere to the Church's teaching.

After reminding again the above quotation from Saint Paul, he continues:

This way the apostle defends the **revelation of Jesus Christ God-man**, conveyed to us by the Church. Christ said: “If he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a pagan or a tax collector” (Mt. 18, 17). Saint Paul teaches that the Church upholds the truth and keeps it safe! (1 Tim. 3, 15).

But for you, my dear, the people far off from God, the insane minds teaching that the soul transfers from generation to generation, are the people who uphold the truth and keep it safe.

He concludes:

Dear lady, yield to the holy Church and adhere to our Lord Jesus Christ's revelation upon the destiny of humankind through holy Scripture, the Gospel, and the holy Church. You must know that the divine revelation cannot be added or deprived of something. The book of revelation of Saint John -ends the Old and the New Testament by saying: “This is my solemn warning to all who hear the prophesies in this book: if anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him every plague mentioned in the book; if anyone cuts anything out of the prophesies in this book, God will cut off his share in the tree of life and in the holy city” (Rev. 22, 18-19).

Now I have to humbly pray to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary to illumine and help you in order to adhere to the teaching of the

Catholic faith, to the holy Church founded by Jesus Christ on the rock of papacy, which is the trustee of the evangelical truth.

Postscript: "I dedicate a last thought to the over-wise of the reincarnation or theosophy, quoting from Scripture: " Their deeds are corrupt and vile " ! " (Ps. 13, 1) (Vol. 42, pages 16-18).

## 13. The value of the private revelations

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Now we touch upon a very important issue in the Father's life: his unreserved faithfulness to the Church about the apparition and the revelations at La Salette.

First, let us see how the Father reacted to the private revelations on the whole.

Some persons pointed out that the Father was somehow inclined to believe in private revelations. He himself declares such an inclination, specifying, however, that he does not allow himself to be subdued: "I love the private revelations of holy persons, but I never accept everything " (Vol. 37, page 115).

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Father Vitale gives exact information on this subject:

Very fond of mystics, as soon as he knew one was near, he approached the person endowed with supernatural gifts. He made connections with him/her; on occasion he was a guide, a counselor and/or a proofreader. Always well balanced in faith, he discriminated true from false revelations and demanded faith, not private revelations as a foundation of action. Not to make a false step toward mistakes or danger, he liked inner virtues best, especially obedience (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 280).

Just now we have read the letter to Mrs. Zuccaro where the Father says that the apostles' death ended the revelation in the Church. He also explains: "The revelation is the one Jesus Christ entrusted to the Church through the apostles, which contains the



destiny of human beings. No new comer can change it at all “ (Vol. 42, 16).

People should not accept private revelations supinely. The Father treats this subject in his letter of May 10, 1925, to Msgr. Liviero, bishop of Citta' di Castello. He criticizes the publication of Saint Veronica's entire diary:

Being taught by the teaching of several mystics, I have always deemed that the visions and locutions of even holy persons, especially women, may contain deceptions. Paulin attributes errors even to saints the Church venerates on the altars. How many contradictions we see between Saint Brigid, D'Agreda, Emmerich, etc. We cannot consider the revelations and the locutions as words of the Scripture. Some of them must be omitted, and others explained in a right, prudent meaning (Vol. 29, page 82).

The Father details these ideas in a letter to Father Peter Bergamaschi, who had published all the writings of a renowned Benedictine mystic, Sister M. Cecilia Baij of Montefiascone (1694-1766). The Father criticizes such a criterion:

Conforming to prudence and sacred accuracy, people cannot deal with private revelations as if they were canonical books or decrees of the Holy See. The most enlightened persons, especially women, may be greatly mistaken in the visions, revelations, locutions, and inspirations. More than once the divine operation is restrained by human nature. For instance, who could ratify in full all the visions of Emmerich and Saint Brigid, (5) which show evident discrepancies ? I love very much the private revelations of holy persons, but never I accept them in full ! Were I to publish revelations, I would eliminate, or revise what is inconsistent with a sound criterion, or reliable traditions, or opinions of sacred, learned writers. I think of behaving prudently...

My dear father, to consider any expression of the private revelations as dogma or proposition near the faith is always imprudent! The mistakes could amount to thousands. Paulin substantiates this fact with the examples of saints we venerate on the altar. It is not surprising, because the vision or the news undergoes some modifications while passing through human channels. Even though the personal dispositions or aptitudes to receive the mystical operations may be habitual, the act of receiving such operations is actual. The same dispositions or aptitudes are not always the same; a psychological, moral, spiritual, physical event

can modify them, hindering the spiritual enlightenment from shining perfectly in the soul. Thus, the person is unaware of circumstances, details, or propositions, and is mistaken involuntarily. In fact, everything is received through, and according to the subject.

This is proved by experience, by the mystical theologians, such as Saint John of the cross, Saint Theresa, Castrovetera, Paulin, etc. by prudence and reason we cannot accept all the words (of the revelations)

as they were propositions near to the faith; still less when they are contrary to the authoritative opinion of renowned writers and to the simple, beneficial devotion of the saints (Vol. 37, pages 115-17).

No one in the Father's communities was allowed to adhere to private revelations, as to a rule. He writes to Msgr. Zimarino, bishop of Gravina:

Mystical theologians teach that no institution must be taken or be approved on the ground of private revelations: people must behave as though such revelations do not exist. I read that Saint Teresa asked her spiritual directors the consent to found an institution, but she concealed the revelations which moved her to found it (S.C. Vol. 7, page 164).

On one occasion, to reorganize itself, a community was expecting a revelation of a holy person, but the Father intervened:

Do not provoke the Lord. We have faith, trust, counsel, reason, and prayer at our disposal; these are the means our Lord gave us to know his adorable will, or to follow it without gratifying our selfishness. Therefore, let us pray. Our Lord taught us how effective is the humble, trustful, perseverant prayer when we surrender ourselves to the divine will with pure intention (Vol. 39, page 74).

## **14. The apparitions at La Salette and Lourdes**

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Now we touch upon the Father's behavior on the issue of La Salette.

The apparition of the Madonna at La Salette on September 19, 1846, touched the world for a period of time. Several authors elucidated it with their writings, sacred preachers spread it from the pulpit, and the new devotion was introduced in cities and countries. But, while the devotion to the Madonna of Lourdes was increasing, the Holy See intervened with two decrees to remove some abuses introduced in the devotion

to Our Lady of La Salette; consequently, the devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes kept increasing while the devotion to Our Lady of La Salette decreased. Furthermore, several people considered the devotion almost prohibited, whereas the decrees meant to put the devotion in the right terms.

The diocesan authority has recognized the two apparitions.

After a rigorous canonical process that examined the events, the persons involved, and the miracles, Msgr. Lawrence, bishop of Tarbes, declared:

We judge that Immaculate Mary, Mother of God, has really appeared to Bernardette Soubirous on February 11, 1858, and in the following days, 18 times, in the Massabielle cave on the outskirts of Lourdes. This apparition has the characters of the truth; therefore, the faithful can surely believe in it (Trochou, *Saint Bernardette Soubirous*, Marietti, Turin, pages 326-27).

Likewise, the bishop of Grenoble recognized the events at La Salette. After a regular process of five years, Bishop Philibert de Bruillard declared on September 19, 1851:

We judge that the apparition of the most holy Virgin to two shepherds on September 19, 1846, on a mount of the Alps' mountain chain, within the territory of La Salette parish of Corps deanery, has the characters of the truth; therefore, the faithful can surely believe in it (Barbero, *La Salette*, Pauline editions, page 229).

Pius XII referred to this document when he wrote the letter to the superior general of La Salette Missionaries on October 8, 1945, for the first centenary of the apparition. He said: “**The canonical process of the diocesan authority ended positively** “ (The *Marian teaching of Pius XII*, Pauline editions, page 141).

To fully understand what we are going to say, we need to keep in mind the policy of the Holy See with regard to the two apparitions. In 1877, three bishops questioned the S. Congregation of Rites on this subject, and they were told: “Those apparitions or revelations have been neither condemned nor approved by the Holy See, who has permitted the faithful to believe them only with human faith, on the ground of the traditions referring them, substantiated by the proofs and the trustworthy witnesses... Therefore, the Holy See gave neither approval nor condemnation, but has showed a permissive attitude. Thirty years after, the above quotation of Pius XII was inserted in the encyclical of Pius X against the Modernism “ (Volken. *The Revelation in the Church*, Pauline editions, page 203).

## 15. Why is La Salette in the twilight ?

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Why does Lourdes flash new gleams while La Salette seems to fall into oblivion ?

Father Volken (Ibid. page 115) says, “A particular revelation is open to criticism by itself; however, if it is destined to edify the Church, it will reach its goal at the time destined by God. “ He substantiates his statement with the devotion to the Sacred Heart. “Saint Margaret died in 1690, but the events of Parey-le-Monial and the devotion to the Sacred Heart were acknowledged in full 200 years after Margaret's death. *The devotion to the Sacred Heart* by Father John Croiset, S. J., was published in 1691, but it was put in the *Index Librorum*; it was taken away from the Index in 1887. “

We wish and are praying that the devotion to Our Lady of La Salette may triumph; meanwhile we listen to our Padre saying the motives that hindered the course of this devotion.

He attributes the fact to “the enemy of any good, who raised fanatical defenders of the apparition, who backed some supporters, in good faith pretending to, impose the apparition of the most holy Virgin and her words as a dogma, before the Holy Church expressed its serene and wise judgment; furthermore, they offended the ecclesiastical authority. The books they published were put in the *Index Librorum*. The French clergy felt offended and reacted with the press, to the prejudice of the apparition. “ It was during these events that the quoted decrees were promulgated. “The enemies seized the opportunity to discredit the apparition; the supporters became more fanatical and boisterous.

As a consequence, many people thought that the holy Church had prohibited the devotion to Our Lady of La Salette (which never happened), and their enthusiasm cooled down. Meanwhile, the apparition of Our Lady in Lourdes was renowned, and the people moved forward in that devotion, whereas

the devotion of la Salette decreased everywhere, except in the holy mountain “ (S.C., Vol. 1, page 188). (6)

## **16. A book by abbot Combe is condemned**

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The Father found himself involved in the question of la Salette because of the little shepherd Melanie, sister of Massimino, to whom the Virgin had appeared.

In 1897, at the age of 66, she was in Messina for one year as a directress of the Daughters of Divine Zeal, when their institute was on the verge of death.

Whatever people may say of this yet debated woman, the Father thought of her intervention in the institute as of “an unexpected blessing from God, an unforgettable fortune.” The year of her government regenerated the community to such a degree that the Father said: “She laid the foundation of the humble institute of the Daughters of Divine Zeal “ (Vol. 45, page 444).

Therefore it is no wonder that the Father admired her uncommon virtues and nourished a deep feeling of gratitude as to hold her as a co-founder. In December 1905, on the first anniversary of her death in Altamura, he went there to the cathedral with a group of sisters and gave the funeral oration. His speech was published.

In 1907 the Sacred Congregation of the Index happened to prohibit the reading of a book by Abbot Gilbert Joseph Combe who had translated the funeral oration of the Father on Melanie into French language and had inserted it in his book.

This event made the Father so grieved that he quickly wrote to the Sacred Congregation, protesting his perfect obedience to the orders of the holy Church. We quote his declaration.

Messina, May 31, 1907

Your Eminence Cardinal Prefect, Eminences Cardinals and Excellences Consulters of the Sacred Congregation of the Index:

It has come to my knowledge that the Sacred Congregation of the

Index has prohibited the reading of the book published in Paris, *The Secret of Melanie, the Little Shepherd of la Salette, and the Present Crisis*, by Abbot Gilbert Combe, pastor of Diou (Allier).

Because my funeral oration on the little shepherd of La Salette at Altamura has been inserted on pages 21-36 of that book, I feel obliged to declare the following statement to Your Eminences and to the Eminent Consultors: if you have found in that oration any reason for prohibiting the book, besides those found in the same book, I perfectly conform to the upright judgment of the Church expressed by this Sacred Congregation, and I retract everything of the funeral oration which might have caused the prohibition.

As to the apparition of the most holy Virgin of la Salette and to the marvelous deeds that people attribute to the late Melanie Calvat, I give only human credence according to the mind of Pope Urban VIII, being ready to forbear from it if the judgment of the holy Church and of His Holiness is contrary to such a credence.

Humbly kissing the hands of Your Eminences and Excellences, I declare myself

your humble servant,  
Canon Hannibal Mary Di Francia

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(Vol. 28, page 52)

The Sacred Congregation did not answer the above protestation, and the theologians censors found no fault in that oration, for they affirm that the book by Combe was condemned for different reasons. In fact, the Father was not compelled to retract or correct anything, as he should have done if some fault were found in his funeral oration.

## **17. A letter to Abbot Combe**

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On August 15 of the same year, the Father mailed to Abbot Combe a copy of his protestation and a letter, which is a monument to his ecclesiastical spirit.

First, he exhorts the abbot to accept the condemnation of his book deservedly:

My dearest brother, you know that we have to accept everything from the hands of God with great humility, acknowledging that everything comes for our good. We always deserve being mortified by his divine hand. But, when contradictions or admonitions come from highest ecclesiastical authorities, such as the Sacred Roman Congregations that represent the Pope, then our submission must be perfect, our humility deep, and our prudence holy. In such a case, we must not consider the circumstances which caused the admonition or contradiction from the prelates of the holy Church. God makes use of several means, but the decisions of the high prelates of the holy Church are work of the Holy Spirit, who governs the Church. We must heartily reprove what the Church reproves, even by renouncing our judgment. If God himself wants to change things, he will do so at the proper time and place. But, the less we submit to those who represent him, the less he will change things.

The Father seized the opportunity to expound the sound principles to which the defenders of La Salette should adhere.

My dearest brother in Jesus Christ, I cannot help submitting to you some ideas of mine about the mistakes in which people fall while they defend La Salette, to the prejudice of the holy cause.

From several apologies about La Salette and from several persons I have dealt with, I have noticed that when they defend the apparition of the most holy Virgin, the secret, and the *Rule of the Apostles of the Last Times*, their way of acting is not according to prudence, caution, and charity.

These are the errors in which they usually fall:

1. They put on the same plane both the apparition of the most holy Virgin and the dogmas of the holy Church, whereas the marvelous events are nothing else but private credences. People believe in them with humble, simple faith according to the reasons for believing, but they should not put them on the same plane of the dogmas.

2. They put the secret on the same plane of the gospel. The criterion for accepting such revelations should be very different from the criterion through which we accept the gospel as word of God. Private revelations are subject to errors owing to human beings who receive such revelations, by permission of God.

That the defenders of La Salette think of the apparition as a dogma or a gospel of secret cannot be approved. Because error calls upon error, they become enflamed and excited while defending La Salette and the secret, and pretend that all should believe; they almost cry out for lightning from heaven to strike down those who do not believe, as some disciples did with Jesus for the people who did not receive him. “And yet, the Lord turned toward them only to reprimand them “ (Lk. 9, 55).

My humble opinion is that the apologies for La Salette and the secret went too far, to the prejudice of these divine events, letting the devil make a gain.

But the enemy of any good made the best gain when he pushed the defenders of La Salette and the secret beyond the limits of defense, offending the ecclesiastical authority, to a great prejudice of the Lord's works. All this displeases the Lord.

According to the teaching of sound theology, what God works in private in the Church must be submitted to the judgment and will of those who represent him. God is jealous of this order he established, and wants no one to alter this rule of faith. When people deal with high personalities of the holy Church to make them accept private revelations or works, they must act with great humility and submission to the Church's authority. They must act humbly and prudently to gain their assent and the approbation of the ecclesiastical authorities. The saints did so, their private great revelations notwithstanding.

Without such humility and prudence, the defense of the truth becomes fanaticism! (S.C. Vol. 8, page 61).

This is the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council about the charismas: “Those who have charge over the Church should judge the genuineness and proper use of these gifts, through their office not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good “ (L.G. 12).

## **18. ... and to Leon Bloy**

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The Father presents the same remarks to the famous Leon Bloy (1846-1917).

Also the apocalyptic French writer concerned himself with La Salette and published his volume *Celle qui pleure*. He sent a copy to the Father, perhaps following a suggestion from Combe. The book shows traces of the disputes of those times, and, above all, of the author's intolerance.

The Father writes to him on September 18, 1918, acknowledges receipt of the work, and “like a friend and admirer “ submits his remarks to him. Very important is the first one:



Writing and printing invectives and offensive words against the bishops, who are united with God, endowed with the fullness of priesthood and with a very high dignity, cannot be approved. If some of them do not comply with their duty, it is out of our business to judge and condemn them. They depend on the Roman Pontiff; who will take care of them.

Then he insists:

I think that the passionately fond of La Salette and Melanie used a wrong system to defend and to credit the apparition; their system instead discredited the apparition and Melanie. What benefit can la Salette derive from laying the blame on the ecclesiastical authority and from discrediting the French bishops ?

Besides, your whole publication is illegitimate for lack of the ecclesiastical imprimatur. Nor can one say that the imprimatur was unnecessary; it was indispensable for your book! If the Roman Curia gives some weight to your book, it will put it in the Index, as it happened to other publications on Melanie and La Salette. I question the authors of these works: are the books worthy of the *index librorum* the best means to credit Melanie and La Salette ? A French proverb says “Surtout pas trop de zel ! “

The Father concludes with a proposal worthy of his love for Our Lady and the Church:

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Highly esteemed Mr. Bloy, I beg you a favor in the name of the most holy Virgin of La Salette, in the name of Melanie: withdraw all the copies of your book and mail them to me; if they are all, I will buy and destroy them; later, you will correct and publish them with the curia's imprimatur (S.C. Vol. 8, page 80).

Leon Bloy, however, did nothing; on the contrary, he said that if his book were put in the Index, that would be *the best advertisement*. The Father writes to Combe:

I want to forget to have read this phrase unworthy of a Catholic; I think it just escaped your lips when you were thoughtless; therefore, you deserve our pity. I too, in a moment, could do worse! S.C. Vol. 8, page 64).

## 19. For Melanie's biography

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The remembrance of Melanie is connected with the apparition at La Salette. The Father held her as a soul of great virtues, perhaps worthy of the honor on the altar, but having some defects to which he hints here and there in his writings. When Abbot Combe resolved to write her biography, the Father congratulated him on his resolve, but warned him in order to avoid another condemnation.

If you want this publication to achieve the goal we all wish, you have to develop the work in such a way as to avoid another prohibition from the Sacred Congregation of the Index.

A style and a language of great moderation, reserve, limitless respect, and submission to the prelates of the holy Church should predominate in your publication. No word should offend priests or journalists, detractors or opposers of La Salette. Let the critics of the future value these events. Now, the state of things, prudence, charity, the satisfaction for the offended ecclesiastical authority, as well as the need to destroy any mark of fanaticism in this story require a very great caution. History is to vindicate some deeds. By publishing Melanie's biography, we must take the only care of expounding the great holiness of that soul, her inner, continuous communication with God, her extraordinary virtues, her suffering, and the gifts she received from God.

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At last, he ended his writing with a stupendous conclusion:

The judgment of the Church excepted, in which I believe more than in what I have seen with my eyes and in what I have touched with my hands (S.C. Vol. 8, page 63).

This profession of faith is enough to measure the Father's total, unconditioned faithfulness to the holy Church. (7)

## 20. Protestation of faithfulness to the Pope

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We conclude this chapter by quoting the following protestation to the Pope that the Father wrote for the Rogationists:

As a Christian by Lord's mercy, as a priest unworthy of the Catholic Church, and as a congregant of an institute aiming primarily at increasing the priests, I declare that I will have the greatest respect, an unlimited subjection, and subordination to the Holy Father. I will hold, love, and obey him as our Lord Jesus Christ up to my last breath: The Holy Father's interests will be my heart's living interests; his words, either said outside cathedra or privately, will be oracles of eternal salvation for me. His opinions and ways of thinking will be the rule of my opinions and the ways of my thinking, to which I will always conform myself. His sorrows and pains will be mine.

When I preach, confess, and talk I will instill in the people these feelings of unlimited subjection and filial love toward Jesus Christ's Vicar. The first intention I will put in the mass, thanksgiving, divine office, meditation, and rosary will be for the Holy Father along with his intentions. When he issues encyclicals or delivers speeches and I am fortunate to read them, I will conform myself to his feelings obeying exactly what he commands or suggests. I will consider the Holy Father as sacred and venerable, and if I am fortunate enough to see him, I will repute the opportunity of kissing his feet and even the dust on which his feet trample as my fortune.

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I have declared all this for the following reasons:

1. Because I know that our Lord Jesus Christ wants us to honor, love, and obey his Vicar as his own person.
2. Because the predominant spirit and the rule of this humble institute command it.
3. Because I feel profoundly and intimately that such things must be.
4. Because the perfect subjection to the Holy Father brings about the Lord's blessing on each institute and each soul, whereas a lack of this subjection under the pretext of these distinctions *ex cathedra* and

### 3. SON OF THE CHURCH

*not ex cathedra*, person and sacred character is the beginning of serious faults for the individuals and the beginning of ruin for the communities (Vol. 44, page 123).

This splendid declaration, transcribed on an artistic parchment was handed in the hands of Pope Paul VI by the superior general in the private audience given to our capitular Fathers on September 14, 1968. On the following October 1, Msgr. Giovanni Benelli, substitute for the State Secretariat, communicated His Holiness' satisfaction for the filial homage, adding:

While reading the document, the Holy Father has been touched by the fervent expressions of deep faith in the Pope's mission, the sincere love toward the Person who carries the burden and the responsibility, and the complete adhesion to the teaching and the directives of the *Pontifical Magisterium*... Sure that the feelings of the venerable Founder continue to be a stimulus and a program for the members of the two Congregations instituted by him, the Holy Father wishes that this exemplar attachment to the Cathedra of Peter be rewarded with copious celestial favors and be a source of merits and happy increase.

## Notes

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- (1) The Father makes use of the word *adoration* in a very large meaning. He points out one's own submission, out of "inner feeling of respectful love toward the beloved object... Hence it is easy to explain the ecclesiastical custom to genuflect before the Pope, the diocesan bishop, as well as to kiss the Pope's foot, The term adoration also explains the act of respect and veneration that the cardinals give the neo-elect Vicar of Christ" (*Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 1. adoration, columns 320 and 323*).
- (2) The battery which opened fire against Porta Pia on September 20, 1870, was commanded by Second-lieutenant Carlo Almirante, a young engineer from Catanzaro. Later he was ordained a priest, lived 86 years, and at his death in 1934 Naples mourned over him because of his extraordinary virtues. The Sacred Congregation for the canonizations is concerned with his beatification. Jokes of Providence! (Msgr. Canestri, *L'anima di Pio IX*, vol. 3, page 283).

- (3) We have developed the Father's opinion on Carducci in our *Bulletin of 1967*, pages 236-67 and 376-77).
- (4) Keep in mind that in those times the state *of* Israel was not yet born, and the condition of the holy land was precarious.
- (5) Because of the precarious condition of the Church in those times, Saint Brigid in her revelations announces a catastrophic future; but a biographer remarks:  
As it happens to the souls who are zealous for the Lord's cause, or for the cause they think is the Lord's, Brigid mistakes her voice for God's voice “ (G. Joergensen, *Saint Brigid of Vadstena*, vol. 2, page 187).
- (6) Now the renewal of the devotion is increasing: “Even though the hospice of the sanctuary of La Salette, the highest in Europe, has almost doubled its pilgrim rooms, it has been always ` full house ' during summer time. Besides the private Pullmans and the lines of cars, about 25-30 daily bus of line climbed along the winding roads of the fascinating mountain up to La Salette. The ample parking lots were hardly sufficient. But in the days immediately previous to September 19, anniversary of the apparition, a comforting great number of confessions and Communions put to a hard test the zealous missionaries of La Salette, who were helped by numerous brethren who on purpose had come from Italy, Swiss, Germany, Belgium, Spain “ (L'Osservatore Romano, September 29, 1971, page 6).
- (7) Combe did not write the biography of Melanie; Leon Bloy published *The Life of Melanie*, which is made of the Melanie's notes about her adolescence (1831-1846). Unfortunately, we do not have yet a biography on documentary evidence; therefore, Melanie remains a variously discussed figure.



# 4.

## THE DIVINE COMMAND

1. He was born for that
2. The hour of Providence
3. The Rogationist vocation
4. The first writing on the Rogate
5. The great revelation
6. The secret of all good works
7. The need of priests
8. How few are the priests today>
9. Who are the workers?
10. All of them are brought about by the prayer
11. God wants it !
12. Why the prayer?
13. Prayer and action
14. The Rogate and the sanctification of the clergy
15. The merit of the Rogationist prayer.
16. Painful mystery !
17. Notes

# 1. He was born for that

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Now we are entering the field in which the Father gathered his best laurels: the Rogate. He himself acknowledges such a merit in a phrase of his own funeral oration, which somehow escaped from his pen, and he attenuated soon after: "About the *ROGATE* we say this only: he devoted himself to this prayer either for zeal or out of obsession or both" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 241).

History assures that he was very zealous, and the censors of his writings have already acknowledged that. One of them has stated alluringly: "The Servant of God was so touched by the needs of the Church due to the lack of workers, and by the effectiveness of the remedy suggested by the gospel that to carry out such a remedy, which is the prayer, he moved heaven and earth. This topic was the reason of his life, the prevalent motive of his writings, the characteristic of his institute." This statement reminds me of the words I wrote long ago: "The Rogate was the light of his way, the star of his thought, the sun of his life: he was born for the Rogate. We cannot imagine our Father but waving the shining flag of the Rogate, and longing to bring it all over the world." "Ah !" he exclaimed, "we pray for the rain, the good harvest, the liberation from divine punishments, and for so many human needs, but we leave out praying to God that he send out evangelical workers to his mystical harvest." In a fervent prayer to the Sacred Heart, he wails:

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Why don't your sacred lovers lift up this prayer to you? Why doesn't the Catholic world get up as one man to implore plenty of priests from your divine heart, while the souls perish? Lord, spread this spirit of prayer from east to west, from south to north. May the hearts of the high prelates, of your bishops, of the priests, of the whole Church overflow with it. May the hearts of the virgins and the sisters consecrated to you be enflamed with it. Lord Jesus, we ask the triumph of the Evangelical Rogation of your heart all over the Church and the world. Make it a universal rogation. May all people fulfill this divine desire of your heart;



may their ears be penetrated by the lasting cry of your longing heart: "The harvest is great, but the workers are few: pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he send out workers to his harvest!" Here is the Father's enflamed soul ! These words come out of his bones permeated by heavenly fire, as the prophet Jeremiah said, "From on high he sent fire down into my very frame" (Lam. 1, 13). (The priesthood, letter circular, page 43).

This is the Father's charisma.

The Second Vatican Council has recalled the doctrine of Saint Paul about the charismas: "It is one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts, distributing them to each as he wills" (1. Cor. 12, 11). "He also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church" (L.G. no. 12). The Father's charisma was the understanding and the zeal for the Rogate, which are the base of his works. It will appear clearly from the present and the following chapter.(1)

## **2. The hour of Providence**

We admire the Providence's intervention at its proper time.

To face the needs of the Church, God sends his servants for specific missions in time and place established by him.

The founders of orders and religious congregations, beginning with Saint Benedict up to the great souls who in modern times have adorned the Church with marvelous institutes, arose to meet the needs of their time. God raised the Father when the Church in Italy was having troubles for the clergy's condition.

The revolution of the liberals, socialists, and masons had already pushed many priests astray, had suppressed the religious communities, had impoverished the dioceses and the seminaries, and had spread into the classes of society, the common people included, the secular spirit of religious indifference. Such a spirit

was often combined with the spirit of an open scorn and persecution to the Church, the Pope, and everything related to religious life. We cannot help reminding the insult to the corpse of Pope Pius IX on the night of July 13, 1881, while being transferred from the Vatican to Verano.

Above all, the worldly way of disobedience and licentiousness had penetrated the clergy, whose desertion reached the 20% in some regions of south Italy; but the disorder had already invested all the nation. In 1871, when Msgr. Bonomelli took possession of the diocese of Cremona (population 350.000), he mourned over the apostacy of 35 priests. Msgr. Corti, bishop of Mantova, died all of a sudden of a broken heart because of the apostacy of his clergy, several teachers of the seminary included.

In Sicily, *the ecclesiastical battalion*, also called sacrilegious battalion, was formed by priests and friars. Most of them deserted the divine service when Msgr. Cirino Rinaldi, Judge of *Royal Monarchy*, mailed a circular, inviting the ecclesiastical superiors of Sicily to give their subjects full freedom of enlisting Garibaldi's army.

“A very awkward situation reigned in the diocese of Lecce and Messina, where serious moral disorders were established because of the Ordinaries' old age.>> Writing to the king of Naples on Oct. 2, 1857, Pius IX regretted for the "serious disorders in the diocese of Messina, due to the cardinal's old unaptness and his present imbecility" (Aubert, *Pius IX's Pontificate*, appendix by P. Martina, page 673). In *Historic Events of Messina Seminary*, page 26, Msgr. Minutoli re-establish the good name of Cardinal Villadicani, archbishop of Messina; for sure he had positive merits (Oliva, *Annali di Messina*, vol. 8, pages 358-59), but he was a simple man without the nerve to rule discipline in those stormy times; furthermore, he was also weak because of age, and the ill-intentioned persons took advantage. Hence, the regret of Pius IX, who sent an apostolic administrator. When the Father had the funeral oration upon Cardinal Guarino, he soberly touched upon the condition of the diocese of Messina in 1875, when the archbishop took up the office: " While singing the praise of Guarino, God forbid me from putting his predecessors of happy and blessed memory in the shade. But the period from 1860 up to us has been one of exceptional torments to the Church of God ! We have witnessed the desolation of the kingdom of God and the abomination of his house, mentioned by the seer of Babylon. As

soon as Archbishop Guarino arrived, with a quick glance and by intuition he knew and savored the miserable condition of our diocese" (Vol. 45, page 30).(2)

More or less pitiable was the condition of the other dioceses in Italy, which was ominously reflected in the shortage of religious and ecclesiastical vocations. The statistical data for the diocesan and regular clergy during the Father's life are the following: in 1861, the priests were 118,488 for a population of 21,777,334; in 1921, the priests were 62,942 for a population of 38,033,000. Anemia had entered the body of the Church; to give it freshness and vigor, new lymph should run in its veins. But, because the splendor of the Church is usually connected to its priesthood, a means to raise numerous and holy priests in the Church was to be found.

The priest is a divine man that no human industry can create, and Christ himself took the care of pointing out the prayer as the proper means to obtain them. He said, "Pray to the owner of the harvest that he send out workers to gather in his harvest."

To make this means known, adopted, and esteemed, God sent our Father to the Church as an apostle of this prayer: Rogate.

### **3. The Rogationist Vocation**

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When and how was the Father called to the Rogationist vocation?

Referring to Rogate, he confesses that "the Lord, by his infinite goodness, enlightened him about a great word of the gospel, which contains the secret of the Church's and society's salvation" (Vol. 38, page 11). Under an anonymous veil, the Father relates the action of the grace which connected his thought and heart to the evangelical word:

"There was a person who paid specific attention to this divine command before he read it in the gospel, and began his career with this attention" (Precious Adhesions, 1919, page 10). Such an attention was due to a divine inspiration in the bloom of his youth: it was "a great, sublime idea that the spirit of God, who blows wherever he wishes it to, inspired to a young man in

the beginning of his spiritual youth, many years before he started the Pious Institution" (Ibid. page 7).

Let us read an additional anonymous confession of the Father:

At the beginning of his spiritual life and before knowing these divine words of Jesus: "Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest," a youth was immersed in the predominant thought of increasing chosen priests, holy and apostolic men according to the Heart of Jesus by winning them from God through an insistent prayer. He felt that such a prayer was the best means to work a greater good in the holy Church, to save many souls, and to expand the kingdom of God on earth as it happened in the times of Saint Dominic, Saint Francis, Saint Ignatius, Saint Alphonsus, etc.

For this youth, this idea was clear and unquestionable.

Later he was amazed and absorbed after reading these divine words in the gospel: "There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest" (Mt. 9, 37). (Vol. 2, page 143)

Father Vitale has:

Perhaps before taking the cassock, in the fervor of his prayer at the foot of the Blessed Sacrament, Mary Hannibal felt that one of the most important issues he could address to the Lord concerning the saving of souls was to ask him to bring holy priests into his Church. He searched for an appropriate prayer in books but he did not succeed in finding any that expressed his sentiments. From that time on, he always kept in mind that the Church needed such prayer. Later, when he came across the following gospel, he heard a voice inside him telling him to make himself an apostle and a propagator of this prayer (Ibid. page 42).

The last assertion is unlike the Father's declaration: he heard the voice before he knew the word of the gospel and before he took the cassock. He already used to visit every day the Blessed Sacrament exposed for the 40 hours in shifts in the churches of the city, and he told us that one day, in a visit to Saint John of Malta's church,(3) he received the first inspiration to consecrate himself to the prayer for obtaining priests, still ignoring the evangelical command.

We recall additional thoughts of the Father on the origin of his Rogationist vocation. He told us that he was very grieved by

the desertion of priests and friars because of the revolution of that time; on the

other hand, holiness seemed to him too transcendental, and he admired the great heroism of the saints while studying the frescos in the churches and convents, especially in Porto Salvo's. To make piety bloom in those times, he thought that prayer was the only means, and he wrote some of them to obtain holy priests. One day he read in the gospel about the Rogate, and he was surprised that none of the prayer books pointed it out; therefore, he felt himself drawn to cultivate the evangelical rogation.

## 4. The First Writing on the Rogate

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As the sun does on earth in its rising, so the divine Rogate began illuminating the Father's mind when he was still a cleric, characterizing his spiritual life. However, we do not have any vocation prayer of that time by the Father. His first prayers for vocations date back to his early work in Avignone. Yet, we are convinced that the anonymous article "An Invitation to Prayer," on The Catholic Word of March 13, 1875, addressed to the citizens of Messina expecting the new archbishop after Msgr. Natoli's death, is by the Father. As a matter of fact, it contains thoughts and phrases in tune with his spirit and mentality.

After quoting the divine command, he continues:

"If we hasten to ask the Lord for the rain, all the more we must pray for help through the care of a shepherd of divine wisdom."

He exhorts the faithful to implore from Our Lady of the Letter a learned, holy archbishop, a wise, prudent, and strong man very devout to her; and insists on the importance and necessity of prayer to achieve this grace:

Let us send up the sigh of the prophets who desired the Savior, praying heaven to pour out the Just and the earth to germinate him, for a good shepherd is the image of the divine shepherd, who gave up his blood for his sheep.

"As the Father sent me, so I send you," the Lord said to the apostles, who were the first bishops of the Church. They were entrusted with this sublime mission, and converted thousands of people. Likewise, many learned, holy archbishops, called by the Lord to this very hard mission, consoled, loved, and made the peoples prosper"... We take delight in reading how Saint Ignatius and Saint Blaze were a heavenly blessing for their dioceses, giving up even their blood.

We are very touched while reading how Saint Charles Borromeo stood out for self-denial and charity. He gave up his possession to the poor, and cared their bodily and spiritual good even at risk of his own life! Saint Francis of Sales ruled with meekness the people entrusted to him. He strove for the good of souls, and converted them by the thousands through preaching, example, writing, and sacrifice. How sweet it is for us reading how Saint Alphonsus Mary Liguori improved his diocese through various means and a vigilant care; he rendered his diocese a model and a field fecund of merits and virtues. These men were called by the Lord... Catholics of Messina, let us lift continuous, ardent petitions to the Lord and to Immaculate Mary so that God send to us a bishop according to his heart.

We think that this is the Father's first article on the Rogate; his vocation, however, did not allow him to confine himself to this. We try to follow him in the affirmation and development of his great ideal.

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## 5. The Great Revelation

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Let us hear the Father's interpretation of the evangelical text:

The evangelist Saint Luke and Saint Matthew registered our Lord Jesus Christ's great word.

Saint Matthew says: As he saw the crowds, his heart was filled with pity for them, because they were worried and helpless, like sheep without

a shepherd. So he said to his disciples, **"There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest"** (Mt. 9, 36-38).

Saint Luke (10, 2): he said to them, "There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest."

The meaning of these words is obvious. Harvest means the people; workers means the priests as well as those who are in charge with saving the people entrusted to them: the people are many, but God's ministers few, therefore Jesus said: "Pray to the owner of the harvest," that is to say, pray to God that he will send out numerous priests to his Church for the salvation of all.

Rogate - it means pray - implies both exhortation and command, and each Christian is obliged to obey it; hence all of us have to pray to reach this goal, because Jesus Christ wants it.

These passages from the holy Gospel make a great revelation:

1. First, they manifest the desire of the most holy Heart of Jesus, who was to create the true, eternal priesthood on earth in order to perform the divine worship, to offer forever the victim of infinite value, and to continue on earth his divine ministry of eternal salvation for souls. Thirsty for souls as he was, Jesus could not help letting burst forth this great word, this divine command; to quote a biblical phrase we say that his zeal was devouring his divine Heart for a greatest interest of his.

2. Second, through those symbolical words Jesus represented the holy Church, the whole world, and each social organization as a harvest which should be cultivated by good workers to fill the mystical barns with copious crops; if the harvest is neglected, it perishes miserably.

3. Third, through these words our Lord Jesus Christ pointed out that his priests are the means of salvation for the mystical harvest of souls; no doubt that obedience to this divine command is the secret key that saves the Church and society; such a prayer is the holy Church's greatest means to expand the kingdom of God and to reach all goods in time and eternity.(1)

4. Fourth, our Lord wants us to understand that to obtain this priceless good we have to pray to the owner of the harvest, who is God, who is himself. He taught us that his priests do not come by chance, nor are self-formed, nor are formed by human effort; they come from divine mercy that creates, begets, and gives them to the world; he teaches us that we do not get them, unless we pray ! Isn't it obvious? It is God that sends forth the saints on earth. Isn't it a greatest mercy of his? How can we pretend to have it without asking for it? Our Lord Jesus Christ's command is very clear: "There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in: Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest" (Precious Adhesions, 1919, page 7).(2)

## 6. The Secret of all good works

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Unfortunately, the Father wrote no complete work on the *Rogate*. Treating the topic about prayer, he promises "a special chapter" (Vol. 1, page 66) on the Rogationist prayer; but, death prevented him to do so. However, because the mouth speaks whatever fills the mind (Mt. 12, 34), and the Father's heart overflowed with love and zeal for spreading the divine command, being never satisfied with calling the attention of the people on this subject, the *Rogate* emerges from all his writings, revealing his spirit. Let us glean this field.

The Father gives prominence to that divine word.

More than an exhortation, the *Rogate* is a command of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Christians on the whole, and to the priests specifically... This word of the incarnate wisdom contains a secret of salvation for the Church and society (Vol. 3, page 57).

It is God who raises his ministers, who sends out holy vocations from heaven, but he wants us to pray. The Rogate is a command. The most holy Heart of Jesus burns with the desire of granting such a mercy, and hopes that the peoples (and all the priests) leave out the negligence of this command by imploring holy vocations. While seeing the ruin of many generations of souls redeemed by his very precious blood, Jesus cries out: Rogate ergo. Plenty of souls would be saved, and many of them would achieve sanctification if the mystical workers catechized, edified, and instructed them in the faith and religion (Vol. 37, page 123). "The Church and the peoples could achieve copious goods from the faithful obedience to, and from the universal propagation of this evangelical rogation (Vol. 44, page 112). "That word keeps the secret of the salvation of souls and the curability of the nations (Vol. 45, page 399).

God made the nations curable, but no remedy is so effective as plenty of evangelical workers, who are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This is a radical cure: therefore, let us adhere to this holy radicalism, if we want a sure social rebirth ! (*Precious Adhesions*, 1901, page 38). With regard to the Church, society, and the world, the Rogate is the means which achieves all goods and the salvation in time and



eternity (*Precious Adhesions*, 1919, page 7). This word of Jesus Christ is a command of the zeal of his divine heart; word and command of a supreme importance, sure remedy for the salvation of the Church and society (Vol. 2, page 144). The *Rogate* contains the secret of all good works and the salvation of all souls (*Precious Adhesions*, 1901, page 5); therefore, it is not surprising if Satan sees the destruction of his kingdom in the spreading of this divine prayer (Vol. 2, page 145).

It goes without saying that the obedience to this divine command is the holy Church's greatest means to build up the kingdom of God; on the contrary, the negligence of this great means is the very cause of the desolation of the holy place, the ruin of the peoples, and of the nations... *Rogate ergo!* This is the great word, the divine command which only the most holy heart of Jesus' zeal could give. As the Bible says, this zeal devoured the divine heart with a greatest interest of the holy Church, the interest for copious ministers for a greater glory of God and the salvation of souls (*God and Neighbor*, special issue, June 1925, page 13).

## 7. The need of priests

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To better understand the importance of the *Rogate*, the Father reminds us of the priests' role in the Church:

The holy Church and the peoples all over the world need this prayer because God fixed beforehand that the priests guide human beings to the truth and salvation.(6) God also established that even redemption is useless without the priests, since they are entrusted with continuing it and applying its fruits. For that reason Jesus said to the priests: "You are the light of the world, you are the salt of the earth"; but there is no light without the lantern shining on the lamp-stand; there is no way to preserve food from corruption without the salt keeping it.

Both Church and society are in trouble. Jesus Christ's mystical bride cries for lack of evangelical workers, while society's ruin increases!

Wherever good appears, faith blooms, the souls find salvation, the youth grow faithful, the poor are relieved, the good works rise; wherever religion is supported, defended, and protected, error is defeated; wherever the laity is Catholic and active, there you find the priest's work. It is the

work of the bishops, of the holy Church's prelates, and of the clergies that operates all the good you find on earth; but all people receive light and splendor from the supreme pontiff, who is the Church's sun receiving light from God directly. This great ecclesiastical hierarchy is made of elect workers who are appointed by God to the divine ministry. The world receives life from its splendor.

Please imagine for a moment the priesthood dying out as the sun dies at sunset. Wouldn't the world stay in darkness? Where would you find God's worship, the sacraments, the Eucharist, God's word, faith, and charity? All of them would end!

Now, please imagine the opposite. Suppose that the earth is full of God's elect ministers, of numerous, holy priests: one for every hundred persons and all of them are as holy as the ancient apostles. Wouldn't you think it would be the sudden salvation and happiness of all souls, no one excepted? (Vol. 3, page 59).

## **8. How few are the priests today!**

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The Father describes the clergy's condition of those times, which is not better off today.

To the question; "Which is the greatest torment of today's Church?" he answers:

The great lack of clergy (Special issue, June 1925, page 14). As in the old days, through the streets of Palestine, Jesus laments: "The harvest is great, but the workers are few."

When our Lord Jesus Christ said these words, he was looking through all the centuries at the cities, the peoples, the regions of the world till the end of time, and lamented over the lack of evangelical workers, which at times is worse than at other times... (Vol. 43, page 149).

If we look at our pitiable times, we cannot help sharing in the adorable Jesus' Heart's pains for the great lack of people dedicated to the mystical harvest; the Church is impoverished, the souls perish, and the desolation foreseen by Daniel is expanding under the eyes of the shepherds of the Church. All of them experience the lack of priests in the dioceses, cities, and country sides.

A bishop wrote to me that 42 country parishes of his diocese have no priest. Other bishops complain too, some of them more, some less. What about the people? My God, what an abyss of misery!... (Vol. 43, page 150).

And yet, the regions lacking ministers perhaps have innocent children who would feel drawn to ecclesiastical vocation, if they were cultivated in piety and the love of God.

The lack of financial means sometimes prevents the parents from encouraging their children to enter the ecclesiastical status; in this case, the seed of piety instilled by the Lord fails to grow, because the children are not cultivated, or are hired for a quick profit, or the families are indifferent. In short, many are the reasons why so many youths remain in the world to the prejudice of their souls and the souls of others, while they might have become holy priests (*God and Neighbor*, May 1915).

Meanwhile, who saves the new generations? Who breaks the bread of God's word to the children who ask for it, but do not find any? Who teaches the poor youths so much betrayed everywhere? "Let the children come to me" (Mc. 10, 14), said Jesus Christ. But, who lets the children go to Jesus? Perhaps the philanthropic societies? Or the civil colleges? Or the protestants? These plunged in everywhere after the European war as richly hired emissaries. They opened kindergartens - my God! - and schools and colleges and orphanages free of charge in order to get hold of children and unchristianize them. They teach that Jesus Christ founded no Church, that the Church is invisible, that praying to the most holy Mary offends Jesus Christ, that using sacred images is against the commandments, that the Eucharistic Sacrament is not Jesus Christ, and that confession has been fabricated by the priests, etc. etc.? My God, what a ruin for souls!

It is our priestly duty to take care of the coming generations; we cannot generate them to the grace with the holy baptism, and abandon them to the wolves!... But we are very few everywhere! Very few workers...The people did not ask them from the Lord, we ourselves did not; we have neglected the remedy pointed out by Jesus Christ, and we have hundreds of priestless parishes... (Vol. 43, page 155).

Oh! how many youths go astray in their prime of life because no good evangelical worker receives them, showing the way of piety through pious unions, associations, good readings, holy industries, and true zeal. The endangered honesty of common and civil young women perishes, for no minister guides them to the sacraments through untiring preaching, hearing confessions, and teaching; no one helps or shelters the poorest among them through resources of charity. How many beggars are immersed in crass ignorance because no priest teaches and relieves them! Who blesses and legitimates marriages? Who safeguard the virgins who long for the mystical wedding, joining them with the divine spouse? Who assists the dying when they are on the threshold of eternity? Oh, how many sick people languish, dying without confession, viaticum, and extreme unction because no priest is available>

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make their way more and more into the world. Debauchery, bad press, sects, plots, revolutions, misery, and desperation are increasing.

The only effective, vigorous remedy to such a great evil and to the social wounds is to increase the number of the good ministers (Prayer book *Good Workers* page 6).

If we look at the infidels' regions, which are the most extensive, our heart bleeds for the abandoned souls which are of as much value as ours, are redeemed by the adorable blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and are willing to meet the truth. How many thousands of not-baptized children are eaten by animals or are thrown down by wild parents in a river or at the foot of a tree, still gasping! How many thousands of wild people grow brutalized, dying without knowing God and the why of their existence.

All this happens for lack of workers in the mystical harvest, for the missionaries are not enough for the needs of the infidels' regions (Vol. 43, page 150).

In short, today we can repeat our Lord Jesus Christ's words: "There is a large harvest, but few workers" (*Precious Adhesions*, 1901, page 11).

## 9. Who are the workers?

For sure, the priests. The Father writes:

Aren't the priests the new Christs sent to the world as Jesus himself was sent by the Father?... Only the priesthood is able both to destroy the kingdom of sin and to change the face of the earth. Its power is unlike the worldly power; it is a divine force, a miraculous secret attracting hearts and making the contrary powers, terrestrial and hellish, impotent. Nineteen centuries of Christianity show and strengthen this truth evidently. Without the priesthood's divine efficacy it is impossible to explain both the supreme prodigy of the apostles, who regenerated humankind through the cross' foolishness, and the wonders that the apostolic men worked to support the Church and save souls (Prayer for "Good workers," page 7).

The Father acknowledges that good workers are also outside the clergy:

Also the Catholic laity is a fountain of innumerable workers; but, how could the Catholic laity exist without the priesthood which creates it directly or indirectly? And the sacred virgins, who commit themselves to the spiritual and temporal beneficence of the neighbor, are also daughters of the Catholic priesthood (Miraculous Secret, 1907, page 135).

In another place the Father touches upon the source of the lay apostolate which is associated with the priesthood:

There are apostles of charitable works who are not priests; but they receive the grace of working the good at the foot of the altar, where the priest has immolated the divine victim, depositing him in the tabernacle. The most holy Eucharist communicates the priceless fecundity of all good works to the priesthood, and through the priests to the faithful (Vol. 45, page 502).

The Father's idea widens:

The divine word is always a sublime synthesis which holds innumerable mysteries, spreading manifold teachings to us. The divine Rogate ergo must be considered not only in relation to the priests who are raised by the supreme vocations obtained by the obedience to the divine command, but also in relation to the persons that God raises for the good of his Church and for the souls (Vol. 43, page 157). Asking workers for the holy Church from the Lord means first to ask priests according to his heart, and second, zealous Religious and lay people, who full of the spirit of God commit themselves to the salvation of souls (Vol. 2, page 144). As some persons sow and others harvest, some people water the blooming seed with their tears and others come home happy with the reaped sheaves, some separate wheat from straw and others keep it in the barns and others distribute it, so several agents work for the eternal salvation of the souls in the social classes.

The first agents are the princes of the nations, the kings, the statesmen, and the government or administration high officers, who are abler to cooperate with the Church and the Catholic priesthood for the salvation of the souls. Oh, how much the culture of the souls' mystical harvest depends on those who are in power ! The Catholic, pious rulers who are children of the holy Church, fearing, loving God, and humbly submitting themselves to Jesus Christ's Vicar, are the religion's right hand because they are able to do a very great good in the mystical field of the souls' harvest... Therefore, when they want to carry out that great command of Jesus' Heart's divine zeal by praying to win good workers to the holy Church, they have to put the special intention to win rulers according to God's will.

Good workers of the mystical harvest are also the educators, because education implies the most holy Heart of Jesus' interests. Plenty of bad educators are the scourge, the hurricane, the storm, the tornado, which overthrows, upsets, and engulfs the earth ! Bad educators are the atheistical

or miscreant or dishonest teachers; poor the pupils who have such teachers>

Obedience to the divine Rogate also implies the duty to ask the divine goodness for sending out teachers, educators, and directors of the institutes who are believers, church-goers, and God-fearing; they can teach the mind and educate the heart of their pupils.

This prayer also helps the parents as those who handle the great harvest of the new generations; through this prayer they receive enlightenment and grace from God, edify their children, keep them away from dangers, educate them in a holy manner, and present them to God in compliance with their mission.

But, how few are the parents such as these, how often house and family are a dreadful enemy of the human being ! (Vol. 43, page 158).

The Father's words foresee the Second Vatican Council's decree on the apostolate of laity.

## **10. All of them are brought about by the prayer**

Meanwhile the workers are very few. Do we have a remedy for that? The Father's answer is:

Our Lord pointed to a great, universal remedy by saying: "Pray, **THEREFORE**, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest." This supreme, infallible remedy is tied to prayer. We called this remedy infallible because our Lord cannot be mistaken; if he pointed to prayer as to a remedy, it means that the prayer will be heard, otherwise he would have not recommended it. It is as though he had said: if you ask me for workers for the souls' harvest, I will give them. But, it also means: if you do not ask me for them, you will not have as many good workers as you need (Vol. 43, page 149).

The Father is eager for stressing the following point: the priesthood cannot die in the Church, because the Church would stop existing:

To tell the truth, the good works of the elects, the worship of God, the Church and the faithful's universal prayers earned the kingdom of God and its justice through Jesus Christ's and the most holy Virgin's merits and prayers; hence, the mystical harvest has seen evangelical workers that were like angels of heaven, almost divine beings, wonder of heroism and holiness. Who could deny that? How many are the ministers of God shining in the clergy? How many are the luminaries of science and holiness? It would be a big mistake saying that our Lord Jesus Christ said needlessly: "Pray, therefore, etc.," and that obeying perfectly this divine command does not attain more and holier workers to the mystical harvest (Vol. 3, page 59).

The faithful must understand that the greatest mercy God may have on the people or a city is his sending out elect priests, as he did with his only Son. Jesus said to his disciples: "As the Father sent me, so I send you" (Jn. 20, 21). Vice versa, the greatest punishment God may give is depriving the people of his ministers, or better yet, of the priests according to his heart. The faithful must understand this duty, accustoming themselves to pray that the Lord send out the priests to catechize, to administer the sacraments, and to guide the people to eternal life (Precious Adhesions, 1919, page 9).

When God sends out the priests according to his heart to the Church and the peoples, who can value the great good coming out of that? Well, if Jesus Christ said: "Pray to the owner of the harvest," it means that he absolutely wants us to pray, and he will hear this prayer infallibly; therefore, the more this prayer is spread, the more the Church will be endowed with elect and holy ministers. Being the priests the light of the world and the salt of the earth, they will be the salvation for all (Vol. 2, page 143).

## **11. God wants it !**

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The Father writes:

If both the prayer to win priests according to God and the works to propagate this prayer were coming from a simple inspiration and from the natural consideration of its utility, all the peoples should preferably answer such an advertisement for its high aim.

We know instead that Jesus Christ himself commanded this universal prayer of the highest importance (Vol. 43, page 153). We find remarkable that Saint Luke reports Jesus Christ's divine exhortation by using the verb in the imperfect tense, which means *used to say*, pointing out how insistently Jesus inculcated it ("Special issue," page 14). Since our Lord Jesus Christ commanded this prayer, he himself will grant it. Such a consideration is very comforting; therefore, the more this prayer is spread and is made general, the more the peoples and the nations will be provided with good evangelical workers.

Thus, the gospel will be preached all over the world, and will prepare the times when there will be one flock and one shepherd (*Precious Adhesions*, 1901, page 38).

Our divine Savior's example evidently shows the importance of this prayer he suggested almost by commanding. When he was about to call the first ministers of the new law of grace, those who were destined to be the first fecund seed of the Catholic priesthood, what did he do? Which means did he choose to form the twelve apostles' vocation? Before seeking and calling them, he retired on the mountain and prayed! He prayed *on the mountain* to make his ardent prayer ascend to the Father directly; prayed *in the night* so that no human approach distract him from the enterprise he was communicating with the Father; prayed all night long in order to implore the Father by sacrifice; prayed all night long, shedding tears and crying to be heard by the Father *because of his reverence!* Still soaked with tears and perspiration, as soon as he came down from the mountain he called the apostles to make them the first-fruits of his eternal priesthood. What a great teaching he gave us to make us understand how much we must pray to obtain so great a grace (Vol. 3, page 58).

This way he taught us that so great a mercy, mother and origin of other mercies, cannot be obtained without long prayers> It cannot be otherwise: before our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world, he wanted the people to pray and long for him. The priests are the new Christs: we must desire and implore them from the Lord (Vol. 45, page 504).

"His mother treasured all these things in her heart" (Lk. 2, 51). Did Mary keep her divine son's words idle in her heart, as the lazy servant did with the money? Not at all. She untiringly did what her son commanded, never eating the Eucharistic bread idly, but winning the altar's ministers with her prayer from then on.

We think that the apostles did the same. When the Holy Spirit reminded them what Jesus had said and commanded, how they obeyed zealously>

Also Alapide thinks so when he explains the above passages from Saint Matthew and Saint Luke. In fact, before joining the new apostle



Matthias to the Sacred College by drawing lots, the apostles prayed" (Act. 1, 24). (Vol. 43, page 30).

The holy Church makes us repeat in the apostles' preface the following beautiful, remarkable words: "It is truly worthy, right, convenient, and beneficial that we pray insistently, O Lord eternal shepherd, not to abandon your flock."

Always moved by the Holy Spirit, the Church disposes the Ember days in the quarterly three day period of prayer and fasting, which are destined to the sacred ordinations, to ask good workers for the spiritual more than the material harvest.

But that passed almost unnoticed, and the great command of Jesus Christ has not been fulfilled.

And yet, some voices during the centuries called the attention of people to that divine command. Saint Hilary says: "God gives us this gift through prayer." In his fervent prayer to the Most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, Saint Albert the Great exclaims: 'O Most Precious Blood, we adore you in the holy Eucharist where you stay substantially... Please pour out on the Church, fecundate her with the saints, enrich her with angelical souls like flowers in the Father's celestial garden to spread their gentle fragrance all over the world.' Faber commented this passage of the gospel in his work *Conciones*, quoting Saint Jerome (*Book 2 on the letter to the Galathians*): "Let us pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to harvest, to reap the Christian people's ears of grain which are prepared for the Church's future bread, and to gather them in the granary, never decaying."

Also Sacy in his comment on the gospel says: "The evangelical workers' mission must be the effect of the Church's prayer." Blessed Vincent Pallotti published a brief prayer which begins with: "For the sacred mysteries of the human redemption, send, O Lord, workers in your harvest." And Saint Louis M. Grignion de Monfort wrote a long, sublime prayer to bend divine goodness to grant such a matchless mercy.

In the biography of the Blessed Father Gennaro M. Sarnelly written by Father Dumartier (translated by Father Bozzatra, Festa publisher, page 104), we read a letter he addressed to a Religious, from which we quote: "In the gospel the Lord says to his disciples: 'My beloved, look around, see the nations of the world, see how many souls are ready for the harvest: the harvest is abundant, but the workers are few; pray to the Lord of the harvest that he will send out the workers to his harvest.' All of you say often this ejaculatory prayer: 'Lord of the harvest, Lord of the harvest, Lord of the harvest, send out workers to your harvest.' Please join this prayer to the merits of Jesus Christ's Most Precious Blood and to his zeal for the glory of the Father and the salvation of souls. Almighty God, creator of the souls, send out numerous workers to gather in your harvest. We commend the souls, who are so dear to you" (Vol. 3, page 57). We, however, recognize that these were isolated voices.

## 12. Why the prayer?

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The Father makes and answers a question:

If the harvest belongs to God, how is it that we must pray God to send out workers to his harvest? The reason is that God has disposed to do everything for our salvation through our prayer; for an unfathomable mystery, God's all-powerful will, to be fulfilled, needs the human being's frail will. God cannot gather the harvest of the souls in order to save them, if they do not pray, if they do not want to pray.

Praying to the owner of the harvest is also necessary because the sending out of the workers to the harvest as well as the abundant gathering are of utility to all people, whose salvation we must solicit and promote mutually through prayer.(4)

What institution of faith and charity can be conceived without the Catholic priesthood? Aren't the priests the new Christs sent to the world as Jesus himself was sent by the Father? Toiling for any good work is good, but entreating the Lord to send out numerous ministers is very good, because the Lord wants it. As a matter of fact, he sends them by raising here and there his elects to the holy ministry through a gentle, but strong vocation, which attracts and transfers people from the world to the holy tabernacles. Who is able to resist his powerful call? Vocations such as these we ask by obeying the divine command: Rogate ergo... That makes a great deal of difference between the priests called by an omnipotent vocation and the ones who are brought about by human industries and labor (S.C. Vol. 10, page 220).

We also remark that since our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us to pray for good priests, the labor of the bishops along with the seminaries' directors only reaches an artificial culture of priests, if such a command is neglected. The Church will have half-priestly vocations for lack of grace, since only the most extensive obedience to that command through the most extensive, interested prayer to win priests according to God may gain such a grace. Oh ! only the Powerful who is able to rouse descendants to Abraham from the rocks, can raise such priests (Lk. 3, 8). (Precious Adhesions, 1919, page 9).

Like efficacious grace, vocations come from high; if we neglect the command of our Lord Jesus Christ to pray, vocations will not come, nor will we achieve the effects of so many works and culture. In fact, we

are unable to infuse efficacious, fervent vocations; only the Church's universal, fervent prayer is able to do it. If based on prayer, the bishops' work in the seminaries may become immensely useful and efficacious; the same may occur in the religious orders. To conclude, we insist on saying that the remedy is prayer. By making no use of it, we slight it, and we will suffer the consequences from lack of good vocations (Vol. 29, page 167).

## 13. Prayer and action

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The Father does not undervalue the importance and necessity of the action in recruiting and forming the priests, but he demands each element be given the due attention: first the prayer, and second the action, which should be the outcome of the prayer. He writes:

I agree that we cannot provide the Church with priests by only praying, because action is necessary. The institutes of formation for the ministers are as many as the religious orders, many are the marvelous seminaries, and the nascent religious institutes. But, what does it mean? What use is it without the prayer? "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Ps. 127, 1). "Every worthwhile gift, every genuine benefit comes from above, descending from the Father of the heavenly luminaries" (James, 1, 17).

If we want good ministers, holy vocations to the mystical harvest, prayer is necessary; we must obey that divine word (Vol. 45, page 503).

The association of prayer and action is explained by the Father this way:

We must pray and work to win good workers to the holy Church. When we ask God for a favor, we have to cooperate in order to reach it more easily. For instance, if we pray for the conversion of sinners, our prayer is more efficacious and the conversion is easier if we add our means and work to convert sinners.

Likewise, we must not be satisfied by only wishing and praying to win good workers to the holy Church, but we must add means and work to achieve them. Oh, how all things are fast bound to each other ! (S.C. Vol. 5, page 8).

How is it that priests sometimes abound, while their priestly work

is lacking? And yet, the work of priestly formation in the Church is very active. Both dioceses and religious orders have plenty of seminaries for youths along with blooming novitiates. For that reason we make a point of Providence wanting action and prayer combined to produce their effect. Praying to the Lord that he will send out good workers to the holy Church without working according to our duty and possibility to reach such a goal is a vain prayer, it is like a "noisy gong or a clanging bell" (1 Cor. 13, 1). Vice versa, working for the priestly formation without praying is a useless work, "wasting its punches" (1 Cor. 9, 26). Aiming at forming priests without asking them from the Lord is cultivating priests artificially (Vol. 3, page 60).

Most, or many youth enter the seminary without a true vocation, and among those who become priests the ones with strong vocation are rare, for our work is unable to infuse the effective, fervent vocation in the spirits; it can only come down from the Holy Spirit. But, it cannot be obtained without resorting to the prayer commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ. The unanimous, fervent prayer of the holy Church to obtain effective, holy vocations can make the work of the bishops in the seminaries profitable and very effective.

The same comes true in the religious orders (Vol. 43, page 151).

Furthermore, the prayer is also able to achieve the material means for the training of the vocations:

When the Rogate prayer becomes popular, it will make pious and eminent persons understand the great moment of such a prayer and the great moment of having elect priests according to God, moving them to grant the means necessary to their education and success. Thus, the new clergy will be the outcome of prayer and action (Vol. 43, page 156).

The spreading of this divine prayer helps the faithful in many ways, opening their minds to understand the priesthood's importance and what is related to it. The practice of this prayer brings about help to the sacred vocations, because by desiring and asking evangelical workers from the Lord, people are touched and provide the means to train them> (S.C. Vol. 10, page 210).

## 14. The Rogate and the clergy's sanctification

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The Father specifies the difference between the prayer to *obtain vocations* and the prayer for the *clergy's sanctification*. The latter is very good, but the former is more radical.

We, however, remark that praying directly and explicitly for new, strong, holy, and powerful vocations is more beneficial and more related to the divine exhortation or command, because we ask the most holy Heart of Jesus to form his saints. While explaining this saying of our Lord Jesus Christ, Alapide notes that when God hears this prayer, all the workers he sends to the holy Church are saints (Vol. 43, page 156).

With the *Rogate ergo* Jesus Christ pledged to send to us men endowed with a divine character, raised by God as a wonder as if they were suddenly raised up from the stones. God is able to do so, but he won't, if we do not pray. On the contrary, he pledged to do so, when we ask him for it (Vol. 3, page 61).

The Father develops these ideas:

The prayers the religious communities say by rule, not by vow, for the sanctification of the clergy do not concern directly numerous, holy vocations, but the present clergy's sanctification. Surely, this intention is holy, most holy, and those who say this prayer gain merits, but the results of this prayer are scarce because they face the human will which opposes the divine grace; this appears evident in the consecrated persons who do not improve their holiness.

On the contrary, the prayer or rogation, which is based on the Rogate commanded by Jesus Christ, regards directly the sending out of the workers to his harvest. The holy vocations of new priests are contained in the sending out, because it is God's promise to hear such a prayer. He will raise persons favorably disposed, elected youth who are dear to his Heart. He can infuse in them the powerful breath of holy vocation which comes from the Holy Spirit. This call is irresistible because of the Holy Spirit operating a divine, impulsive force in the person who is called to the divine service and sacrifice; still remaining free, the person is drawn to answer the call and has no quiet, no peace until he accepts and acts upon the powerful impulse.

These are the true called, the priests the Holy Spirit formed on the

ground of the divine prayer commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ: "*Pray, therefore...*"

In another letter to the Blessed Guido M. Conforti, our padre defines the nature of the *Rogate* prayer,

which is different from the prayers aiming at the sanctification of the clergy. These prayers are excellent; but Your Excellence know very well which grace is needed to rouse again an unrestrained minister of the Lord and to push him again in the way of sanctification !... Answering, however, the divine command is different ! Here, the matter is vocation from the Holy Spirit, who transformed the shy, insecure apostles into powerful vocations after ten days of prayer. God is having such vocations in his hands, but he is expecting that the prayer commanded by him snatches them out of his hands to come down in the hearts well prepared. Who knows how many hundreds of thousands of vocations the Lord keeps in store? But, how can people claim to have them without praying, while God commands us to pray for it? (Vol. 29, page 163).

## **15. The merit of the Rogationist prayer**

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To foster the zeal of those who accept the divine command, the Father says:

Let us consider how many merits the people acquire when they say such a prayer.

They obtain from God what they ask for. For instance, the Lord will send out a powerful vocation to an elect on earth, because of the assiduous, humble prayer of someone. A person will hear in his soul: "*Follow me !*" Still remaining free, the people cannot oppose God's voice; therefore, the chosen one enters the sanctuary, is endowed with understanding and spirit, is lighted with zeal for the sacred ministry, and

becomes an apostle or a missionary or a pastor or a doctor or a preacher or a savior of souls. He immolates the divine victim every day; through the divine office he waits between the vestibule and the altar, spreads Christ's presence, edifies the Church; he is different from a common human being. Who knows the good he produces to the world by his ministry? Such good will increase indefinitely until the end of the time.

God will reward this elect worker with ineffable prizes, but also the person who obtained that vocation by praying: "Owner of the harvest, owner of the harvest, send workers to your harvest" will share those prizes.

Saint Vincent de Paul said: "No work can be equal to the formation of one priest"; therefore, anyone who is able to help the formation of priests has to do it with a will; but to win priests according to God, let us pray, let us pray, let us make other people pray the Lord to send them out ! *Rogate* ! Pray, says the Lord to everyone. Let us pray, therefore. May this prayer to obtain the good workers to the holy Church become a *universal rogation*, directed to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the center of the man-God's zeal, from which came the command: *Rogate* ! (Vol. 3, page 61).

## 16. Painful mystery !

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The Father cannot help manifesting his astonishment at how this divine word fell into oblivion during the centuries.

The peoples did not pay attention to this divine command, and have neglected it completely (Vol. 3, page 59).

Oh ! I think that this great remedy was almost forgotten, nor was it used ! It was a punishment to the human beings who undeserved it > (Vol. 29, page 166). To tell the truth, this word of the gospel was given little attention (Vol. 37, page 123). Unfortunately, it is a painful mystery that this word has been given no attention (Vol. 3, page 63). It remained a concealed mystery, because it was not given due attention (Ibid. page 57). For about 20 centuries -this is the truth- the great word, which is a clear, repeated command of our Lord Jesus Christ, remained as buried or unnoticed in the pages of the holy gospel... God's inexplicable mysteries > Perhaps God postponed the manifestation of this mystery, which, however, is so clear, to our times, when religion is deserted, the cities and the peoples are lacking the best means of salvation (*Precious Adhesions*,

1919, page 7). A Servant of God once asked: "Lord, why don't you send numerous priests according to your Heart to the holy Church?" Jesus is said to have answered: "Because people do not ask enough for them !" (Ibid. page 9).

The Father imagines our Lord talking with a person, blaming how people forgot that divine word, and exhorting her to be zealous for spreading it.

Oh ! how little attention they paid to my command and wish ! This is the motive the Church's fields are desert and lacking workers, while the wheat is being lost> Today more than ever my Church needs ministers according to my heart, but justice disputes with my mercy because of the men's sins> Daughter, pray continuously and ask ardently from my divine heart the workers for the harvest. See how many souls perish, because no priest instructs or helps them, guiding them to my heart> The blood I shed for the salvation of souls is dispersed and fruitless, because no one applies it to their salvation.

The light of the world disappeared, the salt of the earth failed !

Daughter, pray and ask saints, saints, saints for the Church, the cities, the peoples. My heart cannot resist the impulse of my infinite kindness, which wants all people saved. Knock at the door of my heart so that I open it and send out numerous, elect workers into the mystical harvest.

My most holy Mother shares with me the burning ardor and the zeal for filling the Church with holy souls and priests according to my heart; the most pleasant favor you can do, daughter, is praying to me, to my sweetest Mother, to the angels and the saints to obtain this grace of the graces, this mercy of the mercies.

It is time to spread my divine command in the Church and form *a never-ending rogation* of many hearts and souls, through which the heavens will open, pouring the just on the earth (Vol. 2, page 149).

As we have said, God sent our founder on the earth to be the *apostle of this rogation*: let us look at him working in this apostolate.



## Notes

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(1) Our general chapter of 1968 treated the Father's charism in the Declaration about the order's nature and aim (*Declarations and Decrees*, pages 31-66).

(2) We wrote at great length about the sorrowful conditions of the clergy in Italy and Messina in our Bulletin ("Messina of the Father," no. 148-151, year 1969-70).

(3) The great church of Saint John of Malta was on the place of the modern prefecture. The present church corresponds to the apse of the old church destroyed by the 1908 earthquake. There people honor the human remains of Saint Placid and the martyrs of Messina.

(4) These considerations are taken from the *Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* by Rodolfo Certosino. (Vol. 1, ch. 133).



# 5.

## "WITH THE ROGATE IN THE ROGATE FROM THE ROGATE"

1. The first idea of the religious communities
2. ROGATE in the institution
3. Program of the institution
4. Leading concept
5. First prayer to obtain good workers
6. The religious congregations
7. External activity of the congregations
8. "Truly a divine mission"
9. Titles of the two congregations
10. Prayer book for the good workers
11. Sacred Alliance of priests for vocations
12. Pious Union of the Evangelical Rogation
13. To reach the Pope
14. The Rogationist verse
15. Three advertisements
16. Eucharistic congresses
17. Always ROGATE
18. To Msgr. Conforti
19. A more terrible punishment
20. The most beautiful and high mission
21. Notes

# 1. First idea of the religious communities

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We know what the divine command meant to the Father; let us now see how *he devoted himself to it*. As a layman and as a cleric he cultivated the prayer for the good workers. Listen to him:

When he became a priest, he deemed that the foundation of a male and a female order that would commit themselves by vow of obedience to the command of Jesus: "Pray, therefore,..." would please the Heart of Jesus and the most holy Virgin, besides being a fountain of great benefits.

The orders should be committed to the following three concerns:

1. To pray every day to the adorable Heart of Jesus, the most holy Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, the angels, and the saints so as to win numerous holy priests and workers for the holy Church, for the people and the nations of the world, and to win extraordinary holy vocations for the seminaries, the religious orders, and the dioceses.

2. To widely spread the spirit of this prayer all over the world in honor and in compliance with the divine command.

3. To be workers of the mystical harvest for the spiritual and temporal good of the people within the sphere of their activity.

Following this fixed idea the poor priest examined the religious communities and the religious orders existing in the Church, as well as those that were being formed; he was amazed that no religious order had picked up that divine word from the mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ; that command had almost passed unnoticed.

After reflecting on the gospel he reasoned that these words are words of Jesus Christ and of supreme importance; they are a command of his divine Heart's zeal... then that priest - may God

forgive his daring - began forming the two religious orders that are bound by vow to carry out the divine command through the three concerns mentioned above.

Several years have passed since he began forming these orders (Vol. 2, page 144).

The Father's writing dates back to about 1905, when the institute and its works were quite consolidated. Now we point out the expression *may God forgive his daring*, which reveals a state of his spirit?

The Father did not start his institutions after planning an accurate program, but he followed Providence, which usually reveals its designs through the circumstances. We know the circumstances that induced him to devote himself to healing the Avignone Quarter, whose name was even unknown to him. Writing to Father Cusmano on August 7, 1884, the Father points out: "It is more than six years since I have started some institutions, almost without understanding how I have involved myself in them" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 33). He is talking about the charitable institutions without making any reference to the religious orders, to which he didn't feel called. As a matter of fact, he was persistently asking heaven to send an elect to guide the institutions and the mission of the *Rogate* so that he might join the Carmelite Fathers and live under the protection of Our Lady of Carmel. We read in his notes: "On December 27, 1893, Wednesday, feast of Saint John the Evangelist, after saying mass I felt a joyful increasing desire of becoming a Discalced Carmelite after the inauguration and the handing over of my institution to an elect person" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 36).

It was humility which impelled him to such a decision, because he felt himself not qualified for the mission of his institutions, nor he dared to call himself a founder. He writes: "God did not raise the founder, his right hand man worthy of the divine word and of the order having that divine word as its heraldry, its mission, its vow, and its operations.

Indeed, this enterprise of a supreme importance requires one of the founders raised by God for the foundation of the religious orders. O God's unfathomable mysteries! O God's various works! The formation of the two communities had no founder, since the priest who began working is only the *starter*. We expected for a long time a founder from Providence, a fit instrument of God. But, since God's works vary in their proceeding, the founder did not come" (Vol. 2, page 147). The starting of that foundation seemed very daring to the Father, who felt compelled to ask God for forgiveness...

## 2. ROGATE in the institution

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To understand how the evangelical command influenced the life of the institution, let us hear the Father:

Both institutes are *born of, in, and from Rogate*; they have almost received these ardent words from the divine teacher's adorable lips, feel themselves intimately penetrated by the Rogate, have absorbed it as the hope of their existence in Jesus and in his longing for the Father's glory along with the salvation of the souls (R.A. page 392).

The great word of the gospel, -this idea was a child of a greater, sublime idea, that the Spirit, who blows wherever he wishes, instilled into the soul of a spiritual youth many years before the pious institute's birth.- **This evangelical revelation, this divine idea**, - abating it is not humility - preceded and escorted the poor priest starter in his hard enterprise. This idea became the pious institute's foundation, as the key that opened some treasure of divine mercies and the secret of the divine favors we desired so much (*Precious Adhesions*, 1919, page 7).

## 3. Program of the institution

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Since we know the institute's origin and development, let us look into the spirit which animated it.

As soon as the Father entered the Avignone Quarter, he had to face the inhabitants' jumble. That was the case to recall the following words of the gospel: "Those unhappy persons were living like sheep without a shepherd... So Jesus said to his disciples, 'There is a large harvest, but few workers

to gather it in... Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 207). Writes the Father:

The priest who knew this divine secret started the pious institute in that enclosure of slums, in that corner of Messina we mentioned above, giving the pious enterprise the chief program of practicing perfectly the divine command of Jesus' Heart's divine zeal, "Pray, therefore..." He gave those abandoned poor, who really formed a flock without a shepherd, the rule to pray in common to the owner of the harvest.

Listening to the tender voice of those children of the poor praying the Evangelical Rogation to win good workers to the holy Church was wonderful; from that pitiable place the prayer raised to heaven, up to the throne of the One who "sees the sky and earth" (Ps. 113, 6) and "listens to the wants of the humble" (Ps. 10, 17).

While that common folk was catechized and children were educated and trained in arts and crafts, the prayer to win favors from the adorable Hearts of Jesus and Mary ascended to heaven. We taught the children by saying: "My dear, we have gathered you for your salvation, but you see how many obstacles hinder both formation and steadiness of these institutions; we, however, have to trust, to serve God, to love Jesus, and to pray because we will obtain everything through humble, confident, and perseverant prayer." As a matter of fact, prayer was the nascent institution's continuous breath. Sometimes we prayed even in the night, keeping vigils (*Precious Adhesions*, 1919, page 8).

## 4. Leading concept

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The Father continues saying:

But I was continuously absorbed in the word of the gospel since the origin of this pious institution.

I thought: what is the meaning of the few orphans who are saved, the few poor who are evangelized, compared with the millions and millions of people who get lost and are abandoned like sheep without a shepherd? I looked at my poor means, at the smallest sphere of my activity, and sought for a solution. I found a wide, unlimited outlet in the adorable words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest." I seemed to have found the secret of all good works and of the salvation of all souls.

Through this predominant idea, I considered this institute not simply as a charitable institution aiming at saving some orphans and poor, but aiming at a greater and wider goal: the divine glory, salvation of souls, and the good of the whole Church. Both the aim of picking up from the most holy mouth of Jesus Christ the command of his divine Heart: **'Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest'** and the zeal for fulfilling it in the best way **for the greater consolation of the Heart of Jesus** form the goal of this institute.

Truly, the spirit of God blows wherever it wishes (Jn. 3, 8); he chose what the world looks down on, and despises, and thinks is nothing, in order to destroy what the world thinks is important. This means that no one can boast in God's presence (Cor. 1, 28-29)>

Divine mercy "who sees the sky and earth" (Ps. 113, 6) liked to entrust this pious institute of poor and orphans with this great treasure, a precious seed, a grain of mustard, which may spread all over the Church with the blessing of the Lord. Thus, the Lord liked to make the children and the youths, the orphans and the poor of this pious institute understand the importance of this divine word: "Pray, therefore," etc.

The spirit of this prayer became quickly the spirit of this pious institute and formed its character, its aim, and its practice (S.C.Vol. 7, page 35).

## **5. First prayer to obtain good workers**

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They began saying this prayer since the very origin of the community.

When the Father opened the chapel at Avignone, he had the divine command *Rogate dominum messis* standing out in the facade. On February 19, 1885, he wrote to Father Cusmano: "I am seeing to it that the spirit and the life



of the institute be the spirit of prayer for the interests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that is to say, the prayer to obtain good workers to the holy Church" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 35).

Then he wrote a fervent petition to the most holy Heart of Jesus for his communities and the faithful. He thought that if a renowned institute should take the initiative to spread this prayer, it would achieve good results; for this reason he appealed to the Salesian Fathers through Don Rua, inviting them to take over both the printing and the advertisement; Don Rua, however, was unable to accept.

The Father printed the prayer in his typography in Messina. (Typ. Avignone Quarter, 1885).

Through this publication, the *Rogate* began its journey into the world from the Avignone Quarter.

In this petition to the most holy Heart of Jesus, the Father gives the most holy Virgin the title "Mother of the Church" about 80 years ahead of Pope Paul VI, who proclaimed in the Second Vatican Council: "Supreme Owner of the Mystical Field, hear us for the sake of the most holy Mary, your Mother and Mother of the Church."

## 6. The religious congregations

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The charitable institution brought about the foundation of the two religious orders, whose hardships and fights have come to our knowledge; we recall them to understand their relation to the *Rogate*. If such a prayer was cultivated fervently in the charitable institution, at a greater reason it ought to make itself pre-eminent in the religious orders.

Says the Father:

It was the turn of the two little religious communities leading the male and the female orphanages to become masters of this sacred patrimony of the Pious Institute of the Poor of the Heart of Jesus, to be trustees and guardians, to form the center of this important religious practice, and to become propagators of it. As in any charitable institution, the inmates who succeed each other form the object, not the institute;

the institute instead resides in those who are committed to the mission, who are united by the bond of religious profession through a name, a rule, and the sacred garb (S.C. Vol. 10, page 209).

Imploring the approval of "The Little Poor of the Heart of Jesus" through a letter of October 28, 1887, the Father reminds Archbishop Guarino of their origin and aim. He repeats an idea we have read at the beginning of this chapter:

It would be pleasant to God and beneficial to the Church if virgin souls gathered joyfully in the bond of charity lifted up their wails like doves, imploring from God good workers to the holy Church with fervent and perseverant prayer; this spirit of prayer should form the character and the emblem of their institute. Since I began gathering abandoned orphans to lead them to piety, I strove to make them understand the word of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Pray, therefore..."

Then he reminds the taking of the garb of the four novices bearing on their chest the emblem of the *Rogate*; besides the promises of chastity, obedience, and poverty they made the promise of "praying the divine mercy to send out good workers to the holy Church." These promises should turn to vows in the religious profession (S.C. Vol. 5, page 313).

## **7. External activity of the congregation**

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The Father writes that the activity of the congregations derives legitimately and immediately from the *Rogate*:

That the two orders are concerned with works of charity and beneficence derives legitimately and immediately from the mission of the vocation prayer: in fact, if they pray continuously to win the good workers

to the holy Church, if they follow the wish of the most holy Heart of Jesus through his divine command, much greater is the reason they have to strive to be good workers themselves. The fulfillment of the fourth vow not only engages them to this continuous prayer, but also binds them to spread its spirit everywhere, which they do by educating orphans and evangelizing the poor, by teaching them that the most desirable grace is to obey the command of the most holy Heart of Jesus through the practice of the Evangelical Rogation (S.C. Vol. 10, page 209).

Writing to his children, he presents the *Rogate* of Jesus as a Decalogue which they pledge to observe:

Committed to each word of this mystical Decalogue (it is made of ten words: *Rogate - ergo - dominum - messis - ut - mittat - operarios - in - messem - suam*), we should feel ashamed to ask God and the most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary for good workers to the mystical harvest of the souls, if we ourselves were not striving with all our soul, heart, mind, and body to be good workers with God's help, our good will, and pure intention. The divine words asking for workers to the immense harvest of the souls keep ourselves ready, miserable as we may be, to favor with God's help any charitable, beneficent work, either spiritual or temporal, whenever we may apply our efforts to it ("Notes" by the Father).

## 8. "Truly a divine mission"

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The Father wants his children to feel the beauty of the Rogationist vocation and become worthy of it through holiness of life and untiring zeal for spreading the divine *Rogate*. Such a prayer makes the institute unique and singular in the holy Church, its littleness notwithstanding. In fact, he says:

This least institute can say: "I am black but beautiful." I am black because of the starter who hindered my progress and because of the contradictions surrounding me; but I am beautiful because of the shining reflection of the command of Jesus' divine zeal, the ceaseless wail of the prayer that I am spreading widely everywhere, and the most holy longing for seeing the holy Church rich with workers according to the heart of

God. I am beautiful because of the Sacred Alliance of so many prelates of the holy Church, who bless me copiously, offering me to God during the sacrifice of the mass; at last I am beautiful because of the orphans I am rescuing, and the poor I am feeding and evangelizing (Vol. 37, page 69).

At the beginning of the foundation of the sisters, he writes to the first novices on July 2, 1888:

Jesus will teach you how to fulfill the great mission of winning good workers for the holy Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ is so kind and merciful that he entrusts you, who are humble and poor creatures, with this sacred, sublime task. Really, it is a divine mission! The point is that a miserable little poor creature becomes a mother of innumerable souls; furthermore, she reaches a greater glory by spiritually begetting priests to the holy Church!

I feel myself confused, full of admiration toward divine goodness!... You must *pray* to win the good workers for the holy Church, and work to win them...

My dear daughters, the most beautiful field of perfect, charitable works is open before you. If the good Jesus does not look on my sins, but blesses you, your vocation is formed and the *zeal* is ready, the zeal for the interests of Jesus' Heart who demands prayer to win good workers for the holy Church, which forms the *fourth* vow. "The zeal of your house, God, burns in me like a fire" (John 2, 17). (S.C. Vol. 5, page 7).

As far as the Rogationist is concerned, he acknowledges and proposes:

I will consider these words as addressed to this pious institute's congregants in a particular way and as though the congregants had received them from Jesus Christ's adorable lips. In this spirit, I consider myself fortunate, because I have been called to cultivate this divine word, to which I mean to commit my life. I will often consider the appropriateness of this mission and the vow of obedience to this divine command, to which the institute's members are committed... I will dedicate my life and my intentions to the prayer of the "Evangelical Rogation of the most holy Heart of Jesus"... To make this rogation universal, with the Lord's help I will be ready to meet any sacrifice, even to give up my life (Vol. 44, page 129).

Preaching to the Daughters of Divine Zeal about the *Rogate*, the Father remarks and exhorts:

Two Evangelists have registered these words in the gospel. Thousand of religious orders have devoutly studied the divine book singling out a verse, a saying, a command, a counsel, choosing them as the foundation stone of their rules, but it seems as though our Lord Jesus had concealed that sublime word, that command under his hand, and no one noticed it until our adorable Savior revealed it to the poorest among his creatures. He showed it, made it resound in your ears, had it printed in your heart and on your chest along with his wounded, blazing heart.

Oh! Please profit by such a great and inexpressible predilection. Make use of it incessantly; lift up your imploring hands to heaven and wail so that heaven unfold; pour out the just, and let the earth blossom the "saviors." Wave this sacred banner; the more you raise to the owner of the mystical harvest this prayer that our Lord Jesus Christ commanded, preserved for our times, and entrusted to you, the more the good evangelical workers will increase on earth and the mystical harvest of souls will be saved (Vol. 45, page 399).

The Father draws the conclusions. First: love for the institute.

Let us love our institute; let us give ourselves to it in order to build its spiritual structure... Let us not be disheartened... Let us love the institute and its dear name: **Rogation of Jesus' Heart**. Jesus loves it; he gave us the most beautiful hopes for its future; if we reflect on it, we realize that God wants it !

Even though our institute is small, still its aim and mission are such that belonging to it and sharing in it make us happy> I am not speaking of the poor, nor of the orphans, but of the banner, "Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest..." What a mercy, what a gift> what an honor is our being appointed to pick up, spread, and point out this word to Christianity. It is like saying: behold, people, here is the remedy to all evils> Such a mission is so sublime that I feel like annihilating myself> (S.C. Vol. 6, page 85).

Second: obligation of faithfulness.

My little children! God entrusted a great treasure to us! But, we must fear of being deprived of it, unless we observe well the religious life.

The time has come to spread the command of the Rogate; God entrusted this mission to us. But, we must observe the religious life, lest this mission perish in our hands. What did I say? Will it perish? Not at all! If we do not observe the religious life, we will perish, but the *Rogate* will triumph! God will snatch out of our hands this treasure,

and will give it to others. "He will rent the vineyard out to other tenants, who will give him his share of the harvest at the right time" (Mt. 21, 41). Oh, little children! How can we think of such a misfortune without dying of pain? Oh, we will never become unworthy of so great ineffable mercy. To be worthy of it, however, implies that we must be perfect Religious through the observance of the vows and the rules, because advertisement and pious union are inadequate if we do not belong totally to Jesus, if we do not form an observant community dearest to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary through the practice of the vows and the virtues!

Unless we are men of prayer, mortified, detached, lovers of Jesus and Mary as well as of the cross and sacrifice; unless we are sober in words, obedient, observant, and men of interior life, our writing, printing, and being zealous are useless. But, if we are observant Religious, God will bless the little seed and the vocations will come. Ah, let us renew ourselves, doing our utmost! Let us say "*Now I begin!*" (S.C. Vol. 6, page 90).

Referring to himself with deep humility, he continues saying:

Since the formation of a community mostly depends on the director, I myself should say, "*Now I begin!*" If I don't, please pray that I be put aside as a useless instrument, and the Lord entrust you to one who edifies you, preserving the very holy mission that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph give you by saying: "*Rogate ergo...*" (Ibid. Page 90). May the Lord help us to take advantage of the Father's teaching!

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## 9. Titles of the two congregations

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Let us see how the Father executed the program.

First of all, the aim of the congregations should appear from the titles themselves. In the early times, the Father did not concern himself with that, because saving the Avignone Quarter people spiritually and materially was an emergency; at the proper time he would have seen to the permanent, formal titles. The first sisters' title was: "The Little Poor of the Heart of Jesus"; the citizens, however, called them: "Canon

Di Francia's Sisters." Likewise, our clerics who attended the lectures at the diocesan seminary were called "Canon Di Francia's Clerics." At its beginning, on May 6, 1900, the male religious community was called "Congregation of the Regular Clerics Oblates of the Heart of Jesus."

The Father disliked these provisional titles, and searched for other ones which corresponded to his predominant idea of the *Rogate*, which was pervading the spirit of the nascent communities. Says he: "A name is of great importance for both an institution and its people. How many names have come directly from heaven? How many names have been given by Providence?..."

For many years we have prayed to God, the Father of light. We have asked pious souls to pray; we have said various masses to the souls in Purgatory for the naming..." (S.C. Vol. 10, page 109).

January 1901 was dedicated to the most holy Name of Jesus for being enlightened about the titles; the titles crossed the Father's mind on the last day of the month, during the mass, but he kept them secret. The same year, while in Rome, the Father submitted the topic to cardinals and officers of the Sacred Congregations, who approved his plan. On September 14, 1901, triumph of the cross, he received the approval from Msgr. D'Arrigo, Archbishop of Messina, and the following day, Sunday 15, feast of the most holy Name of Mary, he solemnly proclaimed the titles before the communities.

These are the permanent, formal titles related to the *Rogate*:

1. The prayer to win good workers to the Church was called "Evangelical Rogation" from the gospel word *ROGATE*.

2. The religious institute was called "The Institute of the Evangelical Rogation."

3. The Religious of the congregation are called "Rogationist Fathers of the Heart of Jesus," or simply "The Rogationists."

Also the name of the sisters springs ingeniously from the *Rogate*. Listen to the Father:

If we consider these divine words, we see that they are a manifestation of the divine zeal of the heart of Jesus, who repeated them many times according to Saint Luke's phrase, "*he used to say*" (Lk. 10, 2). It is not "*he said*," but rather, "*he used to say*" indicating habitual action meaning that the divine zeal never got tired of urging man to pray for this goal. Given all this, the Evangelical Rogation can be paraphrased as the command of the divine zeal.

4. Consequently, the sisters' house is called the "Institute of Divine Zeal."

5. The sisters are called "Daughters of the Divine Zeal of the Heart of Jesus," or simply "Daughters of Divine Zeal" (Ibid. page III).

The institution along with the two orders, the orphanages, and the activities was commonly called by us in those times: "The Pious Institution of the Interests of Jesus' Heart's," because it is concerned with the interests of Jesus, chiefly with obtaining good workers to the holy Church.

## **10. Prayer book for the good workers**

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Let us see how this spirit of prayer is practiced in the communities.

Through the intercession of the most holy Mary, the communities offer to the Lord all good works, as well as the practice of piety, faith, and religion with the intent of obtaining numerous, holy workers to the holy Church. They start and close the acts in common by saying the ejaculatory prayer: "Send, O Lord, holy apostles to your Church."

There are more daily prayers for this purpose. The Father writes:

Besides the prayer to the most holy Heart of Jesus, I wrote another one to **the Immaculate Heart of Mary** and a third one to the **Patriarch Saint Joseph**, universal patron of the Church. The communities say one of these prayers in the morning, another one at noon, and the third one in the evening.

Because the members of this pious institution are taught about the infinite value of the mass, they consider it as the center of the divine wonders, the very effective means to obtain any grace, and offer it every day to obtain good workers to the holy Church. They also offer the rosary for the same intention in the evening.

I have written a booklet (I) of vocation prayers, which are said every



day by the two congregations;(2) the booklet also contains a prayer for **the clerics of the world and the initiated into the priesthood**, and another one for the **reinstatement of the religious orders**.

The prayer to **Jesus in the Eucharist** is said every time we have the Blessed Sacrament exposed, whereas the prayer to the holy apostles is said on their feast.

During the **Ember and Rogation Days** the practice of this prayer increases. The communities go in procession through the house, carrying a banner with the divine command written in big letters and praying for numerous, holy ministers to the Church. Back in the oratories, they end the ceremony with more similar prayers. (3)

## **11. Sacred alliance of priests for vocations**

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The Sacred Alliance reminds us of the 1897 painful events, when a bunch of internal and external tribulations fell violently on the institute, putting it on the verge of death; only God's mercy and the powerful intercession of the most holy Virgin saved it.

In the midst of the storm, the Father was tortured by the following thought. Listen to him:

When everything in our enterprises seems to be upside down, the only comfort is submission to divine will, which guides everything to good results, even though we do not understand. The people who have experienced it know how dearly one pays for being submissive. In my case a circumstance made the cup more bitter; I had to submit myself to the idea of losing the aim of an institute which is committed to the most holy, celestial command: "Pray, therefore"; I had to refold the sacred banner which makes the most holy Heart of Jesus' tender utterance shine, and to which the salvation of souls is very likely connected through the shortest, surest way (S.C. Vol. 10, page 211).

The Father's last resort was prayer, in which he insisted day and night together with his communities, also imploring the prayer of communities of virgins consecrated to the Lord In those circumstances, he remembered a Servant of God's saying: "God's

blessings do not yet come down on this institute!" That person meant: "**God's blessings do not yet come to fecundate and foster this institute.**" From that time the priest starter began longing for the **most holy Heart of Jesus' fecundating blessings** like Jacob did for his father's blessings" (Precious Adhesions, 1919, page 8).

Then he deemed to appeal to his acquaintances and priests friends, not for money, but "to apply the special fruit of the masses to his institute, for its advantage and improvement." He did so with a circular in July 1897 (Vol. 37, 27).

We strove to make the people hold the mass in esteem, teaching them that through the offering of the mass we might obtain any grace, because when the divine victim is immolated on the altar, the heavens unfold pouring graces down.

It goes without saying that the daily masses were applied to this purpose and that we received no offering for them" (Precious Adhesions, 1919, page 8). "**Holy mass and blessings!** Oh! Who will offer the holy mass so worthily to win all the **divine blessings** for this pious institute? Is this institute going to die? Besides attending to the salvation of souls, this institute is perhaps the only one in the holy Church that fulfills and makes people fulfill the divine command: "**Pray, therefore...**" On this ground we could not help trusting in the most holy Heart of Jesus for safety" (Ibid.).

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First, he mailed a circular to the bishops of Sicily, then to the ones of Italy. Later, he advertised the Rogationist prayer, requesting the bishops to unite their intention to the intention of the members of the congregation in their daily prayer for good workers. Finally, he asked the bishops to offer their works and prayers for the same intention. Says the Father:

After mailing this petition to the Church's prelates in the name of Jesus, we received some adhesion letters so expressive as to surpass any expectation. Through its high representatives, the Church seemed to give a helping hand in order to sustain the nascent foundation, pushing it forward in the field of the **Evangelical Rogation** for its complete shaping. To the senders' great satisfaction the four spiritual favors were granted enthusiastically; the Italian bishops' letters announcing their adhesion are most precious and they are **the most delicate documents of the pious institute's archive.**

At each arrival of precious adhesions, we rang the oratory's bells to give thanks to our Lord and to the Virgin Mary. If some children were

under a punishment, they were relieved from it because that day was a feast for all" (*Precious Adhesions*, 1919, page 12).

We are tempted to form an anthology of these letters, which, however, have been published. Now we confine ourselves to two quotations. Msgr. Dominic, patriarch of Alexandria, wrote on January 24, 1924: "Considering the topic, I think no work is comparable to the one that the Spirit, who runs the divine economy in the universe, put in your heart, giving genius and strength for starting it. I find no work worthier of praise and support."

Msgr. Ruggiero Catizzone, Archbishop of Catanzaro, wrote on August 2, 1900: "I assure you that I longed for this institution for a long time: you may imagine how your letter made me happy and satisfied. I fell down on my knees to thank God!"

Some prelates did not confine themselves to say one mass a year, but pledged two or three masses. The above quoted Msgr. Marinangeli, Cardinal Lualdi, Archbishop of Palermo, and his vicar general Msgr. Peter Boccone pledged a mass each month.

Msgr. Boccone said that if his shepherd was appealing to the most holy Heart of Jesus by choosing the first Friday of the month to offer his mass, he was going to appeal to the Immaculate Heart of Mary by choosing the first Saturday of the month for the offering of his mass.

Among the many effects, the Father points out the following:

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1. *For the dioceses and the seminaries*: Several bishops have asked to introduce the vocation prayer book in their dioceses, especially in the religious communities. The daily recitation of such prayers in the seminaries is of greater importance, because they improve the culture of the holy vocations and develop them as well. Besides attracting divine mercy on their good success, by saying these daily prayers the clerics become more aware of the priesthood's importance and mission, finding a practical rule to sanctify themselves becoming good evangelical workers for the divine glory and the salvation of souls (S.C. Vol. 10, page 215).

2. *For the advertisement of this prayer*: It is consoling to see how people begin to observe this command of the Lord! The bishops are taking to their hearts this important prayer and are spiritually joining this pious institute in the daily prayer to obtain good workers to the holy Church. They have pledged to direct their works and practices of piety to achieve this goal (Ibid. page 215).

After the Father's appealing to the superiors general of the religious orders and to all the priests, the Sacred Alliance widened its horizons.

A few years later, the Father tried to split the Sacred Alliance

in two branches: the **Sacred Allies** who pledged the four favors, and the Sacred Allies Supporters who also pledged to advertise the alliance and the Pious Union; but the second branch dried up after a fleeting bloom. The first branch instead developed by the help of the Lord; on November 22, 1922, 25 years after the first adhesion by Msgr. Giovanni Blandini, the persons who had enlisted the Sacred Alliance were: 38 cardinals, 213 archbishops and bishops, 34 superiors general, and 624 priests.

## 12. Pious union of the evangelical rogation

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The Sacred Alliance called attention of the hierarchy and priests to the *Rogate*. Many years ahead of Pope Paul VI, the Father wrote: "It is every Christian's duty to obey this divine command" (P.U. card, page 3). For that reason he thought of inviting the faithful to this prayer, especially the devout who attend the sacraments, and above all the consecrated persons who share in our Lord's thirst for the salvation of souls, because they can force the Lord's hand through their prayer! For this reason the Father established the **Pious Union of the Evangelical Rogation**.

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Msgr. Letterio D'Arrigo, Archbishop of Messina, erected the Pious Union on Dec. 8, 1900 in the oratory of the Rogationists' mother-house. At midnight between the two centuries, while the communities at Avignone were in the chapel, the Father inaugurated the first register of the Pious Union at the foot of the Blessed Sacrament. Msgr. Letterio D'Arrigo, Archbishop of Messina, happened to be the top list member.

The Pious Union was enriched with indulgences by the Sacred Congregation in 1906, and the Father published the registration card, the associates' rule, and the prayers. The Father wanted the registration and the card to be free of charge (4).

The Father conceived a periodical for advertisement. On the

first Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi, feast of the most holy Heart of Jesus, he published for the first time "**God and Neighbor**," the organ of the **Universal Pious Union of the Evangelical Rogation, of the Sacred Alliance**, and of **Saint Anthony's bread** for our institutes. On that occasion, the Father wrote of the **Rogate**:

O Heart, abyss of the vivifying light, here is the echo of your divine wails, "My God, the zeal for your house devours me... The harvest is great, but the workers are few; pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he send out workers to gather it in."

What a secret of your inner secrets! ...O most ardent Heart, may the zeal for your house devour us, the banner of your Evangelical Rogation be taken over all the world, the never-ending zeal spring from all hearts, and may your elect multiply as the stars and the sand of the sea. May the peoples be redeemed again, the nations you made curable be the trophy of your victory, and the Church along with his chief sing the hymn of your triumphs! O Heart of the divine lover, we surrender to you and to your most holy, sweet mother. O Mary, together with Jesus you are our breath; receive this periodical for and in Jesus; together with him please help, comfort, crown us with happy results for the infinite and eternal consolation of his divine Heart! (S.C. Vol. 1, page 110). (5)

The little oratory of Avignone was the seat of the Pious Union for many years. Later, it was transferred to the artistic temple of the Evangelical Rogation of the Sacred Heart in Messina, on whose facade the Father had the ROGATE carved in big letters, under the bronze statue of the Heart of Jesus, who is inviting the people to receive and obey his divine command.

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## 13. To reach the Pope

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To be heartened and blessed, the Father had submitted his little institutions to the Pope more than once, and the Vicar of Christ always gave them hearty paternal blessings. The Father, however, was not fully satisfied, because after presenting the institute in its double activity of charity and *Rogate*, the orphanages stirred sensation, whereas the *Rogate* remained in the twilight.

In the first days of January 1904, writing to Father Bernardino Balsari, superior general of the Rosminian Fathers, our padre asked him the favor to hand a letter of "an obscure, humble priest" to His Holiness Pius X. On that occasion he wrote:

We have two letters from His Holiness Leo XIII manifesting his delight in our charitable institutions. I would like that the Vicar of Jesus Christ pay his attention to the mission as it is in the divine zeal of the Heart of Jesus, who used to say: "**Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather it in.**" I would like to dream of His Holiness considering it, and in case he finds it conform to the wishes of the most holy Heart of Jesus, he blesses, encourages, and fosters it with the word which fecundates and develops the institutions, even when they are in their infancy (Vol. 37, 45).

We do not know what Father Balsari did. The fact is that our Padre wrote the presentation of his institute to the Pope in the same month, and through Cardinal Merry del Val, secretary of state, he received these comforting words:

Rome, January 30, 1904

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Heartily accepting your request of January 28, I have informed the new Pontiff of the Pious Association of Priests in Messina, which aims at praying God to send out good workers to the Church.

I am glad to inform you that His Holiness is very pleased because the Pious Union has received the support of so many eminent persons in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, who have recognized how to follow the command of Jesus: "Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest..." With true pleasure he joins his prayer to the prayer of all of his associates and gives you and them his apostolic blessings.

Faithful yours,

R. Cardinal Merry del Val

Imagine how the Avignone communities welcomed this letter, and joyfully pealed the bells...

In the two private audiences with Benedict XV, the main topic of the Father's talk was the *Rogate*.

On November 11, 1914, when the Father recalled "the exhortation or command of our Lord," the Pope interrupted him by saying: "Command," and added, "I am the first

Rogationist," because I am the most involved in this prayer! The Father asked him to confirm the prayers of the institute and the Pious Union by "adding his holy intention." The Father remarks: "His Holiness assumed a solemn pose. He seemed to be very satisfied and recalled the communion of the saints! Since the communion of the saints is the participation of the intentions and of the prayers in the holy Church, he said that he would unite his own intention to ours. In that moment he attracted the intentions of the Evangelical Rogation to his most holy, sovereign, pontifical intention! He concluded by saying several times, 'yes, yes, I grant it!' Oh! What a value our humble prayers gained!" (S.C. Vol. I, page 160).

The second audience was on May 4, 1921. The Pontiff said to the Father, "This prayer to obtain good workers must mostly concern the Pope, who feels the need of priests in the whole Church." He agreed to enter his name for the Pious Union of the Evangelical Rogation, and, on May 14, mailed to the Father a parchment with his autograph, praising and blessing the institution.

## 14 The Rogationist verse

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The Father's speech to the Eucharistic congress of Catania in 1905 shows the first intention of inserting a vocation prayer in the Litany of the Saints. At the end of his speech he said: "If the highest prelates of the holy Church deem it right to induce the energetic Pius X, who is called *ignis ardens*, to make the decision of inserting in the Litany of the Saints the following verse: 'That you send out workers to your Church... hear us, Lord,' it would be the beginning of great goodness for the Church and of eternal glorification for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament!" (Vol. 45, page 507).

As in many cities in those times, the faithful of Messina said the Litany of the Saints during the daily 40 hours of adoration in shifts in the churches. The Father thought it was of great momentum to insert the Rogationist verse in this litany to have the vocation prayer said daily before Jesus in the Sacrament.

Today, things have changed, and special invocations may be said during the mass.

The Father's proposal achieved no practical results in the congress, but he kept the plan fixed in his mind. On July eleven, 1909, in the private audience with Pius X he obtained for his communities the insertion of the following Rogationist verse in the Litany of the Saints: "That you send out numerous, worthy, and holy workers to your harvest... Lord, hear our prayer."

To extend this invocation to the whole Church, the Father won the petition of many bishops to the Holy See. When the Father submitted these petitions to the Sacred Congregation of Rites and to Pius X, he pressured Msgr. La Fontaine, secretary of the Congregation of Rites: "This matter of great momentum... is particularly entrusted to your faith, zeal, and charity. As a secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites you may silence or carry the cause properly and wisely for the greatest glory of God, the good of the holy Church, and the shaky society, which can only be saved by the priesthood of Jesus Christ>" After insisting on the *Rogate's* importance, he repeats the following idea: "The bishops seek to foster the seminaries (many of them are closed) and to cultivate the clerics; but, if vocations do not come from high, from the Holy Spirit, the seminaries and the novitiates become an artificial culture, whose results belong more to the world than to us" (Vol. 29, page 63).

Unfortunately, on February 20, 1913, the Sacred Congregation of Rites answered: "*Delay.*" It means that the cause was not taken into consideration.

Under Benedict XV's pontificate, the Father won new, abundant adhesions to the cause. The Pope transferred them to the Sacred Congregation of Rites. On that occasion the Father wrote: "Nothing new, but a parchment of praise and encouragement from His Holiness" (Vol. 29, page 145).

In the early times of his pontificate, Pius XI adhered to the request of the Cardinal Prefect of **Propaganda Fide** to insert in the Litany of the Saints the missionary verse: *Ut omnes errantes...* for the conversion of the infidels to the Church. The Father wrote: "Is it possible to achieve this goal without increasing the number of the missionaries? How can the number of the missionaries increase without warmly obeying the command of Jesus to pray?" (Vol. 43, page 151). Therefore, the Father seized that



opportunity to also insert the Rogationist verse, and pressured Cardinal Anthony Vico, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. After informing him of the previous request, he observes that the missionary verse should be implemented by the Rogationist verse, and concludes: "If you, Your Eminence, consider the cause worthy of your high consideration, you can check the adhesions of the sacred prelates, submitting their wishes to the Holy Father and doing what the Lord will inspire. Meanwhile I entreat your Eminence to be wisely cautious and to conceal my name, because it would be to the prejudice of this important cause" (Vol. 29, page 146).

## 15. Three advertisements

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The Father uses three means to spread the *Rogate*: the **Sacred Alliance**, the **Pious Union**, and the **Rogationist verse**, developing all of them altogether, or separately, according to the persons and the circumstances, but always perseveringly and fervently.

On January 1, 1920, he mails a circular to the bishops of Italy, and suggests several proposals for spreading the *Rogate*.

The first proposal is for inserting the Rogationist verse in the major litany. "In such a case, the Church itself would pray to obtain numerous and holy priests" (Vol. 29, pages 166-70). He resolves beforehand the oppositions which might be raised (6) and asks the bishops to write a warm petition to the Holy Father in order to achieve the goal.

The second proposal is a Rogationist pastoral, which should explain the command of our Lord, proving that all, especially the clergy, should pray to the Lord that he send out elect youths. Thus, "the priesthood formed by the Holy Spirit can check evil and save the peoples from the material and spiritual increasing ruin." The pastoral could end by suggesting the faithful to enlist the Pious Union of the Evangelical Rogation, which is the third proposal. The Father concludes:

**By doing so, you would draw the blessings of God on your seminary**

and your mystical flock.

Oh! If all the bishops did so in their dioceses, the prayer commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ as the infallible means to win priests according to the Heart of God would become a universal rogation. It would do a strong, sweet violence to the most holy Heart of Jesus and would win this grace. But the people have become unworthy of it (Vol. 29, pages 166-70).

Several bishops erected the Pious Union in their dioceses; some of them wrote the pastoral; as to the Rogationist verse, no result came out.

However, the Father seized any occasion to touch upon his beloved topic.

## 16. In the Eucharistic congresses

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The Father talked to the 1905 international congress of Rome: "The *Rogate* advertisement was taken into consideration, and, with the approval of the Pope's vicar, the congress officially expressed the wish that all people join their intentions and prayer to the Evangelical Rogation" (Vol. 45, page 506).

In 1905, he talked in Catania. Considering the relations between **Eucharist and priesthood**, he insisted on the necessity of obeying the divine command:

One cannot understand the Eucharist without the priesthood; nor there is a real priesthood without Eucharist. Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is the life of the Church: when the faithful forget, or do not love, or do not believe, or do not receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, then the Church languishes in its members, and falls sick. Who is able to make up for neglecting Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament? Who spreads his glory? Who shows his infinite love? Who excites the hearts to love and desire him? Who represses the errors? Always and only the Catholic priest, because he creates the Eucharist, if we can say so. He generates Jesus

to the sacramental life, and prepares a perfect people for him. Hence, I dare to express my poor opinion: the obedience to the divine exhortation: "**Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest**" is the best means to honor the most holy Eucharist and to correspond to the sublime aims of the great sacrament (Vol. 45, page 502).

The father was unable to participate in the 1922 international congress of Rome, but he wrote a booklet: *The Great Word*, where he explained the divine command. **Jesus militia youth** handed thousands of copies to the members of the congress.

On September 6, 1924, the Padre spoke at the national Eucharistic Congress in Palermo, favorably impressing the clergy. Since he was well known in Sicily, when Father Venturini, S. J., introduced him to the audience, people cheered him enthusiastically, and some of the clergy moved closer to hear him from nearby. With his usual calm and with simple words vibrant from this great love for souls, the Padre began speaking about our duty to prepare the Eucharistic triumphs for Jesus and to concern ourselves with his priesthood by obeying his command: '**Pray, therefore...**'

After summing up the aim of his institutions, he urged the priests to spread the Pious Union and the Sacred Alliance, asking the bishops to promote the insertion of the Rogationist verse in the major litany. His proposal received a hearty approval.

## 17. Always ROGATE

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Needless to say that while dealing with people, especially with the religious communities, the Father always touched upon the prayer to obtain good workers.

For instance, after praising the spirit and the works of Father Cusmano, he writes to the Bocconiste sisters: "We cannot help pointing out to you the divine word of the gospel which mainly forms the spirit of our least institutes" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 231). Furthermore, he mails the membership cards, and invites the sisters to enlist the Pious Union.

He writes to the Spanish sisters of the Blessed D'Agreda:

I recommend to you the daily prayer to obtain from divine mercy plenty of holy priests and virgins to the Church, all over the world." He insists: "What is the use of the priests formed by the bishops or by the religious orders, if God does not form them? A priest formed by God -I wish I were- produces more than a thousand priests formed by others> God, however, let human beings operate. He only intervenes when people obey the divine command: '**Pray, therefore...**' But, how few obey it! The communities of the sacred virgins should say this prayer with great fervor, every day>" (Vol. 38, page 48).

As soon as the Father went to Oria after the Messina earthquake, he met the Benedictine sisters, and exhorted them: "Let us spiritually join the Daughters of Divine Zeal in their devotions... especially in their daily prayer to obtain from divine mercy numerous, holy priests and good workers to the mystical harvest, in obedience to the divine command of Jesus' Heart" (Vol. 43, page 125).

He made a spiritual union with the Salesian Daughters of Holy Mary (The Visitation Daughters). He commissioned a painting to symbolize it. He considered this fact as a new manifestation of the Sacred Heart inviting the Visitation Daughters to cultivate the divine command according to their spirit, in the words of Leo XIII: "From the Salesians we expect the triumph of the holy Church; they ought to pray to the owner of the mystical harvest to send out workers to his harvest" (Vol. 38, page 21 and 41). The Father submitted to them a form to be filled out and mailed to the Pope for the insertion of the Rogationist verse in the major litany.

When Don Orione was appointed vicar general of Messina by Pius X, the Father offered himself and his communities to him as humble subjects: "From now on, all of us are subject to your wise direction, and we have proclaimed you our director general." But the Father could not help calling the Servant of God's attention on the topic of his anxiety: "I present the personnel of our institutes along with the sacred banner and its inscription: '**Pray, therefore...**' May you pick up this divine word of Jesus' Heart's zeal and make of it a holy mission, as we have done, carving it in our hearts. May you be an apostle and a propagator of it>" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 120).

We like reporting some thoughts of the Servant of God, Countess Helen of Persico, who corresponded with the Father by mail.

"I would be very happy to become personally acquainted with you, but I do not know how; if it is not possible, it will be fine, because all of us are united in the divine Heart, as you write very well." We lack the letters of the Father, but from the answer of the countess we know the theme of their correspondence: the *Rogate*. "I thank you for sending the vocation card to me. I love it. I will seek to spread it as much as I can. Oh, may the Lord send out holy workers to his harvest; the harvest is very great, but the workers are very few>"

## 18. To Msgr. Conforti

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We keep two expressive letters of the Father to the Servant of God Guido Mary Conforti, Bishop of Parma, the founder of the "Pious Society of Saint Francis of Sales for the Missions, and president of the Missionary Works."

The Father was not very pleased by the registration card of the Pious Society, because the gathering of alms was at the beginning, whereas the ejaculatory prayer, "**Lord Jesus, please multiply the number of the evangelical preachers,**" was at the end of the card. The **aim** at preparing zealous missionaries, the **condition** of offering two soldos a month, and the **advantages** of the registration were explained in the middle of the card.

The Father could not help complaining, and wrote to the Servant of God:

I submit to your consideration that to form missionaries according to God, the spreading of the prayer to the owner of the mystical harvest should be given the first place, while the necessary contributions to the candidates to the great apostolate should be in the second place.

The matter is to be managed so evidently and clearly that the faithful must know that their alms will be blessed and two cents will be worth 200 liras when their cents are joined to the prayer commanded by our

Lord Jesus Christ... We should amend the prolonged negligence of the divine *Rogate* by printing it in big letters upon the pious advertisements aiming at increasing the missionary works. We ought to exhort the faithful to say this prayer frequently, as a command of the gospel. We should instill it in their hearts with all means and full explanation.

Our Lord pointed out as clearly as he could how to remedy the lack of workers in the mystical harvest when seeing the crowds abandoned he used to say: "The harvest is great, but the workers are few; pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest."

**"Pray, therefore!"** Please consider the **therefore!** Our Lord did not say: "therefore, work to form the priests; therefore, gather money," etc., but he said: **"THEREFORE, PRAY!"** Both action and contribution for such an aim are holy because they are implied in the divine thought. But, it is strange that what has been clearly said hardly receives attention, whereas what is supposed to be implied receives full attention.

Since our Lord Jesus Christ recommended, commanded, and pointed out to the prayer to obtain the priests as to the infallible remedy, what can we expect from our efforts, if we neglect the remedy pointed out by Jesus? Is our toiling along with our money better than the remedy commanded by Jesus?

Please sympathize with the pouring out of my heart into yours, which is full with missionary zeal" (Vol. 29, pages 159-60). Then the Father recommends the Pious Union of the Evangelical Rogation, which is free of charge. (Ibid. page 164).

## 19. A more terrible punishment

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"Lady Countess, listen: people say that the lack of ministers is the greatest punishment of God; I, however, know a more terrible one, which causes the lack of priests. The cause is unwillingness to obey the command of Jesus' Heart's zeal: 'Pray, therefore...' And yet, two evangelists report that Jesus repeated this command. In fact, they wrote: 'He used to say: Pray, therefore...' It is not a man commanding this prayer, but Jesus

Christ, God... I attribute to diabolic influence the negligence of the remedy to which our Lord pointed out" (Vol. 41, pages 159-60).

The above countess is the Blessed Theresa Ledochowska, foundress of the **Missionary Sisters of Saint Peter Claver**, for the African missions. She published two bulletins: *Africa's Echo* and *Black Child* translated into ten languages. She wrote articles, advertisements, and booklets to spread the missions, lecturing in several countries in their own languages. For the missionaries she won financial means, religious goods, and thousands of books written in African languages.

The Father wished this foundress along with her institute to direct their attention to the *Rogate*. On August 4, 1921, the Father wrote:

Given the great needs of the African missions, it would be very pleasant to the Heart of Jesus if your religious family of 93 virgin spouses lifted up their hands to heaven, imploring with wails and sighs from divine mercy numerous and holy missionaries for the infidels, for the Catholics, and for the whole world. We should not be selfish; when we are unable to give our personal help, we can help with the prayer (Ibid. page 160).

However, we must acknowledge that the *Rogate's* mission is a gift that the Holy Spirit reserved for the Father, to which he had to devote himself to an extreme. He worried: "People do not know, do not appreciate, and do not obey the *Rogate!*"

In 1906, when the Father thought that the Rogationist prayer, repressed for 19 centuries, might burst everywhere, he wrote with joy: "When I see the spreading of the great resource for the nations, the Church, the world, and the triumph of God on earth I feel that I am going to die rather than to be confused" (Vol. 29, page 58).

But, many years later, the Father realized that the command of the Lord remained still forgotten... To whom should he appeal? Which means should he find? The last means was prayer!... And he wrote a series of ardent **prayers for the triumph of the divine command**. He appeals to the Holy Spirit, the Sacred Heart, the most holy Virgin, Saint Michael the archangel, Saint Joseph, Saint Anthony of Padua... (Vol. 5, pages 66-74).

We have already quoted some passages, now we report the following:

... Omnipotent God, will you forget humankind because of our carelessness for the command of your Heart's divine zeal? Do not take

vengeance as your perfect justice requires, because your Most Precious Blood shed for the salvation of souls is at stake! Take vengeance instead through your infinite kindness and mercy. As you said through the prophet Zachariah, spread into the Church the spirit of prayer: the spirit of this divine prayer, of this divine rogation that you commanded as an indispensable means to win the mercy of mercies, the grace of graces on earth so that heavens pour out the just and earth bloom with the redeemers! (Ibid. page 67).

O Mother, see to it that the ecclesiastical hierarchy may be blazed with the spirit of this prayer! You yourself enflame the hearts of the sacred virgins, the pious nuns, the lovers of Jesus, and men of good will, whose names are inscribed in the book of life! ...O Mother of the Church, O Co-redeemer of the souls, obtain the universal triumph of the divine *Rogate* from the beloved Heart of Jesus... (Ibid. page 69).

Like the sun at its rising shines from east to west, so may the divine command of Jesus' Heart's divine zeal shine suddenly and brilliantly, especially in the minds of the elect souls. United to Jesus and wounded by his divine Heart's interests, may they be penetrated by this sudden, particular interest of his Heart, and wail and sigh continuously in the divine presence? May divine mercy quickly fill the earth with holy apostles? May Satan's kingdom be demolished, God's kingdom spread everywhere, and Jesus Christ reign in all the hearts. Amen (Ibid. page 71).

## 20. The most beautiful and high mission

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In today's Church, the negligence of the *Rogate* that the Father lamented in his times almost disappeared. He wished the Pope to intervene giving way to a crusade of prayer under the banner of the *Rogate*. Pius X defined the *Rogate* a command of Christ and Benedict XV said that he was the first Rogationist because he was the mostly concerned with this prayer. I cannot forget the Father's sparkling glance, his hearty smile, his full joy when he announced to us, at the end of 1921, that the Pope had mentioned the divine *Rogate* in a prayer for



the propagation of the faith. He wrote:

We cannot help considering with joy the rising, as the first ray of the nascent sun, of this spirit of prayer or universal rogation by the work of two Popes! (Vol. 43, page 152). ...This **rising from on high** began advancing splendidly and shinningly since the early days of Pius XI's pontificate when the **Pious Union** of prayer was presented to him, and he praised this prayer as the work of the works; which expression is worthy of consideration.

Inspired word: God spoke through his Vicar!

Praying for holy vocations is **the work of the works...** Well understood, this expression means: "a work dedicated to this aim is the mother of many good works, generator of great, holy activities for the greatest glory of God, the greater salvation of souls, and the amplest fulfillment of the Church's divine mission in the world. As a matter of fact, this is the work that wins the elect of God, bringing about the saints in the Church (Ibid.)

However, the triumph of the *Rogate* was reserved to our days. The Second Vatican Council has: "The active collaboration by all God's people in the task of fostering vocations, ... directs that the organizations for promoting vocations which have been -or are about to be- set up in the various dioceses...should coordinate all pastoral work for vocations, and recommends the traditional aids towards this general cooperation, such as: unceasing prayer..." (O.T. no. 2). In *Summi Dei Verbum* (no. 12), Paul VI reminds the children of the Church of their duty to correspond to the divine command: "As to the vocations to the priesthood, the first duty of all the Christians is to pray according to the command of the Lord: 'The harvest is great, but the workers are few; pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest' (Mt. 9, 37-38). The divine Redeemer has clearly pointed out that the first source of the priestly vocation is God, his merciful free liberty." For that reason he established the worldly day for vocations on the feast of the Good Shepherd, fourth Sunday of Easter.

Is it a rash thinking that the Father's prayers prepared this day?

We like to conclude this chapter with the encouraging words of Paul VI to the Rogationists.

In the audience granted to our capitular fathers on September 14, 1968, Paul VI described the Rogationist and the value of his vocation with these words: "The name itself qualifies you for your mission as worshipers who implore for the most beautiful

and high mission. That of meriting and preparing the vocations to the kingdom of Christ" (Speech of Paul VI, September 14).

We wish we were really worthy of so high a mission!

## Notes

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(1) In 1892, the prayer to the most holy Heart of Jesus was published in Milan by "Tipi della Biblioteca Cattolica Editrice." It was translated into Polish by Lady Iastrzebsha, and the Father adds that "it was spread in that pitiable nation so needy of ministers." We also have a translation of it into German by Father Stephen Leo Skibnierski from Tirolo.

(2) The prayer book was printed by "Tip. Edit. Joseph Toscano - Messina " in 1899. It was translated into French, at Amiens, by Abbot De Brandt, a holy canon of that city's cathedral. The Father hints at English and Spanish translations in the process for the Americas, but I think they had no success.

(3) We know the composition date of only a few of the above prayers: "Litanies of the Rogations," on May 7, 1888; "To the Holy Apostles," on June 8, 1888. We also know the composition date of other prayers which are not in the booklet. "To Immaculate Heart of Mary for Obtaining Good Workers," on March 21, 1885; "To Immaculate Heart of Mary for the Sanctification of the Clerics," on June 9, 1888.

(4) After taking into consideration the broad meaning of "evangelical worker" (see ch. 4, no. 9), the Father gives full explanation of the intentions proposed to the members through the membership card:

"To practically answer this divine command of the divine zeal of the Heart of Jesus, the Pious Union's members will offer their good works, practices of piety, faith, religion, holy mass, and rosary to the most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary. They will have a general intention and a few specific ones.

The general intention is to obtain copious, elect ministers, and strong workers to the mystical harvest. The specific intentions are the following:

a. That the most holy Heart of Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, give powerful, effective graces of sanctification and vocation to the persons called to priesthood. May they be like the apostles and the disciples who answered the call of Jesus?

b. That the divine grace support, guide, and make the elect to priesthood achieve the evangelical virtues, the literary and ecclesiastical education, and the priesthood.

c. That the religious orders and congregations always bloom with regular observance and abound in vocations according to God.

d. That the Holy Spirit always vivify his Church through the sanctification of the ecclesiastical hierarchy's members by renewing the wonders of charity, zeal, and fervor in the ministers.

e. That the sacred virgins who look after their own sanctification and the salvation of souls may be copious, zealous, and holy.

f. That Providence raises everywhere good educators for the salvation and good results of children and youth.

g. That the parents may know how to educate their children in a holy manner.

h. That the peoples and the persons may take advantage of the priestly ministry in the Church for their salvation, and correspond to it with holy docility.

i. That the spirit of the *Rogate* prayer increase and spread all over the world, become a universal rogation to the most holy Heart of Jesus, and obtain the greatest mercy to the Church.

j. That divine mercy keep and foster in the divine grace and love two nascent institutes that nurtures the divine rogation for the first time, by granting holy vocations to them.

h. Because the apostle said that our requests to God must be always accompanied by thanksgiving, the members of this Pious Union will do so when they pray to God to obtain the good evangelical workers to the holy Church. Indeed, he always sent to the Church apostolic men, priests, sacred virgins, good educators of the youth, and workers in the mystical harvest, human ingratitude and demerit notwithstanding!" (Pious Union Membership Card, 1908, pages 13-16).

(5) It is over 40 years that the advertisement of the Sacred Alliance and Pious Union advertisement is entrusted to the monthly magazine *Rogate Ergo*.

(6) These oppositions had been submitted by the Secretary of State Cardinal Peter Gasparri, who did not want to alter the Major Litany because of its venerable antiquity. The Father answers that the Major Litany had been implemented with the verse against the Turks when they were threatening Christianity with death. Besides, says the Father, how many changes have been made in the litany of Our Lady, in the canonical hours, in the missal, etc. Today, Cardinal Peter Gasparri's opinion seems very strict, almost unthinkable!



# **6.**

## **"HOPE WHICH ENDS IN HEAVEN"**

- 1. The eschatological hope**
- 2. His life was full with hope**
- 3. O paradise...**
- 4. An apostle of the hope**
- 5. Very eager for indulgences!**
- 6. Detachment from earthly goods**
- 7. Trust in God**
- 8. Always hopeful**
- 9. The vows of trust**
- 10. The third vow of trust**
- 11. I shall be never confused for all eternity!**
- 12. Some episodes**
- 13. Notes**

## 1. The eschatological hope

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Now let us talk about the theological hope. The Second Vatican Council calls it eschatological (G.S. no 21) because its object is achieved in paradise. It is defined "the supernatural virtue which makes us trust in God, from whom we expect the eternal life and the grace to deserve it"

(Saint Pius X's catechism).

Hope follows faith. "Without hope, faith gives us a shallow knowledge of God. If we have no love and hope, our faith makes us know God as a stranger, because it is hope that throws us in God's mercy and providence... If I do not hope in his love for me, I will never have a true knowledge of Christ" (T. Merton, *No man is an island*, Milan, Garzanti, 1956, page 33, 41). "Christ Jesus is our hope" (1. Tim. 1, 1). This virtue stands out in modern theology, being the topic of various conventions, while the Second Vatican Council reminds the priests to "set up a steadfast hope for their faithful people" (P.O. no. 13).

## 2. His life was full with hope

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The Father's hope was proportionate to his great faith. His life was full with faith and hope, or better yet, his life was made of hope.

He counted on paradise due him because of Jesus Christ's infinite merits, and often said: "Why Jesus should have suffered his atrocious Passion, but to ensure paradise for us?"

As a priest, he knew of the strict account he had to give to

the Lord for the gifts he had received, but he was sure that God's love and mercy would prevail. He never had any doubt about that.

He began saying every day Saint Leonard of Port Maurice's prayer for a good death at the age of 40. He once said to me: "Now I leave out that prayer: I draw closer to our Lord every day praying to him for a good death with a wailing heart.

Due to God's infinite mercy, the Father thought that few souls are lost; only the mystery of human rebellion gives reasons for hell. Therefore, he did not want people to be anxious for that. He used to say, "The Lord gave us the prayer, the sacraments, the good works, the protection of the Virgin Mary, and the saints; what more do we need to ensure paradise?

He taught that people must suffer and work to achieve salvation; and we know how much he suffered and worked in his life of 76 years, doing everything for the sake of God, in the hope to see him in paradise.

### 3. O Paradise...

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We quote from the beginning of his *Letter to the Friends* this marvelous protestation of trust in God:

O paradise! O kingdom of eternal glory! O end of our painful exile! O eternal city of God! O beatific vision of the One who is infinite beauty, infinite kindness that transpires in this vale of tears with his wonderful rays in every good, in every beauty, and in the wonders of creation!

I long for this eternal happiness, for this region of light and splendor, for the everlasting vision of God forever delighting, and containing everything in himself.

I absolutely want to avoid the eternal damnation, the abyss of the eternal fire, where Satan reigns for ever, hating God, Jesus Christ, the most holy Virgin, the saints, and everything belonging to God. Satan involves in his hate and furious suffering all the souls who followed, obeyed him, and fell into his perverse, subtle, invisible suggestions!

My friend and lord, won't we be friends in heaven, in the bosom of God, delighting one another? (*Letter to the Friends*, page 69).

Writing to Melanie on Aug. 10, 1897, the Father says:

What is the staying in God's bosom for ever? If only a small, far-off reflection of God's light makes us go into raptures, what will the swimming in the infinite light be? O heavenly company of the blessed and the saints, how much desirable you are! O vision of Immaculate Mary, you make the elect happy! O eternal possession of God, you are the sigh of the hearts! Let us bless our sweetest Jesus, who redeemed us with his most precious blood and will make us happy for ever! (S.C. Vol. 8, page 1).

The thought of paradise comforted the Father very much when his relatives died. Despite his very tender heart made him shed tears for any misfortune and made him feel the sorrow for his relatives' death, he never cried for them. Father Vitale told us that our Father used to say: "They are in God; sooner or later I will see them again!" But he always prayed and made people pray for them. On his mother's death, he shed no tear, but conformed to God's will so perfectly as to appear insensible, in spite of being so tender by nature.

Father Vitale reports: "One evening a few days later, a cleric and I went to Avignone to express our sympathy. We found the padre very calm and content knowing the will of God. He spoke of his mother's virtues and of her holy demise" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 102). Father Russell narrates that on the occasion of the death of our Founder's sister Catarina, the Father went to the chapel and said to the Religious: "My sister died. Let us conform to God's will and pray for her." When Sister D'Amore, the mother superior of the religious community of Trani, died, Sister Christine began crying, but the Father sent her to the church telling her to cry over the sins of the world.

He used appropriate words while consoling the survivors. He told a young woman who had lost her mother:

"I understand your great sorrow: your mother was the center of your affection and care. She was so good, sweet, pious, and humble! I remember how she welcomed me the first time I came over here. And you have lost her! But don't be disheartened. Because you are virtuous



and faithful, you have to lift up your mind to God to contemplate her in him. Our earthly life is a fleeting scene, because we are created for an eternal destiny. Therefore we must direct our aim at fulfilling our hope of being reunited in God's bosom" (Vol. 42, page 124). Then he continued promising his prayers.

When he met a man desolate for the loss of his wife, he told him:

"For us believers, our sorrow is easily mitigated in these circumstances. Many people go to America promising to make their relatives go over there later; thus, they are relieved, do not suffer, do not cry, and hardly feel the detachment. Now, paradise is the destination of our journey; whoever arrives first rests, waiting and longing for our arrival. One day we'll be together again. It is a mere, fleeting detachment."

These words impressed that man in such a way that he was consoled and convinced, repeating them for many years after.

## **4. An apostle of hope**

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The Father spread the hope and the longing for paradise around him and to those who had relations with him.

By preaching, writing, and talking, as well as by friendly relations with pious, or indifferent, or atheist persons the Father spoke of heaven as of our home. He inspired the hope of paradise to healthy, sick, and dying people.

Above all, he practiced the ministry of the hope among his communities. Perhaps he never spoke without mentioning paradise, teaching that we must achieve it by sacrifices after the example of the saints, whose lives he gave us to read.

He told us that we must reach paradise for God's sake and mercy and we must foster such a hope. He often asked the little children, "Do you want to go to paradise?" At their affirmative answer he added, "Yes, all in paradise, but pay attention... pray, avoid sin, and do good works with faith."

A Daughter of Divine Zeal testifies,

"Owing to his longing for paradise, he often talked to us

about it. He described paradise so vividly as though he were looking at it. He trusted in the merits of Jesus Christ, who opened paradise for us through the shedding of his blood. His talk ever ended: 'Daughters, as we are gathered here, so we hope to be in paradise!'

## 5. Very eager for indulgences!

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The indulgences he gained through specific religious practices are also a sign of his hope.

The Father declared in a conversation that he deserved purgatory for a long time, but he added: "This does not mean that I will be there so long; I am greatly confident that God's mercy will shorten my time in purgatory because of the Church's prayer, and also because you too will surely make *nu sfurziceddu* (a little effort) for the Father!..."

He heartened the shy persons by saying: "Even though we had committed the greatest crimes, we should always trust and hope in God." While preaching, he once said: "If I had betrayed God with my sins as Judas did, I would always trust in Jesus Christ's merits for my salvation."

Sister Gertrude was as simple as Nathanael. She once said, "Father, when I die pray for me, because I am very afraid of purgatory." Kindly smiling the Father answered, "Who told you that you will go to purgatory? In any case, you will tell the Lord: the Father ordered me to say: 'don't let me go to purgatory...'" The simple sister affirmed that she repeated these words every day in the thanksgiving after Communion, feeling herself more confident in the Lord's kindness. Sometimes the Father said: "Why should all of us go to purgatory? Can't the merits of Jesus, of the Madonna, and of the saints free us from it?" On a feast of the mother superior, a child wished the Father to expiate purgatory on earth. The Servant of God asked the child if she was happy to do so. At the child's affirmative the Father said, "I

wish you so, because I wish it for me."

Someone said that the Father was eager for indulgences, and for this reason he recommended us to gain them on any occasion.

After Communion he said the prayer to the crucified Jesus with great fervor, recommending us to look at the Crucified while saying such a prayer.

The devotions he prescribed or recommended, and the Pious Unions he made us join with regular membership cards, aimed at gaining indulgences.

A sister reports: "I was in the advertisement office responsible for ascribing the new members of the community to the Pious Unions in order that they might gain the indulgences. The Father often asked me whether all of them were ascribed."

## **6. Detachment from earthly goods**

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The virtue of hope leads to detachment from earthly goods. If the Father sought and used human means, it was only for helping people.

Money was always a means for doing well; it belonged to "his lords, the poor." For the sake of them and to achieve heaven, he gave up everything and begged alms from door to door for over twenty years. Usually he received no offering for his mass, thinking that his seeking the kingdom of heaven had already brought him money in abundance. People around him realized his detachment from earthly goods and his trust in God. After the fire destroyed the wooden church, we began gathering offerings for a new one. Father Vitale writes:

A public walk to gather offerings gave the start for the project; people answered generously with tears in their eyes and hope in their hearts. A feeble old woman asked what all the people along the streets were doing. When told about the fire at the church, she cried: "Do not be afraid! Padre Di Francia will build a golden, golden church!" Some time later, and even though it was not the padre's or his helper's intention, those words turned out to be true: the new sanctuary was gilded (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 246).

Because he had to support his communities and institutions, he sought money only for doing well, for the orphans, and the poor. Plenty of money passed from his hands; but not even a cent remained on them. Detached from earthly things, he thought that being somehow attached to them might offend the divine providence.

Prayer was the secret of his riches. When he was in straitened circumstances, he wrote very tender letters to God, the Madonna, and the saints, which should penetrate their hearts, in his way of thinking. Many of these letters are in our hands, many others were lost.

The outstanding feature of these petitions is trust: hardships, tribulations, and present or looming persecutions notwithstanding, his trust stood firm. Even when his prayers seemed to be rejected, he never forebore from trusting in the Lord; he could say together with Job: "Slay me though he might, I will wait for him" (Job, 13, 15).

In his last years, when the offerings came in generously from several nations, he was touched, and with clasped hands and wet eyes said: "How many good people help the poor! How good the Lord is! These people are an instrument in his hands!

When we talk of poverty, we will touch upon this subject again.

Here we remark about the Father's care in cultivating his interior detachment. We quote Father Vitale:

A little childish but significant episode shows the perfection the padre was aiming at. At Avignone, there was an affectionate kitten that the padre sometimes stroked and fed, feeling a childish affection for it. One day on his way upstairs, he found the kitten dead. Taking it seriously, he said to me: "I was impressed... perhaps I had some affection for the cat that the Lord did not want me to have!" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 309).

Something alike happened to Saint Teresa of the child Jesus before she became a Carmelite. Her dad had given her a new born white lambkin as a present which died two or three days later, when she hoped to see it prancing around her. The saint interprets the lambkin's death this way: "My dear godmother, you don't know how many considerations the lambkin's death inspired

in me! We shouldn't become attached to anything here, not even to innocent things, because they pass away just when we do not think of it!" (Story of a soul, Lice, no. 839).

Father Vitale comments the Father's remark this way: "We must admire the speech and the feelings of the saints" He taught us to cut anything that could tie us to the world. For instance, he took us away from some place, some conversation, some friendship... because he feared attacks on us. We remember so many teachings, because he tried to infuse so many of them in us!

One day when the Lord was late in granting him a grace, he said in his simplicity: 'I examined my conscience to know whether there was anything hindering the grace, but I could not find anything'" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 309-310). That reminds us of another episode: "Once we were considering Saint Ignatius' connection with God. It was so great that if he had seen his society destroyed, he would have needed only fifteen minutes to cool down completely. At this point, the padre in his simplicity exclaimed: 'So long?' It was as if he wished human nature was not so reluctant to submit to divine law" (Ibid., page 280).

## 7. Trust in God

The Father's great trust in God was the outcome of his hope.

The private or community prayers aiming at fostering trust in God are very many. When in trouble, the Father used to spend the night in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. He used to say: "They who trust in the Lord are like mount Zion, which is immovable; which forever stands" (Ps. 126, 1).

A priest once said to the Father that some of his words in the Preface to Precious Adhesions showed some discouragement in the presence of insurmountable obstacles.(1) "Yes," he answered, "but I never lost my trust in God, like David saying, 'I have reached the watery depths; the flood overwhelms me'" (Ps. 69, 3).

From his many letters and some oral expressions we know that he faced disheartening internal fights, but he always kept his interior trust in God. He often remarked that even the defects of a founder are a means in the hands of God to test the humility and the hope we must have in God so that no creature may brag before his presence. The Father's trust never went into an eclipse, not even in the darkest events.

He had a very hard life, bearing in peace his troubles without confiding them to anyone. In such cases he said: "Let us pray, let us pray, and trust in the Lord; the institute is his work, and he will save it!"

Afflicted but not disheartened for the increasing difficulties, he suggested to increase the prayer and to repose our hope in God, without confiding in any creature.

He merely said, "I never confided in man," because "he has only an arm of flesh, but we have the Lord, our God, to help us and to fight our battles" (2 Chr. 32, 8).

One day the Father was walking with Father Vitale and relating to him the debts by which he was afflicted, because he had no means to pay them off. At a certain point the Father stopped in front of a palace and asked whether the owners would sell it to him, because Avignone was too small for the institute's development. At amazement of Father Vitale who saw a contradiction between his complaint about the debts and the will to buy the palace, the Father said: "What does it mean? The debts belong to me, but the purchase of the palace is of divine providence's concern.

## **8. Always hopeful**

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The trust in God was the foundation of his institute's life. On the entrance to Avignone the Father had the gospel's heartening saying written: "Do not live in fear, little flock. It has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom" (Lk. 12, 32). He ended the daily work by

commending himself to God, saying in the nightly prayer the psalm, "You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High..." (Ps. 91).

This kind of confidence he demanded from the people entrusted to him. When Father Vitale underwent spiritual suffering for many years, the Father supported and heartened him in any occasion, and when Father Vitale once asked to make a special retreat, the Father answered, "Father Vitale needs no retreat; he has to get rid of the nagging thoughts; he is in the bosom and the heart of our Lord" (Vol. 32, page 17). On another occasion he wrote to him: "How displeased is our Lord because you think of hell, while he loves you so much... In some revelations to the saints the Lord has said that the sons and daughters have not to think of hell, because they share everything with the celestial Father! Our Lord said to the apostles: 'Rejoice... that your names are inscribed in heaven' (Lk. 10, 20). He says the same to us; therefore, let us love him and ask holy perseverance, because we are not created for hell" (Vol. 33, page 73). On other occasions: "Cheer up! You have suffered so much! You gulped down such things... but Jesus is with you and will console you" (Vol. 31, page 91). *Expecta Dominum, viriliter age et confortetur cor tuum* (Vol. 31, page 60).

"Let us look at God, do all we can, and go forth" (Vol. 32, page 19). Speaking of the ones failing because of the war, he wrote, "Let us pray and trust in the heart of Jesus, our supreme good; he will keep them and will make provisions for us: let us not place our trust in man" (Vol. 32, page 89). Defections, or disappearances, or deaths notwithstanding, we have to go forth trusting in the most holy Heart of Jesus, resolved never to leave out our work, even when we do not succeed... Let us do it in the adorable name of Jesus what we can, avoiding all pretence" (Vol. 33, page 122).

To Mother Nazzarena, "I hope you are doing well and both your heart and soul are united with Jesus, the only eternal infinite good. Giving up our life for him even by as much martyrdom as the number of the martyrs is nothing. Place your past, present, and future existence in the beloved Heart of Jesus. When we realize we have displeased him, we have not to distrust or dishearten, because we would hurt his heart; on the contrary, we have to present again ourselves in the presence of Jesus, saying: 'Lord, the one you love is sick'" (Jn, 11, 3). And also: "My Jesus, if my faults were more than the sea-sands and the stars in the sky, I would never like to distrust you, because your mercy is infinitely greater than my faults." Jesus loves so much

the repented, humble persons, and forgets their faults! Cheer up, and begin again to be holy" (Vol. 35, page 131). May everything help you to be humble before our Lord, being always trustful, because the humble trust pleases him. All of us should have a loving repentance of our past faults: I have said repentance but not torment, because the damned have torment, whereas repentance unites us to God!" (Vol. 35, page 200).

After the Italian defeat at Caporetto in 1917, he heartens the sisters serving in a military hospital in Padua by writing to the mother superior: "I exhort you and our dear daughters in Jesus Christ to trust in the divine heart. Don't be dismayed, but be confident under the mantle of Immaculate Mary, our divine superior. Do your duty piously, comforting the soldiers and raising their morale. Be very observant in the practice of the religious virtues, above all in the love for Jesus and Mary, in the religious observances, in the holy prayer, obedience, humility, and discipline. By so doing you can be confident that the most holy Heart of Jesus and the most holy Virgin will protect you" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 252).

When the Morning Star Sisters were suffering exceptional tribulations, they were exhorted by the Father, "May Jesus provide for the future of your institute; certainly he will. By divine decree the institute of Our Lady of Sorrow will bloom and spread for the divine glory and the salvation of souls. Meanwhile we are on the Calvary: resurrection will come later. Let us have such a faith and trust in the most holy Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Mary! Greater are the humiliations, the abandonments, want, and darkness, greater will be the mercies of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will triumph in this institution" (Vol. 39, page 34). Furthermore: "I have been touched by your letter; however, we must consider that the adorable Jesus is a loving father who does not let his daughters perish. He hides, makes us see things as though they were lost, but at proper time he turns everything to our good" (Vol. 39, page 68).



## 9. The vows of trust

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### *A. The forgiveness of sins*

Let us see how the Father cultivated his trust in God. First of all we point out that such a virtue is a gift from God, and, therefore, the Father implored it through prayer.

A prayer for the holy trust dates back to February 1886:

My Jesus, I beg you to give me the tender filial trust in you. I fear you because you are the judge to whom I will account for my actions; but you also see to it that I love you as a loving father who tenderly nurtures his children. If my sins, human weaknesses, and malice terrify and confuse me in your presence, you see to it that your infinite mercy and love comfort, cheer up my spirit, and infuse in me a tender, holy, filial trust in you! May your sorrows, your loving sayings, and the finesse of love of your heart be always present in my mind; may my fearful soul have the heart to surrender trustfully to your mercy... My Jesus, for your sake, for the sake of your open heart, and for the sake of your most holy Mother, Saint Joseph, all saints and the angels grant me this grace I need so much: the grace of a tender filial trust in you, who are my father, brother, redeemer, and spouse of my soul. Get rid of the obstacles which hinder me from having the full trust in you, and see to it that I may sigh, love, desire, seek, serve you, and live and die completely abandoned into your hands (Vol. 6, page 140).

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The human spirit has its ups and downs; and the persons who are called to holiness are purified by God with exceptional spiritual afflictions; in such a case they need to surrender themselves trustfully in the Lord's hands! We quote a Father's prayer, which reflects his afflicted spirit:

My Jesus, beloved heart of my Jesus, time after time an internal affliction and fear bring distrust and hinder me from invoking, desiring, and loving you trustfully and tenderly.

My Jesus, if this is a torment for my not amended, or not confessed, or not expiated sins, I beg you to illumine and move me with your powerful grace so that I amend and purify my conscience through holy confession, atoning for my faults.

But, if this affliction comes from scruples, or temptations, or weakness

of nature, let me get rid of, or overcome it so that I may unite you trustfully, loving, sighing, and searching you with holy confidence.

My Jesus, hear my prayer as much and as you want, because I have already surrendered myself to you. I am completely at your disposal" (Vol. 5, page 142).

The humble person never forgets his faults, and always fears to relapse because of human weakness. Nonetheless, he fosters his trust in God as a loving father who forgives and welcomes his repented son, even if he has sinned 77 times seven.

Such is the trust of the Father, who pledges himself to it through vows.

In the first years of this century he wrote:

My Lord Jesus Christ, kneeling in your divine presence like the prodigal son at the foot of his father and helped by your divine grace, I protest through my vows to never distrust your infinite goodness, clemency, and mercy in spite of my past, present, and future iniquities, either grave or light, in which I might fall. As for my past sins, I protest through my vows that I will be always confident that you have forgiven them, even though I do not give up the holy fear and the sad remembrance of them. As for the future faults in which I may fall, I protest through my vows that I will never distrust your mercy, even though I might fall in the most serious iniquities of the world; I will always trust to be forgiven in full by falling down at your feet and by asking pardon for your sweetest Heart's sake.

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Were I to fall seventy seven times seven in the same iniquities which I committed in the past or in worse ones, I protest through my vows that I will always trust in your infinite goodness, imploring your pardon in the same way, sure that your sweetest Heart's superabundant piety shall forgive me in full as though I had never offended you before. Therefore, I take my vows that in any case, and in any relapse, I will come to you as though that fault were the first one, sure that you will receive me with open arms, on condition that my repentance be true, sincere, and loving.

O my Jesus, please do not disappoint me, but grant me your mercy, which is beyond my hope and confidence. Amen. Amen (Vol. 4, page 89).

### *B. The life of the institute*

At the end of September 1898, the Melanie's departure was near. She had saved the Daughters of Divine Zeal from shipwreck,

but the responsibility of their spiritual and economic life along with the hardships were about to fall on the Father's shoulders. To prepare himself for the new situation and to foster the trust in God in the institute's members, the Father conceived the **spiritual union** of the older and more affectionate congregants. Thus, God would save the institute by his mercy.

By the Lord's help, the individuals of this spiritual union promise to redouble their trust in God's infinite goodness, in the most holy Heart of Jesus' infinite mercy, and in the most holy Mary's, in the angels', and in the patron saints' powerful intercession. The greater the growth of tribulations, the want, the human suspicions, the perils of dissolution of this Institute, the more the members of this spiritual union will trust in God. They choose as their motto the Apostle Paul's saying: "We hope against hope." Therefore, they "renew explicitly their resolution to persevere in the service of God in this institute in spite of persecutions, failure, discouragement, tribulations, want, and oppositions, unless the Lord shows manifestly through the ecclesiastical authority that he does not want this institute any longer (Vol. 40, pages 122-23).

The proceeding of the institute continued being afflicted by hardships and oppositions. On his anniversary of July 5, 1905, the Father glorified the Lord's kindness through another vow of trust, pledging to always hold that divine help will never fail the institute and promising to never be disheartened by his own sins and by the sins of the others.

My sweetest Lord Jesus Christ, in the sorrows and tribulations, in the doubts and want surrounding me, I come at your feet, expecting your help and the appropriate providence with humble, loving confidence. So that my confidence may never fail, because of my frail nature, at your feet I **take an explicit vow** of never distrusting, nor yielding to diffidence in the midst of want, disappointments, failure, and persecutions. On the contrary, I bind myself through a vow to redouble my humble, loving trust in the sweetest, superabundant, divine piety of your most benign Heart, as well as in the gentlest motherly charity and in the compassion of the immaculate Heart of Mary, who is your mother and ours.

Helped by your grace and by my own good will, I bind myself by vow to have a steady faith and hope that you and your most holy mother **can and want** to free us from any situation and risk of dispersion; that you and your most holy mother **can and want** to maintain,

help, provide, shelter; want to assist, protect, free, and save so many orphans, priests, virgins, and poor that you have supported by mercy, as well as these nascent institutes that are decorated with your divine word: **"Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest"** and are committed to spread this word; these institutes that you have guided and protected until now with many wonders of your power and mercy.

Meanwhile, my Lord, I bind myself to never be disheartened in the fulfillment of this vow, because of my sins and of this institute's; on the contrary, I will trust in your infinite clemency that you will pass over our indignity by covering it with your divine merits and by atoning for it with your Most Precious Blood.

My beloved Lord, please accept this vow and lock it in your most loving Heart and in the immaculate Heart of Mary; please help me observe it exactly in the most embarrassing situations, even when you have brought us to the hell's doors and almost to nothing; then, please see to it that full of humble trust, hope, and confidence I may have the living faith that you can, want and will save us unexpectedly even by working miracles of omnipotence and mercy! Amen!

I say one **Hail Mary** to the most holy Virgin, asking her to bless this vow, to help me fulfill it faithfully, to hope against hope, and to present it to the most holy Heart of Jesus. Amen (Vol. 4, page 89).

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## 10. The third vow of trust

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The efficacy of prayer bases on the trust, since our Lord said: "I give you my word, if you are ready to believe that you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer, it shall be done for you" (Mc. II, 24).

The Father teaches:

Since trust originates from humility, like humility it is an essential element of prayer... But, what is trust all about? It is a gentle union with Jesus making us sees him as our loving, benign, gentle, supreme goodness,

who is longing to communicate his graces, and to make us see him as our father, friend, brother, spouse, and tender lover. This loving trust which remains constant despite contrary reasons, drives the humble, loving soul to hug the knees of the loving God and to look at him with eyes imploring mercy, even when Jesus seems unwilling to grant graces for just reasons; it makes the soul follow God when he seems far away, crying like the blind in the Jericho's street: "Jesus, my Jesus, hear my request; I will cry till you hear me for your mercy, for your divine meek heart, and for your glory!"

Oh! What a fervent, loving, humble, sweet, tender words a person will say to Jesus when she is full of holy trust; and how pleased Jesus is by such humble prayer full of trust. Such a soul may draw any grace from his divine hands! We find such a humble, confiding prayer in the Canaanite woman's mouth, which we must keep in mind (Vol. 1, page 65).

The Father is an example for us. His trust in the prayer never failed, and we will touch upon it over again. Here, we point out that he bound himself to it by vow in order to fortify his trust. He did so on May 5, 1910, feast of the Ascension, in San Pier Niceto, where he was preaching the novena for Our Lady of Pompei. In that time his orphanages were threatened with death by the lay authority for the events in Francavilla Fontana. We quote:

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My beloved Lord Jesus Christ, kneeling in your divine presence, in the abyss of my nothingness I protest **through my vows** that I always want to trust in your infinite goodness as well as in your divine promises that you hear our prayers. You said: "**The Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name**" (Jn. 15, 16); "**Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you**" (Mt. 7, 7); "**Until now you have not asked for anything in my name; ask and you will receive, so that your happiness may be complete**" (Jn. 16, 24). Likewise, I intend to confide in the expressive parable of the friend knocking at another friend's door in the night and asking for three loaves to welcome other persons - the friend, my supreme goodness. - Even though the friend was unwilling to get up to give the loaves, still he surrendered because of the importunity of the situation, and gave the three loaves. Also in the parable of the woman seeking justice from an unjust judge not from a judge friend, what a wonder! and the unjust judge - you are not, my supreme goodness - satisfied that woman because of her importunity!

In the presence of these ineffable and surprising promises, I take my vow to always trust in you, in your adorable Heart, in your infinite goodness and liberality, as well as in your most holy mother, in your angels and saints, whom I implore in your name. I trust that you will infallibly grant me the graces I have asked, the ones I am used to ask,

and will ask for your glory, for the salvation of the souls, for me the miserable and for my relatives, as well as for the Rogation's and for Divine Zeal's institutes along with their charitable and religious works. If I ask you or your most holy mother or the angels or the saints for these graces, mercies, and celestial favors with pure intention, humility, holy fervor, pious insistence, and perseverance, conforming to your adorable merciful will, I trust that you will hear me.

My beloved love, if after praying with all the good dispositions and with the greatest trust I do not receive these graces and mercies, or I think of not receiving them, all this notwithstanding I *take vows* to always believe your true, infallible, divine promises, imputing to my unworthiness and ill-dispositions the cause for not obtaining the graces and the mercies that I ask for myself and for others. Therefore, I will humble myself, will hope and strive to become worthy, making my petitions through your divine merits, through the merits of your most holy mother, the angels, and the saints, as well as through the merits of the just and innocent souls. I will always firmly believe that you, most liberal Lord, can and want and will grant the graces, the mercies, and the celestial favors that I have asked, I am asking, and will ask.

Sweet Heart of my Jesus, even though you or your most holy mother or the angels or the saints do not hear, or repel my prayers seventy seven times seven, and quite the reverse of my petitions happens to me, I take my vow that my trust will not fail with your help. I will hope against hope, always asking and waiting for the divine mercies; to do homage to your infallible promises, I trust and will trust that you will always grant me more abundant graces than the ones I wish, hope, and ask.

I base this *unlimited vow of trust* in your infinite goodness upon your divine merits, on your most holy mother's, on the angels', and on the saints' merits as well as upon the just and innocent souls. My Jesus, please accept this vow and lock it in your sweetest, most merciful Heart as well as in the most loving, pure Heart of your most holy mother; look at this vow benignly and mercifully every time I ask, wish, long for, and cry, but do not obtain or do not seem to obtain the graces I am asking; look at this vow every time your most just and holy motives prevent you from granting what I am asking, or you do otherwise, or I do not understand that you are granting the favors.

O most loving sweet Heart of Jesus, o most immaculate Heart of Mary, be merciful to me and to the persons for whom I wail, sigh, and pray! Have mercy! I am a poor man in need, and my years fail in lamentations, etc.

Angels and saints, please have mercy on me and on my petitions!... Celestial friends... Souls of the just on earth, may your prayers help me. Amen... (Vol. 4, page 91).

The Father suggested the persons who were worthy to make this vow. Mother Nazzarena was one of them.

For some time, the community of the Holy Spirit was under continuous tests from the Lord, and the Father wrote: "I fear the community of the Holy Spirit has a hidden sentence to atone for divine justice, and some persons are the victims!... Let us praise God, have a confident hope in all events, and renew the vow of trust!" (Vol. 35, page 99). On another occasion: "You are saying that want is felt. Praised be the Lord! **Renew the vow of trust!**" (Vol. 36, page 186).

The peasant Virginia dell'Aquila of Oria was living an uncommon spiritual life. The Father visited her now and then, exhorting and leading her to the perfect surrender to God. He says:

I feel that Virginia fears for herself. Do you think that Virginia still exists? I knew she was dead; how is it that she revivifies? If Virginia is dead, she cannot mind her own business. The new Virginia has nothing to do with the old one, who was inconsiderate, always thinking of her being saved or damned, whether she was acceptable to God or not, whether she was doing God's will or not. The Virginia full of anxiety is dead. The new Virginia does not mind herself, but looks after the interests of Jesus' Heart; she does not mind whether she will be saved or not, because she surrenders herself into the Heart of Jesus, where none can be lost. The new Virginia is thinking of suffering for the conversion of sinners, is praying to win good workers to the holy Church, and is wailing only for the interests of Jesus and of souls (S.C. Vol. 5, page 114).

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He answers a desolate letter of Virginia:

You write and call yourself Virginia wretch. Please do not apply to yourself the word wretch, because wretch is the devil who has lost for ever the grace of God! Perhaps you say: "I am a wretch because I have no priest helping me." Do you mean that Jesus is not enough for you? What nonsense! Perhaps you say: "I am a wretch because I cannot receive Holy Communion." But that is God's will, which is better than to receive Holy Communion! You will say: "I do not know if I am doing the will of God." If you don't know, it doesn't matter, provided that you do it. Where is the holy trust? Trust in Jesus who loves you so much, who wants you crucified out of love; do not wrong him through lack of trust. Rejoice instead, and conform to the Lord, being confident, confident, and confident. I would like you to make the vow of trust; if you agree, I will mail it to you (S.C. Vol. 5, page 115).

## 11. I shall never be confused for all eternity

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The Father endeavored to seek the means for his institution; but his inexhaustible resource was always trust in God.

He writes:

"I have tried several means, I have knocked at the door of the rich, but in vain; for that reason I am running the risk of abandoning these poor children, lest I lift up my eyes to the One who also feeds the birds of the air" (Vol. 41, page 5).

And the Lord rewarded the trust of his servant. Writes Father Vitale:

"In the presence of such moving charity, it is not surprising that Providence sometimes met the padre's needs mysteriously, especially before the earthquake when the lack of help was continual. Unexpected aids, as we read in the story of Cottolengo, happened proportionately at Canon Di Francia's institutions. Pressed by creditors and hopeless to get human help, several times a beneficent secret hand gave him the needed money. On other occasions, when our communities needed necessary, unexpected provisions, enough for the poor as well came in. When abyss seemed to engulf the foundation, the gap was always filled by divine power! Now and again the help came in a legacy for the foundation, an unknown person who paid our debt, or money was found in a box...we might call it...a joke divine Providence played on his faithful servant" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 353).

Many of his works seemed absurd, and they might be only explained by his immense trust in God. Sometimes we needed necessities, and he said: "Do not be afraid, the Lord will provide as he did in the past." Due to this, wonders happened; for instance, a letter with abundant money arrived to meet unexpectedly



the need of bread on that day.

The Father himself recognized particular interventions of the Lord since the beginning of the institution. He wrote to Father Cusmano: "These little institutions are very incipient; we have no income, and live by alms. Humanly speaking it seems impossible to go forth, living by the day; and yet, we see miracles of divine Providence!" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 33). On another occasion: "Even though we are always in debt, divine providence manifests itself portentously" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 36).

In 1901, communicating the names of the afflicted institution to the sacred allies, the Father asks himself: "Will this little plant grow? Will it be formed, becoming a tree? Only God knows that!" And recognizing his own miseries, he continues: "If I look at the abyss of my weakness, I hope nothing for its future. But, if the institution is God's work, his omnipotence will provide it with the persons qualified for its formation and stability. On the ground of its means of subsistence, it can last one day, having nothing for tomorrow. And yet, we held it as a matter of no importance, but sought the divine glory and the salvation of souls with pure intention (which is a grace of God), holding that the institutions are not formed by gold and silver, but by the principles of the fear of God and by the Christian virtues. Then he manifests God's intervention: "However, the divine Providence that feeds the birds of the air and dresses the lilies in the fields, never failed us, providing us in a marvelous way" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 112).

## 12. Some episodes

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First of all let us listen to Msgr. Joseph Loiacono, archbishop of Ariano Irpino, who was a guest at Avignone for some days in 1901, before being consecrated a bishop.

"I knew of Canon Di Francia's holiness by repute, and the few days I lived together with him confirmed it. It was a fortune for me being present to the Servant of God's para-liturgy, when he instituted the **Rogationists of the Heart of Jesus** and the

**Daughters of Divine Zeal.** (2) I am always keeping in mind that service: nothing seemed to be terrestrial in that chapel; we felt the supernatural around us.

The sheltered youth narrated marvels of charity and even miracles... One evening the cooks said to him at dinner time:

- Father, we have no drop of oil to dress the salad.
- Did you check well?
- Yes, the oil container is dry.
- See again, and check better.

Even though they were sure, they obeyed. Meanwhile, the Father lifted up his eyes in prayer. At their coming back the youth said:

- Father, there is oil enough in the container."

Teresa, the Servant of God's sister, told us that a fellow once shouted to him in the street: "I want to be paid today." The Father answered: "Today you will be paid. Come over at Brunaccini palace at 7:00 p. m." He had not even a cent, but that day he received abundant alms and kept his word with that fellow.

When the Father was in need, he often appealed to Our Lady of the Letter, going to the cathedral to pray. Once, after the prayer, he met near the city fish-market a Mr. Antonino Interdonato, a general contractor and a benefactor of the institute, who asked the reason of the Father's affliction and gave him a bill of one hundred liras. Happy, the Father was in his way home when he met a poor woman crying for her urgent needs, and gave her the bill. Back to the institute, after praying before the Blessed Sacrament the Father was told that a lady had come offering a greater alm.

Saro Marchese remembers:

"While talking with Father Vitale and Canon Celona, the Father was asked for 78 liras for an urgent need of the institute. Rummaging his pockets, Father Vitale scraped together two liras, and the Father said: 'Let the children go to the church.'

He put on surplice and stole, opened the tabernacle, and said some Our Fathers. When the prayers ended, someone rang the front door bell. The mail man delivered an urgent registered wrapper, and the Father gave the two liras as a tip to him, who took them only after the Father's insistence, because he knew

Father Di Francia's needs.

In the wrapper there were two ear rings, an envelope, and a note saying: 'Place the ear-rings at the statue of Saint Anthony, and use the money for the orphans.' In the envelope there were 4 golden coins worth 20 liras each. Thus, Saint Anthony provided for the 78 liras plus for the two liras of tip.

One day, someone knocked at the door of Saint Paschal in Oria. It was an old poor man who was crying at the top of his voice: 'Padre Hannibal, will you give me a piece of bread?'...

The Father went to the refectory...opened the bread chest and asked... 'isn't there any bread?' 'No, today brother Joseph will go to Ceglie to pick it up.' I barely had enough to make lunch. The padre gathered the bread from the table, put it in a basket, and gave it to the poor man. I asked: 'Padre, when the community comes, what will I give them?'

He smiled in a friendly way and said: 'How long does it take to prepare lunch?'

'Scarcely a few minutes.' Then he added: 'The Lord will provide us with bread.' He left...

Someone was ringing the bell at the door. Brother Joseph opened it while the church bell was playing Angelus. A woman carrying a basket of warm bread asked the brother to have it blessed by Padre Hannibal; she would take two loaves only; the remaining was for the orphans" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 354).

Referring to the early years of the institute, the Father said that once he had to pay the rent of Avignone little houses, and he had no money.

"Give me at least 200 liras" said Donna Anna, the dues collector. And the Father: "Come back in about an hour." As soon as the lady went away, Msgr. Guarino's butler came in with 200 liras sent by Francis II, the former king of the Two Sicilies, who was in Berlin in exile. The Father had written to him, and the money arrived at the proper time.

Sister Gertrude says that she entered the institute of the Daughters of Divine Zeal after hearing the following wonder from Miss Biotti Carlotta of Messina, a teacher in Lipari. The fact is this: when the suppliers decided to give the Father no credit any longer, the Servant of God collected his thoughts in prayer. When he went to the suppliers, he found out that his debts had been paid by an unknown person and he took the payment receipt.

Sister Veronica Briguglio, she was then the mother superior,

confirmed the above episode to Sister Gertrude. Father Cama of Messina knew of it from his late brother Dominic, who was a cleric at Avignone in that time, and narrated it to me.

It seems that such a wonder happened more than once.

These facts may be explained by the intervention of generous benefactors, such as Ciampa, Costa Saya, Interdonato... who remained anonymous. However it may be, the divine providence intervened.

Francis De Gregorio has been a doorkeeper at the institute for a few decades; his reports date back at the time he was a candidate to religious life: "We were lacking money and food; the Servant of God went out for begging, but returned tired and empty-handed, while we were in the church praying on his exhortation. Suddenly, the doorkeeper hands to him a letter delivered by an unknown person: there was money in. The Father, however, was unable TO thank him, because he had already disappeared.

Because the clothes of children ran short, the Father told them to pray the Madonna. Suddenly a load of clothes sent by a charitable lady came in: sheets, shirts, linen, an iron bed, and four mattresses. While we were busy putting them in order, also a load of paste sent by another lady came in.

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One day a supplier went to the Father shouting and threatening. The Servant of God tried to keep him calm, telling him to be confident in divine providence. While the creditor was still with the Father, a letter was delivered. The Father opened it; there was money enough in it to pay off the creditor.

One morning of May in the chapel, the Father drew the slip which indicated the act of mortification on that day. It was written: "Hear mass kneeling, with eyes cast down, and joined palms." He commented: "I am in need of money; someone is willing to lend it to me, but he demands a guarantee which I cannot offer. You perform this act of mortification well, because this is the best guarantee." The children paid full attention while making the penance. The same day, the person gave the money to the Father without any guarantee.

One evening in 1901, the Father gathered the little children and said: "I need a great sum of money; each of you should ask the Madonna for 50 liras..." The following day the Father returned to the institute of the Holy Spirit and said: "Children, the

first 50 liras have already come; who of you prayed fervently? " The following day he went again to the children showing a heavy envelope and saying: "Children, what is inside here?" All together they shouted: "50 liras." - No! - Said the Father -There are all the 50 liras you asked from the Madonna... Actually, 50 liras still want... for sure one of you did not pray well... go ahead confidently! The remnant 50 liras came that day. Later, the Father told the children that the man who delivered the big envelope was unknown to him!

Sometimes the Father took in his lap a three or four year old orphan, telling him: "Let us pray the Madonna; she hears you. We have nothing to eat." The child joined the hands in attitude of prayer saying a Hail Mary, and the Madonna provided according to the need.

Teacher Gazzara writes:

"One day, almost crying, the Father said to a group of little orphans in my presence: 'today you have nothing to eat. Come with me in the chapel!' I followed them. They prayed with raised hands to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the intercession of Saint Anthony. Not even half an hour had passed when a load of tuna fish came in. It was sent by a person unknown to me. Later it came to my knowledge that bread, paste, and oil turned up in abundance."

The same teacher writes that he met the Father in Cavour Boulevard in April 1901, and while walking with him the Father said: "How much I have to praise the Lord for the graces he has granted to me, a poor minister! I went up the stair of a rich man and knocked at his door. As soon as he opened the door and saw me, he slammed the door at my face: but a helping hand will always appear for my orphans. In that moment a person approaches him, kisses the Father's hand, and places a bill of fifty liras in it.

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Francis Langher of Roccalumera was a guest in Avignone as a student. He reports the following episode which happened in 1889. One day the baker called upon the Father insisently for an account of at least 300 liras upon his credit so that he might pay a bill expiring that day.

The Father said: "Today, the capital of the community amounts to 20 cents. However, you wait for a while because the children will pray to Saint Joseph, who will provide.

The baker sat down nervously not knowing whether he should go away or wait... The Father along with the community was praying in the chapel. After about 20 minutes, he was called

to the door. Two French officers, a master mariner and his vice-mariner declared that they were caught by a storm in the open sea and had pledged 300 liras for alms in the first city they would enter, if the Lord had saved them. They were keeping their word, happy to help a French institution. The Father explained to them that his name was Di Francia, but he was not a French man. Both of them, however, concluded: "If the Lord led us here, it means this is his will," and handed 300 liras. Thus, also the baker learned to trust in Providence.

We close this chapter with two episodes narrated by Joseph, Father Bonarrigo's nephew, who lived in Avignone four-five years. One day, after returning empty handed from the city, the Father had the work in the laboratories stopped, and gathered all in the chapel to pray for the daily food. At midday sharp, the postman delivers a registered letter with 100 liras inside. It was sent from Belgium by a lady who had visited the institute some time before.

The following painful episode leads us to think of God's mercy, which prevails over everything.

The Father had borrowed a sum of money and signed a bill. He hoped to pay it with the aid granted to him by the city hall. When the bill expired, the Father begged the creditor to renew it for a few days, waiting for the city hall's payment. But the creditor flew into a passion and threatened with dishonoring the bill.

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Back home, the creditor shouted like a possessed man, crying that the following day would be one of battle, as his relatives said... Unluckily, the following day never rose for that poor man, because he died in the night by apoplectic stroke.

## Notes

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(1) Speaking of the difficulties hindering the Pious Institution's development, the Father wrote: "The four difficulties, which surrounded this little charitable institute since its start, have been growing, always with more complication

of things and the interlacing of circumstances. The institute has been surrounded by a vortex of tribulations which brought it at the point of death a hundred times before being completely born. How many times I felt myself exclaiming, "The waters went over my head; I said: I am lost" (Jer. Lam. 3, 54). (S.C. Vol. 10, page 211).

(2) More exactly: It was the liturgy of September 15, 1901, when the Father proclaimed the final titles of his congregations.





7.

**"LOVE BECOMING  
IMMORTAL  
WITH YOU"**

1. Holiness is charity
2. God deserves our love
3. Happy the person who loves God!
4. Love of God in all of his works
5. Pure love
6. Hate for sin
7. "This man lives in God!"
8. A miniature
9. Always alert in preventing sin
10. The spirit of atonement
11. God's will
12. In bad and good time
13. Prayers to do God's will
14. Notes.

# I. Holiness is charity

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Charity is the queen and mother of all virtues. "It contains and summarizes the perfections in such a way that not even one virtue can be achieved perfectly without charity. Like cement and lime tie the stones in the walls making the building stand, like the muscles and sinews tie the body avoiding its decomposition, so charity ties the virtues, which cannot stand without it" (Saint Francis of Sales, Theot. book XI, ch. 9). Saint Augustin wrote: "Initial charity is initial holiness; advanced charity is advanced holiness; great charity is great holiness; perfect charity is perfect holiness" (*De natura et gratia*, ch. 70, no. 84). Saint Thomas Aquinas states: **"The perfection of Christian life lies in the charity, first in God's love, second in the love for neighbor"** (*Ila Ilae*, q. 184 art. 3). Our Lord said: "On these two commandments the whole law is based, and the prophets as well" (Mt. 22, 40).

The Father writes,

"Everything must begin from love, because God's love gives a priceless value to our actions. Love teaches perfection, and everything done without love is lost. Love forms the pure intention, makes us work for God, his glory, and his honor, and makes us be grateful to him for his divine benefits, above all for the benefits of Jesus Christ's divine redemption.

Pure love urges us to love God for himself more than for his binding commandment to love him, or for the many goods deriving from such a love. This pure love is the perfection of charity and the image of the love with which the Blessed in heaven love God... All of us must long for it. May pure love be the best of the religious practices; may it imbue our minds, our wills, our hearts" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 183).

Let us look at the Father's love for God.

## 2. God deserves our love

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The Father taught us the love for God by word and example preaching the Lord's beauty and infinite kindness, and pointing out that life without love for God is barren and lacking all good. He wrote:

May our life be a continuous effort to love God our Lord, Creator and Redeemer, with a predominant, strong, tender, constant, fervent, active, compassionate, effective, and uniting love (Vol. 3, page 166). God is infinite beauty! God is infinite goodness, and we must love him. He holds all perfections, beauties, treasures, which we are unable to understand. If we look at nature, we see a faintest image of the divine properties. Let us look at space: it is so immense that the human mind cannot compute it; still, God is more. Look at the stars: they are millions and millions and many of them are greater than earth a hundred thousand times; suspended in the empty space, they orbit with admirable order, still they cannot express how powerful God is, because he created them with a word and he is able to create as many of them as he wants. Look at nature: how many beauties it has! Beautiful is spring, fragrant the flowers, majestic the mountains, pretty the creeks, pleasant the fields, mysterious the graves, terrible the oceans: how much beauty and variety the author of them holds! (Vol. 23, page 15).

The virtues of the saints come from God, who is infinite goodness. He shows himself to the blessed ones who see him face to face, experiencing a loving happiness that differs from one another. Without lessening himself, he rewards the merits of the elect by making them contemplate himself for ever without growing weary as eternally new, despite his being all the same. They love him because he is worthy of being loved, not because they take pleasure in loving the infinite goodness. Even though he would make them suffer eternally, they would continue loving him.

Now, then, if God is infinite goodness holding the wholeness of beauty and greatness, does he not deserve our love? (Vol. 23, page 16).

### 3. Happy the person who loves God!

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Desiring that all of his children love the Lord, the Father continues:

Which merciless heart will deny love to God? Poor creatures! They love everything but God! And yet, earthly loves are vain, are nothing. Look at the world and show me what God's creatures love. Some love money, others clothing; some food, others property and wealth; some conversation, others glory and honor; some love creatures; and with what profane love, transport, and passion they love them! Ah! The main loves blinding human beings are loves of self-interest and of creatures. How do they sacrifice themselves for the sake of self-interest and of creatures! They spend nights, face risks, struggle for a living, swear, work, and endanger their life! They declare to live for each other, to share the days, the pains, the sufferings of their life! People go so far as to idolize creatures!

But happy is the person who is penetrated by the sparkle of divine love; happy is the person that out of love lives with great transport, loving the Creator in creatures: instead of loving self-interest, he loves the king of all treasures, instead of loving vanity, he loves the eternal truth! Happy is the person who says to the world: "Treacherous world, you do not suit me! You have nothing else but tribulation and bitterness; I have drunk from your cup experiencing how bitter it is; I do not love you, I do not surrender my heart to you; on the contrary, I love Jesus, I want to surrender my heart to Jesus.

## 4. Love of God in all of his works

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Through preaching, prayers, and exhortations, the Father urges us to praise, bless, and adore the divine attributes; through the prayer of the first fruit he teaches us to begin the new year by praising God's omnipotence, mercy, wisdom, providence, and divine perfections. He insists that we should never forget God's love for us, which reveals itself in all works.

When we consider that God loved us with eternal charity, our mind is moved, our heart is touched. We were not yet born nor our parents nor our forefathers, and God was loving us. Neither earth nor the sky nor the stars existed, and God was loving us.

Do you think God was in need of us, poor creatures? Wasn't he fully happy without us? Being all the same fully happy, God did not need us, nor was he obliged to love or create us; and yet, he loved our souls so much that he not only created, but also redeemed us. He made us in his image and when we lost his image because of sin, he sent his only son on earth to redeem us. What does this most benign Lord demand of us for his love? Nothing else but love!

## 5. Pure love

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The Blessed Thomas of Jesus, in "The Anguish of Our Lord," asks the Lord for a sparkle of love. The Father erased the word 'sparkle' from his book and replaced it with a fire.' A fire of love! This was his eagerness, his longing!

Since his early years he nourished an ardent love for God.

When he graduated from college, he made himself so conspicuous in piety and virtue that his confessor gave him the permission to receive holy Communion every day at the age of 17, which was very rare in those times. Still, he did not yet feel, nor

he foresaw the divine call which was to snatch him from the world, some year later.

On the contrary, at a certain moment he deemed he had to form his own family. Father Vitale has it:

“In his early youth, thought about his destiny sometimes crossed his mind. And although he was filled with holy affection, his heart was touched momentarily by an earthly creature. Later on, he paid for this indulgence very dearly in his spiritual life; he had a lasting fear that he had shared the heart with which had been so close to God with the world for a few moments of his life” (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 18).

But there was no sharing of his heart; at 18 years of age, our youth began thinking of his destiny. Feeling no special call from the Lord, he deemed that the common way of life was open to him. God, however, made himself felt at a certain moment. The Father said that his vocation was a sudden one; when he did not expect it, God spoke to his heart, and he became sure that the Lord had called him to the ecclesiastical vocation.

Our young poet could not help hinting at this fleeting period of his life when he composed the marvelous poem on the death of the illustrious Taccone Gallucci's younger sister Carolina:

Oh! If you loved! I would tell you: happy,  
You who girded divine wings  
before a grievous disenchantment withered  
The flower of your beauty!  
Fortunate, I would say; deceitful  
Dream is life, a fleeting show  
that the flattery of love represents  
By fanciful colors; if you draw near  
To pin down the undaunted, and serene,  
You'd see naked the whole  
Charm, that the ingenuous eyes enticed...  
Trust me, to whom the mystery of a precocious love  
Was understood while drinking  
From the gentle opening breeze of youth,  
Me, that, made ill and deserted, started back  
To the friendly shadow of the altars, weeping.

Perhaps this is the *unknown anguish* which he expressed in these verses honoring the *Madonna della Mutata*.

In the innermost fibre  
Of my afflicted heart  
Is a pain to all unknown  
Is a suffering unexplored;  
No sight of creature  
Can this dark shadow feature.

In the poem "To Immaculate Mary," published in *The Catholic Word*, when he was only seventeen, the poet laments his errors:

I too weep at your feet, O Mary,  
In the suffering of my disenchantment:  
How many errors, inside of me  
Embitter the life of my soul!  
But in the flower of my years,  
Kneeling at your holy knees  
I sought you with tears in my eyes,  
There I found the cross and the altar!

The episode did not upset the serenity of his spirit, nor did it block his way to holiness.

He pledged always to improve his love for the Lord, loving him the best he could, and turning his life to an ever increasing act of love for God.

On one occasion he entered a class of children who were learning the verb to be. He suddenly applied the lesson to God who is the being and love we must adore and love. He made a meditation on it suitable to the children's minds, who never forgot it.

God's love was his life. He spoke of it with great fervor, sharing his flames of love with his listeners. His institutions show the mark of this love, which transpired from his speaking, praying, walking, and acting.

He spread this love all his life long with his example, his writings, his works of charity, and the religious congregations he founded.

Father Vitale writes:

“Our padre strove to possess the pure divine love. We perceived his striving from the acts of his private life and from his ardent cares and continuous concerns that no worldly spirit nor human interest entered our congregations... He wished each member of his communities to seek God alone, following his example and teaching. When he met simple persons not at all allured by the world, he was very pleased. He thought

that these persons attracted the blessing of God on his institution.

He used to say: whoever seeks God is humble, simple, and docile; he is not cunning, nor is he a liar, nor he feigns. On the contrary, he puts himself in the hands of the superiors to be molded as wax.

Still a cleric, I began to associate with the Father. He showed me his orphans in the Avignone quarter and explained his ideals to me, concluding: "In short, here we seek God and paradise." As a matter of fact, the aim of his institutions is summed up in seeking God and paradise.

Animated with divine love, he never sought money to increase the institute's capital, not even when it was easy to do so, because he feared to surpass Providence's limits; nor he sought licit human help apart from the pure glory of God.

Considering how vast was the institute's mission he had undertaken, he sometimes exclaimed: "Oh, where I plunged into! I wonder whether I am pleasing the Lord!"

When the Father saw wise, devout persons becoming sad for being insulted by the world, he mildly recalled them to seek only the pure love of God.

In his several misfortunes he used to exclaim: -Let us seek God and look at him alone.

This pure love of God explains his constancy and untroubled mind in every circumstance.

We will be happy, if we imitate our good Father!" (*Bulletin* 1931, page 35).

## 6. Hate for sin

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Since our Lord said: "If you love me and obey the commands I give you...(Jn. 14, 15), as well as: "You are my friends if you do what I command you" (Jn. 15, 14), true love of God cannot confine itself to words. Whoever wants to love the Lord, should pledge to avoid anything which is against his holy law, even in the least; therefore, he must hate sin, striving to avoid even the least faults.



This is a subject we must talk about. "Our society has lost the awareness of sin. If some trace is surviving, people try to suffocate it. Modern man does not want to feel a sinner; he wants instead to combine any action with tolerance and permission, following the **permissive morals**, which aim at freeing man from the bonds imposed by moralists, canonists, and ascetics" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, Feb. 18, 1972). People do not touch upon the subject of sin, nor do they want to listen to it: "Sin is a silenced word; modern persons avoid the consideration of sin and do not speak of it. Sin seems an obsolete, unbecoming word" (Ibid. March 9, 1972). And yet, sin "is the human beings' calamitous drama, which modern lax morals want to deprive of seriousness" (Ibid. July 20, 1972). This is Paul VI's teaching. On its part, the Second Vatican Council teaches that "the faithful still strive to conquer sin and increase in holiness. And so they turn their eyes to Mary who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of the virtues" (L.G. no. 65).

Fight against sin is a fundamental pledge of the Father.

Naturally, he too paid his tribute to human weakness, and he himself writes: "Only a creature, whose virtues were the abyss of all perfections, was free from the lightest imperfection. This creature was the Mother of God" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 62). More or less, the other human beings feel the effects of the original sin. The Father, however, acknowledged that his faults never reached mortal sin by the grace of God.

On February 10, 1927, during his last sickness, the Father confided to me:

I review in my mind the innumerable faults I have committed in my life, even though I think they are not mortal, by the grace of the Lord. But who can weigh the malice of a fault? The Lord lets me know my faults up to sixty years ago, and how all of them were punished; furthermore, the Lord made me understand the specific punishments which purified me of specific defects. For this reason I recall the words of the Bible: "If the spirit of the Lord is upon you, do not abandon it; you will be purified of your sins." And yet, we must always confide in our Lord.

A lively, bellicose nature engaged the Father in a close fight; but his long practice of the virtue made him prevail over nature, and when an instinctive act overtook him, he quickly took remedial measures.

For instance, one early morning the Father left; he returned some hours later to say mass. On the preceding evening he had

had a talk with a Mr. Ando', and both of them had raised the voice; but they left greeting each other sincerely. However, the following morning the Father went to beg pardon from that gentleman before saying mass, in case he had offended or scandalized him. Since he was not at home, the Father traced him in the city. Mr. Ando' went to Father Vitale and told him the story: "What is Father Di Francia thinking of...? Absolutely nothing happened..."

For sure, the Father wrestled continuously against his defects, and we have already quoted some of his resolutions he made over and over again.

The Father was confident in the Lord that he could succeed in avoiding sin and wrote beautiful prayers to obtain such a grace. We report one of them:

*To the crucified Jesus:*

O my crucified goodness, I do not want, not even in the least, to offend your heart, which is an infinite abyss of love and sorrow! My bad behavior scandalizes my neighbor, prevents the sanctification of souls, and tortures your divine heart! My Jesus, may such impiety never happen again! My crucified Lord, for the sake of your holy wounds grant me the favor of taking away any sin from me, even the venial ones. I will do my penance, even a double one! See to it that from now on I avoid even the lightest imperfection, which afflicts your beloved heart and scandalizes my neighbor. I am ready to suffer a double pain for the sins which your infinite kindness will hinder me from committing! My crucified love, I have tortured your heart too much, becoming an obstacle to my brethren! Not to hurt you, I wish I had never been born. You love me since eternity, and out of love you created and redeemed me! O infinite kindness, you are omnipotent! For the sake of yourself, please work this miracle in my soul.

Please do so for the most holy cross on which you died offering yourself to the Father; work this miracle for these very sharp nails, which perforated your hands and feet; for these very sharp thorns, which pierced your most innocent head; for this loving wound of your heart, which is a well of infinite charity; and for your most precious blood, which cries for mercy. Work this miracle for the sake of the most holy Mary in sorrow, and for the agony that her immaculate heart suffered at the foot of the cross! My crucified Jesus, for the sake of Saint John, Saint Magdalene, and Saint John of the cross who asked and obtained this grace from you, (1) hear me, hear me; grant me the grace I am ardently beseeching! Amen. Amen (Vol. 6, page 126).

Also, we have a prayer for daily behavior, in which the Father implores an effective grace to avoid offending the Lord during the day. (2)

Because he was very vigilant to avoid sin at any rate, the witnesses almost unanimously affirm that they never saw any fault in him.

## 7. "This man lives in God!"

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Whether the Father had received or not the grace granted to Saint John, it was a firm belief of those who were at home with him that he kept his baptismal innocence. Father Vitale knew him better than any one, and he repeated over again that he never noticed moral faults in him. He used to say: "He had his own miseries, but I think he never committed deliberate faults."

It is not surprising. The theologians teach that due to human weakness the perfect persons are unable to avoid human miseries, but they succeed to avoid the deliberate venial sins by a special grace of God,

Let us call to mind the episode of Hannibal's early youth when he went hunting together with an uncle of his. They came across a friend who asked how long their hunt had lasted. The uncle answered: "We were only out for an hour and all we hit was a blackbird in flight." Mary Hannibal added: "Our hunt began at three a.m., and we shot the bird on the branch of a fig tree!" His uncle said nothing, but after they left he scolded his nephew for his embarrassing corrections. Narrating the episode, the padre added: "You see what the world does; it teaches us to lie!"

Concerning lies, the Father said that he had received from the Lord the instinct to always say the truth. Lie appeared to him so strange that he did not suppose it even in others; for instance, he believed in the innocence of a shoemaker, because the shoemaker asserted it. He admitted no lies, not even by joke, and was so strict on this point that he dismissed a candidate to religious life because she did not amend such a defect in a certain period of time.

One day during the recreation, a boy shouted to his playmate: "Lie, lie!" The Father came out of his room and asked: "Who said the word lie? You should say 'It is not so,' otherwise you suppose the intention of cheating in your fellow, and that's not good."

I remember an exhortation to a mother superior: "For goodness' sake, may no one tell lies, nor be false, but all of them be sincere and simple, because lies ruin souls!" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 208).

He was untiring in recommending the superiors to prevent disorders, which remove the blessings of God from the communities. A former cleric recalled the Father that near to death with opened arms exhorted to avoid sin as the greatest evil with grave, solemn voice: "When there is no sin, we have nothing to fear, and Providence will never fail."

He almost never talked to the communities about mortal sin, but insisted on avoiding the venial ones and the defects.

He really feared venial sins, and said: "Who can understand crimes? Venial sins are conducive to serious disorders which we don't even suppose; they displease God, and we have to avoid them." While talking, he had wet eyes and trembling voice.

We also deduced his hatred toward sin from his suffering because of the defects in his community; he turned so grave and serious as to change the color in his face, becoming also uncompromising. He demanded the acknowledgment and the amendment of the fault. Says Father Vitale:

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The Father was jealously watchful in avoiding voluntary defects, and who has been in confidence with him knows the miniature of his conscience and his fear of offending the Lord even with the lightest faults. And yet, he used to say that he drank iniquities as water, and reminded us of how the Lord demands a perfect correspondence from the souls committed to perfection and of how he seriously punishes their little defects.

The writer remembers in details the padre's marvelous preaching on little defects during the retreat at the seminary. How many times he repeated the following words of the scripture: "Who despises little things, falls down, little by little." He made us understand the ugliness of pardonable sins. Then he was a young priest, an imaginative poet with deep scriptural insight who had an incisive way of his own in doing meditation. The spiritual persons who approached him used to say: "This man is full with God, he lives in God!" (*Bulletin*, 1933, page 269).

## 8. A Miniature

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We report a significant episode. In 1924, while unloading papers, a worker of the building company had a grave accident which fractured his backbone. In those days the reform of the social laws was applied through the insurance. People feared big fines, or arrest... For this reason the lawyer and professionals consulted by Father Vitale made told him to record the worker in the books of our typography. The Father knew the case in the late evening, and on the following morning, before saying mass, he went to the insurance office declaring that the worker was not a printer but a worker of the building company. He was registered in the insurance book after the accident. Then he went to Father Vitale saying: "I couldn't rest tonight! How can we permit falsehood? God is displeased. Besides, I am the director, and I will face the consequences. If it is a matter of prison, it is my business." As a matter of fact, nothing happened because there was no malice, nor anything against the law. The worker was called for an emergency work, once. But here the point is that the Father was disposed to face prison instead of telling a lie!

Speaking of the Father's soul, Father Vitale defines it a miniature.

It is a very successful definition. The visitors to the museum who caught a glimpse of the miniatures' wonders in the codices, appreciate the richness of art, the mastery of work, the great value of treasures. These are compressed in a few centimeter squares of parchment. They tell us about the study, the patience, and the punctual cares of the monks who created them.

The Father is a great miniaturist. With the help of God's grace he has worked patiently and constantly on his soul, making it a very precious miniature. He sifted all the throbs of his soul in the presence of God, enriching and making them precious with God's love.

The miniature can be adequately appreciated through an accurate observation of its details: the design and the color appear in their wonderful beauty; the purest blue, the gold, and silver stand out in the dazzling brilliance of an enchanting picture. Ancient people were right when they described the action of the miniature by saying *alluminare*, that is to say, giving light to the design, to the figure.

The more we study the Father, the more his figure appears

brilliant to us in the light of his heroic virtues and in the wonders of his spiritual finesse.

Precision and daintness are the feature of the miniature: precision and daintness about virtues we have to admire and learn from the Father.

Accustomed to seek spiritual finesse in his innermost, he deemed to correct the lightest defects, which are usually unnoticed.

The Father also wanted to avoid some expressions of common use, which were improper to his spiritual finesse.

"Woe to those who dared to say things like, "poor devil, deuce, curse, bad fate, and the like." He disliked hearing pejorative words even about the weather! He said: "Speaking badly is negative; it is not good. The elements of nature are creations of God, and even though they seem severe, they still do God's will. Why complain then?" No one heard an improper word from his mouth" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 308).

We conclude with a sister's witness, giving it an explanation. She stated: "The Father abhorred any imperfection. When he happened to notice even a slight fault, he exclaimed: "My goodness! What is it you have done? You must confess it!" And he also sent us to beg pardon from the mother superior."

This testimony does not affirm that the Father was having scruples, or was leading souls in the wrong way. He considered the venial deliberate sins as grave with respect to perfection, as he himself explains: "I say grave, but not mortal" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 224). Discussing the subject of confession, he makes clear his thought: "Theologically speaking, venial sins are not a necessary topic of confession; but a person who wants to belong entirely to God; who wants to feel the horror of the offense to God; who wants to amend any imperfection and bad habit; who absolutely wants to avoid any slackening, and wants to grow in the love of Jesus and in the religious virtues; this person should consider venial sins very seriously with respect to perfection" (Vol. 1, page 14). Obviously, the Father strove to infuse a great dread of any fault, however slight it was.

It is fixed in my mind what the Father said every time he left. We ran around him to receive his blessing; he exhorted us briefly and fervently to do good, always insisting upon the holy fear of God and hatred of sin, quoting Tobit: "Through all your

days, my son, keep the Lord in mind, and suppress every desire to sin or to break his commandments" (Tb. 4, 5). His eyes wet, he repeated it with grief-stricken voice and a characteristic vibration I cannot forget. To obtain from the Lord the grace to avoid sin, he ordered his community to say an ejaculatory prayer at the beginning and the end of their staying in the church: **"Lord Jesus, free us from any mortal and venial sin."**

## 9. Always alert in preventing sin

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The pledge to prevent sin at any cost originates from our hatred of it. Deeply afflicted by the soldiers' blasphemies during the 1915-18 European war, the Father wrote a letter to General Cadorna, begging him to stop such an impiety, which was a challenge to the God of armies. I have read this letter, but unfortunately it has been lost.

The Father confided his deadly grief with a Rogationist who was in the army and complained to him for the dirty and blasphemous environment in which he was living:

Unfortunately, it is true what you wrote to me, and God knows what heavy blows my heart suffers when I hear such horrendous blasphemies, which I shrink from writing. It causes a most bitter pain to me; I would like to die instead of hearing the most adorable name of God profaned. Therefore, let us bless God's name in our hearts, let us atone for such impiety and iniquity of many reckless who lead a frivolous, scandalous life even when facing death, when they should ask God for pardon! I repeat, let us pray and atone for it as much as we can with our good works (Vol. 41, page 133).

Let us report some examples to show how the Father always found a way to warn the blasphemer.

Msgr. Di Tommaso, Bishop of Oria, related that the Father abhorred sin even when it was committed by others, and greatly suffered in hearing God's name profaned. Passing through a street of Oria, he once heard a man blaspheming while squabbling with another man. The Servant of God approached the blasphemer, placed his hand on the blasphemer's mouth, and kept him silent.

The man was confused, began kissing the Father's hand, and asked him to pray for forgiveness.

Canon Celona reports: "We were walking together when the Father approached a blasphemer, warning him fraternally. That man begged pardon saying, "Excuse me, Father, I did not see you."

Father Ruggeri relates: "I was offering my arm to the Servant of God in Oria because of his feeble legs, when some men cursed behind us. As though pricked by a knife, he winced back imploring them not to curse. We continued our way saying prayers." The Father hated sin, and when he heard someone cursing, he always approached and warned him mildly not to do so. The blasphemer calmed down quickly, begging pardon from him and from God. I happened to see that in the streets many times.

"After listening to his preaching, especially in the Annunciation Church, I came to know how much he suffered because of the many blasphemies, and how he warned sinners not to offend God, also because of the tremendous scourges with which God would punish humankind, according to what Melanie (3) had confided to him."

I remember an episode narrated by Professor Favarolo.

He was traveling to Taormina together with the Father on business of the religious community in that town, when a passenger suddenly cursed. The Father got up quickly and with energetic gesture shouted out aloud to the blasphemer: "Only God is holy!" Every one kept silent up to the next station.

A daughter of a blasphemer told me that the Servant of God once calmed down her father who was cursing in Messina station for having lost something. Our Padre gave him all he had in the bag, took him home, and gave him a bottle of wine and the sum of money he had lost.

Because the Father thought that the reason of cursing was misery, he used to intervene with charity. "He suffered for sins, and when he heard cursing, was grieved and exclaimed: "My God! My God! My God! The Heart of Jesus is pierced." He demanded atonement, calmed down the blasphemers mildly, and gave money, in case of need." "Often some driver who blasphemed was approached by the Servant of the Lord, who asked him for repentance and amendment, with good results. Because he



thought that the ordinary cause of the offense to God was misery, he took care of the material situation to reach the soul quickly and positively." "He exhorted us very often and warmly to receive the poor with charity in order to avoid that they might offend the Lord in case we dealt with them roughly." "One day a water bearer slipped, broke the barrel, hurt his leg, and cursed. The Servant of God warned him severely, threatening him with divine punishments. I told the water bearer who that priest was, so he begged pardon. The Servant of God dried the blood with his handkerchief, took him to Frasti's pharmacy, and asked how much was the price of the barrel, which was five liras. Then he gave 10 liras for two barrels and five liras for his rest."

Since the Servant of God's charity was well known, some people exploited him by threatening with curses, thus compelling him to give money in order to avoid sin.

The railroad switchman Bonsanto of Oria was an habitual blasphemer. Knowing the Father's hatred of curse and his pecuniary generosity to avoid sin, he cursed in his presence in order to obtain an abundant alms, under the pretext that he had lost his wallet. As a matter of fact, he obtained a good sum of money from the Father by promising to curse no more. The wicked man himself told me the story (it is Father Ruggeri speaking). But God's hand caught him: shortly after the story, he was transferred to Taranto, where the railroad wagon buffers crushed him to death.

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## 10. Spirit of atonement

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The Father's live spirit of atonement was the outcome of his love for God and his hatred of sin.

In 1875, the Italian Catholic press rose up against the profanation of the name of God at Dolo (Venice), where people gave the name of God to a race winning horse. The ecclesiastical authority of Messina ordered a triduo of atonement in the churches, and the Father wrote the song of reparation to the most holy Heart of Jesus, which begins thus:

Adorable Heart  
Of peace and forgiveness' zone,  
You are of the Triune  
The highest throne...

When he founded his institute, he made its members join the Pious Union of Prayer and Penance aiming at atoning sins. He was careful that his communities fervently made the religious practices of reparation on the first Friday and first Saturday of month. Furthermore, he ordered to say the litany to the Sacred Face in April and a triduo at the end of Carnival in reparation of blasphemies. On that time our communities sang the touching stanzas that the Father wrote on the inner sorrows of the most holy Heart of Jesus. We quote the first stanza:

O worries and sorrows of the Supreme Good,  
Of unknown pains abyss misunderstood,  
Profound torture and dull ache  
Send your divine Heart at stake.  
Oh! smile and joy never raise  
On your loving, Holy Face!  
But only darkness and tears  
My Jesus' sadness fears!

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We also recall the yearly novena to the most holy Name of Jesus with the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on the altar, when through nine prayers the people atoned nine classes of sins: blasphemies, heretical curses, scandals, persecutions to the holy Church, insults to the papacy and priesthood, bad press, sins of the consecrated persons, ruin of the youth, and profanation of the most holy Eucharist. The Father preached on these themes for 34 years.

All the above prayers of reparation were customary, but for particular cases the Father ordered specific prayers for atonement.

Now and then the Servant of God mailed circulars to his communities ordering reparation for sacrileges, especially against the Blessed Sacrament. It goes without saying that he himself was always actively involved.

On these occasions he himself did special penances, and ordered the communities to make holy hours of adoration, penances, and vigils, exhorting each one to console Jesus by following his/her own fervor.

Owing to the Father's word and example which shook the persons by kindling their fervor, his presence made the prayers of reparation more solemn and heartfelt in the communities.

While exhorting the people to atone for blasphemies and sacrileges, the Father seemed to suffer even physically: he cried. More than once, after hearing blasphemies in the streets, he gathered us in the chapel to pray for reparation and for the blasphemer's conversion.

Besides the reparation prayers during the Carnival, the Father wished the sisters to entertain as many outside girls as they could, also inviting their parents. They did so with games and little plays all day long in order to prevent occasions of sin.

Father Vitale writes:

"When he heard of profanity in churches, Canon Di Francia hastened to the rectors to propose public atonement. Furthermore, he had become an official guest speaker of many churches because the pastors had found in him a speaker, a poet, and a mystic along with one capable of enthusiastic prayer and songs" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 277).

We also recall how much he strove to set up a crowded, fervent congregation of faithful at Camaro Superiore to atone for a sacrilegious theft.

At Mili San Pietro, sacrilegious robbers took away the sacred vessels along with the consecrated hosts, which were found dispersed in a field. The Father hastened to preach a triduo of atonement, had an icon erected on the spot where they found the sacred hosts, and convinced the pastor to promote a yearly Eucharistic procession on the anniversary of the event, to which he participated with his preaching. The Father took advantage of the reparations to awake the religious communities' fervor:

"First of all we have to honor our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and our Lady through a perfect religious observance, because our Lord is displeased more by the sins of the consecrated souls than by the worldly-minded persons" (Vol. 34, page 12).

"Let us be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ by loving, serving him, and doing the religious practices. Our prayers and works must foster the good of souls and the relief of the poor" (Vol. 35, page 217).

The time after the first European war was marked by grave disorders. The specific offenses against God such as blasphemies, profanations, and sacrileges were not pointed out by the press in Italy, nor in the world. For this reason the Father wrote an **ardent**

**petition to the very merciful Heart of Jesus for the salvation of the most afflicted and ruined society** (Vol. 5, page 55), and an offering of the holy mass and Communion in reparation of the sacrileges committed in the world, especially in our regions.

This is a passage from the offering:

O most afflicted and tortured Heart of Jesus our Lord, we want to share with you the very sharp pains you suffered at the sight of the horrible sacrileges which hell organized and sinners carried out against this Blessed Sacrament! O most afflicted Heart of Jesus, we are sorry for you, and through live faith and deep feelings of piety we want to share your inner bitterness for so many terrible human ingratitude! Ah! Most holy Heart of Jesus, if we could atone for such a shame through the shedding of our blood, we would be willing to do so considering ourselves very fortunate to be victims of your love!

To atone, he offers the infinite merits and sufferings of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, the merits and love of the angels and the saints, begging Jesus to forgive and convert sinners. Then he adds: "Forgive our ingratitude and our offenses against this most Blessed Sacrament." And concludes: "Beloved Jesus, accept these offerings, plunge human iniquity into your very precious blood, and save us. Amen" (Vol. 5, page 49).

The communities said this prayer for a long time. Afterwards, we will touch upon another extraordinary reparation in honor of our Lord.

## **11. God's will**

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Love for God consists in performing everything for the sake of God's will. This is Jesus Christ's teaching and practice: "None of those who cry out, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of God but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt. 7, 21), and "I always do what pleases him" (Jn. 8, 29). Doing the will of God is the only

worry of the saints. The following saying of Saint Joan of Arc impressed my mind: "I know nothing but the will of God"; thus, the illiterate peasant-woman of Domremy imposed the plans of battle to the marshals of France, and led the army to victory through and with God's will.

That's how our Servant of God did God's will.

When he was a guest of Msgr. Loiacono at Ariano Irpino, they walked through the episcopal square and stopped before the monument of Canon Peter Paul Parzanese.(4) There, Canon Di Francia recited with sweet sadness the first verses of *Born blind*, a beautiful poem by Parzanese:

Please don't tell me that the mornings  
At the edges of the sky  
Return to awaken the things,  
In a blaze of golden dye.  
My eye didn't open under the sun,  
Oh, God's will be done!

We relate another episode worthy remembering that I gleaned from the artisan Pietro Gulli' who witnessed it.

One day, a flower-seller by the name of Laurence was entering the city, carrying a basket of snow-white fragrant gardenias from Cumia. Suddenly the basket slipped out of his hand, and the snow-white flowers fell down in a puddle.

"God's will be done," says the resigned poor man looking at the flowers, and thinking he had lost his daily bread.

"Yes, my son, bravo; God's adorable will be always done!," says the Father who was walking behind the poor man, and had witnessed the scene. "That's nothing, be still, and hold the basket." The Servant of God stooped down, picked up the flowers one by one from the puddle, and put them in the basket as they were before snow-white fragrant.

"Miracle!" Exclaimed the amazed poor man; but the Father quickened his pace and went away.

"God's will be done!" This was the Father's program of life.

His usual expressions were: "Let us surrender to divine will God's will be done. Let us do in everything what pleases the Lord. Let us conform to divine will."

He used to say, "Ask the Lord for whatever you want, but always add: "If it pleases you, Lord"."

Father Drago reports that when they were handling the

purchase of the house in Rome, the middleman and our lawyer muddled the issue; at the Father's usual expression: "God's will be done," Father Drago shouted: "That's not the business of God's will! The matter! is muddle and theft!" But the Father warned him: "Keep silent, my blessed son: even in such cases there is God's permissive will, as it happened in the betrayal of Judas!"

The Morning Star Sisters had suffered damages. The Father wrote to them: "Let us bend to God's will, who afflicts us in one way or another by permitting thefts, or mistakes, or the machinations of the ancient murderer, the devil! But everything helps those who love and fear God, as Saint Paul says" (Vol. 39, page 12). On another occasion, when he was waiting for the results of some dealings for a community's good, he wrote: "To get the papers, it takes time... But we have to pray. Let us make novenas so that our Lord and the most holy Virgin get everything well done in the divine will" (Vol. 39, page 28).

He taught: "When we say 'God's will be done,' we ought to say so by spirit of petitioning more than by submission" (Vol. 6, page 107).

The Servant of God writes to the novices: "Doing God's will is truly the best and the greatest thing we can do" (Vol. 34, page 2). For this reason he always strove to know and to do God's will.

Writing to a sisters' community: "The Lord's ways are unfathomable, but beautiful and lovable; who can understand them? Let us bend to them without understanding, based on the knowledge of how much Jesus loves us! Let us pray, work, and wait. It is written: "Bear the Lord's delay, work strongly, and your heart will be relieved... The patient will suffer, but he will be also comforted... Whoever trusts in the Lord is strong and steadfast like mount Zion"" (Vol. 39, page 14). When he ordered to say some prayers for the house of Padua, he specified: "Above all we should ask and hope to perfectly fulfill the divine will" (Vol. 34, page 95).

The Father always endeavored to know and to do the divine will, and taught us to ask the Lord to know and carry it out faithfully, avoiding any sin. In his various sufferings, the Father was always resigned to God's adorable will, and no one heard him complaining for any wrong done to him. He used to say: "The Lord knows what he is doing," and warned his sons and

daughters to never complain.

During his various apostolic ministry, the Father had many sorrows, but few joys, receiving both of them from God. He used to say that to do the will of God, one should leave out even mass, Communion, etc. and in his last days he suffered much for being unable to say mass and to receive holy Communion, but he was resigned because of his union with God.

Writing to a community about his condition, he said: "Feebleness prevents me from saying mass and receiving holy Communion. Pray that I may do the lovable, adorable, divine will, which is better than anything else" (Vol. 39, page 75). A few days later: "I do not know where it is going to end. Above all I wish divine will be perfectly done in me, praising and blessing Jesus in my suffering" (Ibid. page 77).

In 1924 he fell seriously sick in Rome, and wrote to Father Vitale:

I am missing the adorable Jesus in the Communion, but his cross is dear and delightful to me, because I am doing his beloved divine will, which contains the life and the Passion of our Lord, and all the sacraments as well. I plunge myself in it to find and atone his divine Majesty for the honor I have not given to him, as well as to give him anything I should have before. In the divine will I find the spiritual and temporal goods of which I deprived my neighbor, the consolation for the hearts I have afflicted, and the goods I have wasted. The divine will contains everything in itself and is always atoning to God and the creatures (Vol. 33, page 98).

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The Father recognized the will of God in all events, the least ones included, perfectly conforming to it. Father Vitale reports a little episode which happened on a July first dinner:

Once, in the Avignone courtyard, we were sitting in the shadow of a plant tossed by wind. When a thorny branch hurt his head, he quickly exclaimed: "What is this plant doing here? It is better to move it." Then, as if aware of having made a mistake that could have ill effects, he turned around, saying: "I have been a fool asking what this plant is doing here! It is doing God's will to make us practice patience. We have to bless it" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 278).

The Father never started any enterprise without premising a prayer to know and to do God's will, nor did he make the communities pray for graces without asking the Lord to make his will known. He established that the communities say every day a

prayer to know and to do the will of God, and in special circumstances he ordered triduos or novenas.

In matter of importance, he joined prayer with the advice of the superiors and holy men.

Once the decision was made according to the will of God, the Father carried it out calmly and firmly; but he was always ready to leave out an enterprise, when it showed to be against God's will.

## **12. In bad and good times**

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The Father's perfect calm in good and bad fortune shows his perfect conforming to the Lord's will; he carried out his enterprises to the best of his ability, but whatever the results might be he always kept serene.

I remember the Father's attitude in relation to the Avignone civil suit. The owners' heirs sued him because they considered his purchase illegitimate. The matter was serious, and the institute was running the risk of great financial damage. The Father did his best, busily working with the lawyers in preparing his defense. He also designated a celestial court made of angels and saints, to whom his and other communities prayed in shift. Then he entrusted himself to God's will. He won in the court and in appeal, but lost in the supreme court. As soon as I knew it, I informed the Servant of God: "Father, we lost the case!" He made no gesture of surprise, nor of amazement. He only said: "God always wins, always wins!" But he said these words so calmly and indifferently to my great wonder. To tell the truth, I was expecting an act of submission, but not such a calm. Thus, after doing his best, the Father showed his intimate union with God, who knows what he does. As though nothing had happened, he began talking of Our Lady of the Letter in whose honor he had to make a speech in the cathedral. Later, he definitively won the case in the new court of appeal in Palermo.



We will touch upon the controversy between the Father and the bishop of Potenza, Msgr. Razzoli, who interdicted the Father from entering his diocese because of the congregation of the Sisters of the Sacred Side. The Servant of God often said: "Let's leave it in the hands of God. We will see how he will arrange the things." Not only he did not complain for the notorious interdict, but also kept other persons quiet: "No, no! The Lord disposed so, we have to conform to his will." When Msgr. Farina was appointed Apostolic Visitor, the mother superior general urged the visitor to solve the case, but the Father did not approve her intervention:

In relation to Msgr. Farina, I beg you to abstain from writing to him, and from doing anything, which could speed up the solution of our case. Let's leave it in the hands of God, who knows how much, and when he wants it. Meanwhile you pray that the results be for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls (S.C. Vol. 8, page 241). Do not worry how the old case will end. You see that all of you love Jesus, the sacrifice, the observance in everything, etc. Jesus will see to the rest (S.C. Vol. 8, page 254).

Meanwhile he lays down the rules to be observed:

Let us rely on the adorable Heart of Jesus, Our Lady of Sorrow, and our dear powerful Saint Joseph. It is well that you are praying and are making other persons pray! Prayer, trust, prudence, patience, pure intention, spirit of humility, and peaceful minds are the weapons to achieve what pleases the Lord! Do not feed selfishness with victories over those who oppose you, etc... But let us acknowledge that everything happens because of our sins; therefore, let us be merciful to all, excuse their intentions when we cannot excuse their actions, and pray that Jesus unite all the hearts in his heart and the heart of his most holy mother in the way he likes. Do not talk too much of the notorious case, but for necessity or usefulness, or to arouse religious fervor in prayer, hope, and silence. It is written: "Silence and hope are your strength." "It is well for you to keep silent, waiting for the salvation of the Lord" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 232).

We have the opportunity to see how generously the Father accepted God's will in everything, but here we confine ourselves to a few episodes.

In 1911, the civil authority tried to requisition Saint Paschal convent in order to use it as a lazaretto in case of cholera. We had already begun the transfer to the Celestine house, toiling to settle furniture and things in the area of Saint Paschal convent

reserved for us. Meantime the Father wrote to Father Palma, who had to communicate the news to the communities of Messina:

When you inform them, make them understand that everything has been done calmly, and that everything comes from the loving will of God, who builds the story of the institute at any rate through his love, testing its faithfulness and faith. By faith we have to see the hand of God working in the misfortunes, which may contain spiritual and temporal goods, or are the prelude of divine mercies. I am glad that all this happened when you were not dwelling here, because you would have suffered, especially when you had to report the news. Now let us bless and praise the loving will of our Jesus and his most holy mother! Without worrying about our future, we must be calm and trustful in the most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and in the protection of our dear guardian angels (S.C. Vol. 7, page 60).

When he happened to have a foot seriously contused, he wrote to Father Vitale: "The Lord's will be done. He visits us lovingly!" (Vol. 31, page 60). On another occasion: "Among the divine graces and mercies we notice holy crosses, afflictions, contradictions, sickness, oppositions, and for all of them we mean to thank the divine kindness. We'll do the same for the patience and submission granted to us by the Lord in order to bear them, as well as for his kindness in turning everything to our greater good" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 249).

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Talking about the Spanish epidemic which was ravaging all Europe in September-October of 1918, the Father pours out his heart to Father Vitale:

The holy hand of God makes itself felt everywhere to the insane, apostate society! What a joy it brings to me, should we even die! It is time to punish human iniquities! May God be atoned for the human transgression. May kings and oppressed peoples be regenerated under the divine scourge: thus, they will be saved. "Only honor and glory is yours, almighty Father!" But this is only the beginning of the sorrows! Let us surrender confidently to the adorable Heart of Jesus, offering ourselves as victims of his adorable will! (Vol. 32, page 157).

A few days later, after manifesting the conditions of the house in Trani, where none of the priests was going to give Communion to those daughters for fear of contracting the disease, he takes again the subject of the disease:

How perfect God is even when he punishes! This is a disease that no one can defeat, neither government, nor city halls, nor Red Cross; furthermore, there are no eggs, no milk, no medicine, no doctors, no means! We can only surrender to his divine Heart! ... But the press keeps silent indifferently, while the theaters are on! Now Italian fashion is getting ready to vie with the Parisian one!...Even the Italian toys! And the war develops with divine mystery... May God save Italy, France, and the world! (Vol. 32, page 159).

Around the same time he writes to Altamura: "Long live Jesus and the holy cross! God's will be done: let us conform to it with joy!" (Vol. 36, page 102).

After arranging the plan for the personnel of a house, the appointed mother superior falls sick. The Father remarks: "The Lord continues visiting us in his infinite mercy! Don't we have to bless him? Let us bend and adore God's unfathomable judgments!" (Vol. 35, page 98).

In 1921, the Father had an occasion to buy land along with its facilities in Rome, but he did not see clearly into it: "It is an affair we have to pray for enlightenment in order to follow the Lord's will" (Vol. 36, page 26). In 1924, at the time of the escrow, the Father writes to Mother Nazzarena: "Only God knows if we are going to take possession of it: but we conform to his will" (Vol. 36, page 102).

Informing the community of the contract date, he writes: "Will we find obstacles? God knows it! We pray that God's will be done perfectly" (Vol. 36, page 109). Talking about the sisters' sickness, he remarks: "The blessed Jesus is visiting us in various ways, and we are doing his adorable will" (Vol. 36, page 165).

## 13. Prayers to do god's will

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We like reporting a few prayers that the Father wrote in order to know and to do the will of God.

In the manuscripts dating back to his youth, Nov. 14, 1873, we find the prayer "to do God's will." He copied it from the *Imitation of Christ*, book 3, chapter 15,

no. 2, 3, 4. Later, the Father inserted the first part of it into the daily prayers of the community, adding: "Loving Mother of my Lord, let me do the will of my Lord."

Despite he had not received a grace, the Father praises the Lord and offers himself to God's adorable will in a prayer of Oct. 2, 1888 (S.C. Vol. 10, page 6). He wrote in a note: "I want my slavery to the divine will to be my chief aim" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 36).

His niece Mrs. Rosalia Bonetti remembers: "Once he wrote a prayer for my mother, in which he asked the Lord that all life be always conformed to his holy will. This prayer was handed down to me, and I said it until I lost the manuscript, not knowing the prayer by heart."

In the prayer for the New Year's Day's vigil, the community protests "to want nothing in the new year but God's will." The Father specifies: "If you have graces and mercies in store for us, as you do with your creatures in your infinite kindness, we thank you beforehand. If you have tribulations and sorrows, as you do with those whom you love and want saved, since now we mean to receive them from your hand, now we praise, thank, and bless you" (S.C. Vol. 9, page 5).

It was perhaps when Jensen seceded from him that the Father wrote a specific offering of mass to the most holy heart of Jesus so that the divine will prevailed over in that circumstance:

Today I offer the great sacrifice of the mass to implore a perfect fulfillment of your divine will in this affair... Do not look at my demerits, but at your merits worth infinite value and at those of your most holy mother and of the saints. Please grant me this grace. Give me holy virtue and strength so that I may be quiet, serene, and peaceful, conforming to your will. Apart from my inclination or ideas, may I wish you and your greater glory, considering and adoring the sovereign rule and the holy, perfect dispositions of your divine will in any human event, even *the most least* (sic) (Vol. 6, page 1).

In his last years, he wrote the "Little Rosary of Divine Will," and he used to say it every day more than once, especially in his last sickness. It begins with Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory, and continues by the saying at every bead: "**Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**" "A Glory be" is inserted at every decade of beads, and at the end of the little rosary is said:

**"My Lord Jesus Christ, I love, praise, adore, thank, and bless you together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen."**

In his last sickness, the Father wrote to a person who was praying for him:

I thank you for your prayer. Obtain for me patience and strength against the enemy who perturbs me by trying to infuse a loomy mood in me. I would like to be cheerful. We should be ashamed of not being so when we consider that we have surrendered to the divine will and to the love of sweet Jesus (S.C. Vol. 5, page 139). I went through terrible times. Heavens seemed closed... But, the more my physical, moral, and spiritual sorrows increase, the more I feel attached to the divine will: *Fiat! Fiat!* As you want, Lord, and at any cost, but help me!

Please obtain for me a perfect uniformity and conformity with his divine will, asking the Lord to make me die in his divine will with a purified conscience and being purgatory-free, if Jesus wants so (Ibid. page 143).

We quote a few witnesses: "I remember very well his evident submission in his last sickness at the Holy Spirit, before being moved to Guardia: his expressive look at the sky was very persuasive." "In his last sickness, both his surrender to God and his perfect uniformity with divine will shone; he bore his pains not only with patience, but also with joy, saying: "My Easter is God's will... and the like."- "I took care of the Father for 15 days in his last sickness. He was conformed to God's will, often saying: 'What are these pains compared with those of our Lord?'"

The Father's life-long care of seeking and doing the divine will ended in his perfect conforming and living in God's will. We find the evidence of it in his own notes:

My spirit's room is the divine will. Any time I am unsatisfied or disappointed, even when things seem directed to the greater glory of God, my spirit will retire to this room. For this reason I will not make any distinction between permissive and the ruling will of God, because both of them are for me the divine, adorable, loving, desirable God's will, which is the center and the shelter of my spirit.

I hate everything which is against the divine will, such as sin. So that my love for the divine will be perfect, I will hate grave and light faults, rejecting everything which is not fully conformed to the divine will. Consequently, I will hate my imperfections, striving to amend and become holy.

I will retreat to this room in any set-back and tribulation coming from God, or from creatures, or from my enemies, or even from myself

because of malice and weakness, etc. I will do the same in my sorrows, which are the outcome of my imperfections.

I will stay in this room, praying that the aim of the divine will be achieved on earth as it is in heaven. I will also pray for the interests of the Sacred Heart, especially for his sending out good workers to the holy Church.

To correspond to divine will, I will give priority to the wishes of love, sanctification, and salvation of souls. My wishes of love will be endless, likewise those of sanctification and salvation of souls. Thus, the divine will is pleased.

Finally, I will endeavor to make the divine will known and loved by all so that all the people may shelter in its room, where my spirit is for ever and ever. Amen (Vol. 43, page 145).

## Notes

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(1) We have three little prayers to Saint John of the cross. the Father asks the saint to obtain for him the same grace he received from the Lord (Vol. 6, page 125).

(2) We report it.

O very humble and meek heart of Jesus, who set yourself as our model, I entreat you to give me an effective grace so that today I do not offend, nor displease you. I hand my heart to you, asking you to keep it away from uncharitable affections and from any attachment. Because you said, "Do not be afraid," keep back the movements of my heart at their rising, which give way to anger or indignation, setting bad example to those I should edify. Cover this cold, restless heart with holy meekness and calm so that my spirit be detached and calm in any circumstance and contrast. My Jesus, see to it that today's movements of my hearts be movements of zeal and charity. I beg you to keep me free from indiscreet zeal, which goes out of the bounds of prudence and justice, being a destroying passion instead of an edifying virtue. My strong Jesus, free me today from the timidity which hinders me, and infuse holy and generous courage in me. Today I will go in the midst of your poor. My Jesus, see to it that I be kind with them; make me meek in dealing, apt to teaching, right in judging, prudent in correcting, fervent in the work. As a priest, make me the light of the world and the salt of the earth. May I today edify the souls entrusted to me, and win them to your divine heart through virtue and doctrine.

My Jesus, today I entrust my tongue to you in a special way: keep and purify it, teaching me how to be silent and how to speak, O Word of God.

Take care of my mouth, O Lord! Keep me from saying offensive, useless, idle words contrary to charity, prudence, and simplicity, but give me ardent words of eternal life, and a chaste, wise speech for the people I am going to meet. For the sake of your mercy, O my Jesus, I beg you to free me today from the tricks and temptations of my hellish enemies, from any offense to you, and from the deceit and frauds of creatures.

Kneeling at your feet, my Jesus, I retreat into the loving wound of your left foot: keep me inside it as in an invincible fort. Teach me to suffer for your sake, to desire and seek your love, all day long. My Jesus, I do not know the tribulations that your provident and loving hand has in store for me today, but whatever they may be, I beg you to grant me the effective grace to embrace them as the means to achieve your love.

Finally, O my Jesus, since you are the owner of the hearts, I beg you to soothe the hearts of those who are about to treat with me for your glory, their sanctification, and mine. Grant me your Holy Spirit that he may work in me, move me according to your will, and govern my behavior and the behavior of those entrusted to me. O very meek heart of my Jesus, today grant me a particular vigilance over myself, and a special care of the holy virtues in order to catch the precious moment and the happy occasion of your gentle inspirations. Make me faithful in the little things, mortified in the senses, detached from food and comfort, that I may perform everything in your presence, always keeping it in my mind and spirit. May I today lift up my heart and thoughts to you, praising, desiring, sighing, blessing, invoking, seeking you with internal acts, inner sighs, and fervent ejaculatory prayers. Recollected in you, my center, my life, my treasure, my supreme good, my all, and showing even outwardly my internal recollection through the features of the face, gestures, meekness, and gentleness, may I edify the people. My Jesus, see to it that I spend in a holy manner this day, which your infinite mercy grants me, and which could be the last of my life! Even though you are eternal, you used the time in a divine manner. For the sake of your divine use of the time and of your spirit of prayer, through which you prayed most fervently for all creatures and for me to the Father, to whom you are substantially united, grant me this grace. May one of your divine prayers obtain for me the effective grace to behave as a minister should in the midst of the poor and children. My Jesus, hear me for the sake of your most holy Mother; hear me for the sake of the saints. Hear me. Amen. Amen. Amen (Vol. 6, pages 138-40).

(3) The witness thinks so, because Melanie always reminded the punishments foretold to her by the most holy Virgin in her apparition at La Salette; but the theme of divine punishments was very frequent in the Father's preaching, and his writings shows that it dates before his connection with Melanie.

(4) He was born at Ariano Irpino, and died in Naples (1809-1852). He was a canon, the capitular vicar of the diocese, an orator and a poet. He distinguished himself for his fearless assistance to the cholera patient in 1837, and was card-catalogued *credible* by the Borbonica police because of his patriotic poetry. By nature and training, he was very similar to Bisazza, the Father's teacher, who wrote to him on Sept. 6, 1847: "There is harmony in our souls, brains, and hearts." "Author of patriotic songs, such as *Il Coscritto*, he found inspiration in the country and home affection with humility of heart and exquisiteness of conscience. His *Songs of the poor*, aiming at education, spring

from spontaneous and poetic sensitiveness" (Bargellini, *Pian dei Giullari*, vol. 3, page 102). Until a few decades ago, the school-anthologies reported some of his poems, such as *La Croce*, *La cieca nata*, *Il vecchio sergente*, etc. These became very popular.

(5) O Lord, you know what is better for me: may it be done according to your liking. Accomplish in me what is good, what you like, and what is for your honor. I am in your hand at your complete disposal. Dispose of me as you want. Because I am a servant of yours, and ready for everything. I do not wish to live for myself, but for you, and I wish to do so in the most deserving, perfect way!



# 8.

## JESUS

1. Be enamored of Jesus Christ
2. Above all, love for Jesus
3. Solemn protestations of love
4. The most holy Name of Jesus
5. The child Jesus
6. Jesus crucified
7. The Precious Blood and the Sacred Face
8. The Sacred Heart
9. Consecration and atonement
10. Inner sorrows
11. Notes

# 1. Be enamored of Jesus Christ

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Jesus is the most alive and concrete manifestation of God's love for humankind (Jn. 3, 16); the best way to reciprocate this love is to be enamored of Jesus. May God give us such a gift.

How much the Father loved Jesus! Says Father Vitale: “I have never forgotten one evening, when I said good-by to him, he told me, then a cleric: “Be enamored of Jesus Christ.” I still feel these words, because they have wounded my soul gently; I cannot express what they did to my heart” (Father *Mary Hannibal Di Francis*, page 283). Be enamored of Jesus Christ! Simple words, but having a particular vibration coming out of a heart enamored of Jesus Christ. Comments Father Vitale, “I still feel these words, because they have wounded my soul gently; I cannot express what they did to my heart” (Ibid. page 283).

To be enamored of Jesus Christ is the saints' passion. Says Saint Teresa: “A person should imagine himself in the presence of Jesus Christ, talking with him and becoming enamored of his humanity” (Life, ch. 12, no. 2). It is exactly what the Father did. To the atheist Cannizzaro the Father merely said: “Dear professor, I acknowledge that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is my love, my supreme good! He is the sigh of my life, the hope of my eternal happiness!” (S.C. Vol. 5, page 120). Imbued with admiration for our Lord, the Father could say together with the apostle: « For, to me, “life” means Christ » (Phil. 1, 21).

Writes Father Vitale: “Because of his reverence to Jesus, his words pierced hearts as if they were arrows” (Ibid. page 283). The Father exhorted us:

The practice of divine love of the congregants will be always directed to the adorable Jesus Christ! Oh! May divine mercy let us be enamored of the lover of hearts, of the king of eternal love, of the eternal love of our souls! Let us love Jesus Christ with a great transport of heart,

mind, and soul! Let us be eager to increase his holy love, asking for it many times a day the adorable Heart of Jesus, his most holy mother, who is the mother of the beautiful love, our patron saints, and the angels (S.C. Vol. 10, page 183).

He wrote in the *Points of Rules*: “Love of Jesus must be the beginning, the object, the end, and the mover of our intentions, actions, and observance: Jesus, everything in Jesus, through Jesus, for Jesus, and from Jesus” (Vol. 3, page 166).

And in the *Declarations and Promises*:

The only aim in my actions and life will be Jesus: loving Jesus as much as he deserves, sighing for him, pleasing him in everything, and belonging to Jesus with the most fervent love, and perfect union of his and my will. Through lively faith I will contemplate Jesus in the innermost depth of my heart where he dwells, urges me to love him, asks for love, attracts me, longs for being one with me, and grieves so much every time I do not make up for my faults.

I will listen to him talking in my spirit, asking for souls and for sacrifice out of love for him and for souls (Vol. 44, page 113).

For him, the visible sign of holiness was love for Jesus. For this reason he sought to know and to meet the people who were full with this love. He used to say: “Privileged souls can work miracles, but if they are not great lovers of Jesus, I do not feel drawn to them” (Father *Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 281). He greeted Jesus “The Divine Archer of Hearts,” and referring to this poetic imagination of Jesus shooting arrows *of* love to win souls, the Father wrote:

When he wants to wound a heart  
With sweet love,  
Thinking of it is enough;  
He sets an agile arrow on the bow  
Aims and shoots quickly  
At the heart unexpected love:  
Oh, the wounds he opens in the heart,  
Making it long for love!

Writes Father Vitale:

At the beginning of every year, when we draw the pictures of saints and angels by lot to win their protection and to practice a specified virtue and mortification, more than once cards read: “Love of Jesus.” The padre considered it as a privilege. You had to see his posture when such a card appeared. After reading it to himself, he began smiling; then he

would take off his glasses and exclaim, raising his right arm: “Children, how beautiful this one is! How lucky the owner is! He has rightly” (then he would pause to build up suspense), and then he spoke sweetly, “love of Jesus.” He clapped his hands and everyone followed him applauding; he wanted the hearts of his children to delight in hearing Jesus' name (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 281).

Another episode, of which I am a witness. “A few years before the padre's death, the institute was taking a snapshot of the orphans around him. Everything was ready, the children were looking into the camera when suddenly the padre exclaimed: “Look at the camera and say in your heart: Jesus, I love you! The camera will pick up your utterance and will print it in your image.” This little joke revealed the flame in his heart” (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 284).

## 2. Above all, love for Jesus

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The Father continuously exhorted people by writings to love our Lord: “Jesus dislikes cold hearts, but likes intimate, tender, effusive, strong, calm, constant love.

Please love Jesus with great transport of will and mind, with all the interior powers and the feelings of your soul; be always fully aware of his adorable person and of the mysteries of his most holy life. May the holy tabernacle, which is the loving nest where his divine body gathers the eagles, attract you” (Vol. 45, page 397).

He wrote to the Rogationists: “Dearest children, I exhort you to expand your heart in the most holy love of the adorable, most loving Jesus our Lord. Oh! What results may youths achieve, if they do not feel love for Jesus?” (S.C. Vol. S, page 55).

He protested to seek nothing but love for Jesus: “Dearest Father,” he wrote to a priest, “if you know the secret to become holy and to love Jesus with pure love, please teach it to me;

this is the only thing I want to know!” (Vol. 37, page 44). He exhorts the first novices: “Daughters in Jesus Christ, let us endeavor to sanctify ourselves, because all else is vanity. The Holy Spirit said: “Where there is no science of the soul, there is no good.” Let us love Jesus, our supreme goodness, attend to him with one heart, one soul, one mind; let us look at Jesus, work for Jesus, zeal for the interests of his heart, worry for what worries him, and rejoice for what pleases him. Let us have no thought but Jesus, because we find happiness in Jesus only.” It is true that by following Jesus we cannot avoid the cross; for this reason lie continues saying: “It is true that we face opposition, contradiction, struggles, and troubles, but all these things are means of sanctification. Daughters, be sure of this: if you were in the world, you would be suffering tribulation and labor much more serious and bitter than the ones you endure in the religious life, but without merit. Therefore, let us be pleased with suffering some pain together with Jesus, our supreme goodness, who suffered so much for our sake!” (Vol. 34, page 75). He writes in the rules:

Religious virtues and the practice of divine love will be the rules for the novices. To grow in the love of Jesus, supreme goodness, they will do and suffer everything for his sake. They will think of him, meditate on his life, his Passion, his death, and on the mysteries of his infinite love.

Always keeping in mind the adorable, Divine Savior they will meditate especially on the pain of his Divine Heart. They must be loving souls. If they are, love will make them strong in their suffering, in their work, and in their immolation, leading them to divine union, which is the aim of their suffering and work (1). They must always ask of the most holy Heart of Jesus for his love, the love of the most holy Virgin, and other holy loves. (Vol. 2, page 142).

A daily prayer of the novices to Saint Theresa said: “The tender, strong love for Jesus, supreme goodness, be our personal character and the character of this little Retreat” (Vol. 2, page 6).

The Father is also urgent with the Rogationists:

Let us meditate on three mysteries of suffering of Jesus Christ: suffering in his human nature, public contempt, and inner sorrows. They are an abyss of infinite love, and happy is he who meditates upon them! Let us meditate on Jesus Christ's benefits, his divine beauty, any feature of his human life, and his divine Heart, which is a furnace of infinite love. Let us meditate upon the marvelous presence of Jesus in the most holy Eucharist, where he reveals three mysteries of infinite charity: his

continuous dwelling among us, his immolation on the altar, and the making of himself food and drink! If we do not meditate on Jesus, we are unable to love him, but, if we meditate upon him, we cannot help loving him! (S.C. Vol. 5, page 55).

For the Rogationist probationers:

“The probationer who does not work everything for Jesus will never achieve interior spirit. Virtues will be for him a shallow practice; furthermore, step by step he will get used to a spirit of falsehood and hypocrisy, becoming unworthy to live in the Lord's house” (S. C. Vol. 10, page 164).

Our Lord's life, his examples, and divine virtues formed the object of the Father's continuous meditation and the model of his life. It appears from “My Lord Jesus Christ's Imitation,” a few notes in which the Father considers the salient behavioral points of the divine Master in order to imitate him: “My Lord Jesus prayed incessantly with recollection during his tremendous suffering... sympathized, looked for, and loved sinners... loved, forgave, excused, and prayed for his enemies, returning good for evil, immolating himself, and rescuing many of them... said only holy and perfect words... spent no moment without suffering, praying, and working... concealed his infinite suffering under silence.”

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The numbers 37 virtues of our Lord, which he strove to imitate (S.C. Vol. 9, page 9). (1)

### **3. Solemn protestations of love**

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We have already talked of the Father's activity to atone for public profanations or offenses against our Lord; now we like reporting two of his acts of atonement.

In 1875, Ernst Renan, the author of a blasphemous life of Jesus, after attending a scientific congress in Palermo toured the

main Sicilian cities and stopped in Messina on September 16, 1875. His friends did their best to prepare a triumphal welcome for him, but they did not succeed. The Catholic press mobilized the public opinion against the novelist of Seine, who had adulterated history through a pseudo scientific apparatus, divesting our Lord of his divinity. Above all, the youth rose up generously showing their faith, and our padre, who was not yet a priest at that time, published a vibrant protest. We report the last part:

“Citizens of Messina, let us renew the protestations of our faith and the fits of our love toward the divine redeemer Jesus Christ, God and true man, when Ernst Renan, an unfortunate apostate, will be here to profane the Catholic Messing with his presence. He has offended our Lord Jesus Christ in his divinity and has mocked his sublime agony, also manifesting his sentiments of affection for Judas, the traitor! May each one of us protest highly, giving no homage, not even with the mere presence to the author of the most abominable, odious libel, which the revolution and the hellish sects, enemies of God's name, greet in triumph. While the fool and the deceived clap their hands and help this poor creature to go from city to city ashamed, let us gather in our churches to praise and bless the sweetest name of our Redeemer and to appease his wrath provoked by sins. May we be one in our sentiment, affection, and thought, crying out with love: “ Long live Jesus Christ, true God and true man!” (The Catholic Word, September 16, 1875).

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In 1916, Benito Mussolini was quite unknown; he poured forth sacrilegious blasphemies against our Lord in his newspaper *The People of Italy* with the article “No to Christ, yes to Barabbas!” The title was a hellish cry. The Christian world shuddered with horror, and the Father was pierced in his heart. From Padua, he wrote to the communities on October 1, ordering a triduo of atonement:

Dearest children in Jesus Christ, I do not know if you have heard the sorrowful news of the gravest offenses against the adorable our Lord Jesus Christ. Someone of the Masonic newspaper of Milan has cursed in such a way as none ever did. He has addressed to our Lord the most injurious words, has announced that they will destroy the churches, the altars, the statues of the Madonna and the saints, and the like, repeating the cry of the Jews: “Away with this man; release Barabbas for us! Crucify him.”

The Catholic world has become indignant at such blasphemous language, has censured the horrendous blasphemies through the press, and has made public reparations everywhere.

Then the Father orders a triduo of atonement through these religious practices:

*Morning:* 1. A special offering of the holy mass “to praise, bless, and thank Jesus our Lord, adorable loving Redeemer, in atonement for the horrendous, hellish blasphemies published in an impious, hellish newspaper of Milan.” 2. Holy Communion and the prayer of the first Friday of the month.

*Afternoon:* Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at least two hours before dusk: “The practices of devotion will be of adoration, praise, blessing, and thanksgiving for the infinite love of Jesus, as well as amends, protests, and manifestation of love.” Then he invites “the individuals who love Jesus, our divine Redeemer, to make the best offers in atonement for such hellish offenses” (Vol. 34, page 106). To stigmatize the execrable blasphemy, the Father writes grave words on the October issue of *God and Neighbor*:

#### Atonement for very Horrendous Blasphemies!

Perhaps most of our readers know that an impious, hellish newspaper of Milan has published very horrendous blasphemies against the adorable our Lord Jesus Christ. Drawn by unbridled Satanical fierceness, persons who have sold themselves to the devil have published the most offensive words against the divine Redeemer, threatening with blowing him out of the world, laughing! They concluded by repeating the impious saying: “Away with this man; release Barabbas for us! Crucify him!”

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“Unfortunate persons engulfed into iniquity! We would dare saying that we don't feel drawn to pray for their conversion, because through their refined, planned style they show to be already in the number of the reprobates! They descended into hell still living! As it is written, they will be the footstool of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he comes again in glory at the end of time to judge the living and the dead.” After touching upon the reaction of good persons all over the world, he invites the faithful to offer private and public reparations to our Lord for the gravest insults done to him (S.C. Vol. 1, page 178).

The Father did not confine himself to atonement for public offenses; he rather liked his children to atone continuously from within their hearts. He writes:

If you can do a favor for Jesus, the best you can do is to say “I love



you!” He longs for and wants love from us. Let us say it, therefore, over and over again; when unable to speak, we will say it by heart! So that no moment of our life is without pronouncing such a saying, we declare that we intend to repeat “Jesus, I love you!” at each beat of our heart. Jesus deserves our love; why shouldn't we heartily reciprocate his infinite love by loving him with our little love? We say, therefore, over and over again with all our heart: “Jesus, I love you. “ (2)

Now, I feel obliged to report an episode which happened when I encountered the Father for the first time, on August 20, 1911. We were eight children altogether, going with him to his institute in Oria.

As soon as the train moved, he asked me: “Tell me, how much you love Jesus?”

I stammered: “I love him as much as I can.” He insisted: “How much do you want to love him?” I do not remember whether, nor what I answered. I remember instead that after addressing the same question to each of us, he suggested this answer: “I want to love Jesus with the love of the angels and the saints in heaven, with the love of the most holy Virgin Mary, and, finally, with the same love of his divine Father.”

He explained: “Certainly, that is not possible; but, what does it matter? Jesus appreciates holy wishes, delights in them, and increases the flames of his love in the soul!”

## 4. The most holy Name of Jesus

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Now let us consider some particular manifestations of the Father's love toward Jesus and his mysteries, beginning with the worship to his most Holy Name. As the name of Jesus was like harmony to the ears, honey to the mouth, joy to the heart of Saint Bernard, so it was to the Father's. The favorite ejaculatory prayer the Father said in a very low voice was: Long live Jesus. “It was the cry of the soul that longed for union with God”

*(Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 282). “Father Alessi, a Carmelite, remembers the Father with delight before the earthquake as a pioneer making*

children use the greeting: " **Praised be Jesus Christ!** " When the postulants took the religious garb, the padre used to give them new names: he chose those that included the name of Jesus, such as Gesuina, Gesuele, Gesualda, Gesulmina. The holy man could not help expressing his love of Jesus. (Father *Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 282). He wrote:

“Pronouncing the word “Jesus ” calls to mind the mysteries of his love, wisdom, and charity. By only pronouncing the name of Jesus I will be aware of his presence. It will revive my motives to love him by recalling to mind the following: that he created, redeemed, and called me; that he has granted me so many favors; that I belong to him as a priest. While pronouncing or hearing the sweetest name of Jesus, I will also bow my head” (Vol. 44, page 113).

The Father did not confine himself to the liturgical rule of bowing the head when Jesus' name is spoken during the religious service; he demanded to apply such a rule always and everywhere. “How much I grieve when I see some of these children not bowing their heads when Jesus' name is spoken. I guess they haven't learned that I bow deeply on purpose to show them a good example” (Father *Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 282).

By faith, he made sick people swallow bits of paper with the name “Jesus” written on them; he wrote special prayers to Jesus for their healing, and signed his own forehead with the name (Vol. 5, pages 52-54). Following Saint Bernardino of Siena, the Father had a tablet painted with the name “Jesus” like a shining sun. It was displayed in our communities and in the faithful's houses; in the bottom of the painting was written these initials: M. J. A. B. (Mary, Joseph, Anthony, and Bernardino).

This beautiful, beneficial devotion is among the main ones in our institutes (Vol. 1, page 80). The month of January is dedicated to the name of Jesus, and every day the communities read a special passage from a booklet during the evening meditation. Preceded by a solemn novena with the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the feast is celebrated the last day of the month. The Father wrote the prayers of the novena, added three quatrains to the well known song (*All'orecchio, al labro, al cuore...*), and during the first European war added four verses to each stanza to match the atonement prayers.

Until 1907 the novena was celebrated privately. In 1908 it was celebrated in the Holy Spirit's church, and the novena

booklet printed by our “Typography of the Sacred Heart” was distributed to the people. Father Pantaleone Palma notes in the preface: “On the feast, five Eucharistic lamps have been offered in honor of the five letters forming the name Jesus. The faithful were exhorted to keep the lamp burning; thus, the flames honor the sacramental presence of Jesus, who will illumine, comfort, and make us happy.” At the end of the same year, the earthquake destroyed the lamps, but they were replaced by thirteen ones as a memorial of the thirteen Daughters of Divine Zeal who had perished under the ruins.

The feast of the most Holy Name in the old liturgy was of second class (today we would say " feast "), and was celebrated on the second Sunday after Epiphany. When Saint Pius X moved it to the first days of January, our communities were unable to celebrate it solemnly with the novena, because of the Christmas feasts; therefore, they transferred the celebration to the last day of January, and by pontifical prescriptions we are authorized to say two masses of the most Holy Name of Jesus on that day.

The novena should be done with all fervor, and the Father often called the communities' attention: “I suppose you are doing the novena of the most adorable name of Jesus with great fervor, and hope that you continue to do so. These tremendous times are getting worse (January 22, 1917) urging us to be more recollected and to pray to God with fervent petitions” (Vol. 34, page 112).

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He demanded a novena with nine prayers of atonement, the litany of the most Holy Name, and the songs (S.C. Vol. 5, page 14). The Father himself preached the novena for 34 years in the community where he was dwelling, recommending the houses of the sisters to have at least a triduo of preaching. Writes Father Vitale: “How enraptured he was in the preaching during that feast! Sometimes he would blush, his voice would grow dim and his eyes would fill with tears ...To inspire his listeners with love, he analyzed the meaning of the hymn by Saint Bernard...” (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 282).

On the feast, the communities presented the great petition to the eternal Father to obtain graces through the merits of the most Holy Name of Jesus. Says the Father: “We recommend that the petition be presented and prayed with great contrition and holy fervor, with living faith and humble confidence, based on the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, to which the eternal Father denies nothing” (Vol. 34, page 112). Because the petition is a devotion of our religious family, « it must be done *privately* at the foot of the altar. To avoid the presence of outsiders, the Church's or the Oratory's doors will be closed (Vol. 34, page 153).

The Father's final petition is made of 34 requests in favor of the congregation. Each petition is preceded by a thanksgiving for the graces already granted, and is read at noon before the opened tabernacle. On February 1, the communities start offering 34 masses to have the petition granted.

The Father explains:

Such importance is based on our Lord Jesus Christ's divine promises, who said to his disciples, the apostles, and all the Christians till the end of the world: **“I tell you the truth: the Father will give you whatever you ask of him in my name”** (Jn. 16, 23). On another occasion he said: **“And I will do whatever you ask for in my name”** (Jn. 14, 13). He also added: **“Till now you have not asked for anything in my name; ask and you will receive, so that your happiness may be complete”** (Jn. 16, 24).

Not believing these divine promises does not believe in Jesus Christ's divinity. In asking in the name of our Lord means, asking through his divine merits which can obtain everything from the eternal Father. By praying in the name of Jesus we join his earthly, perfect prayers which the eternal Father could not help granting; now, Jesus repeats his divine petition from the tabernacle, and we join them every time we pray in his name, firmly trusting that God will deny nothing owing to Jesus' promise. If we have to pray so at any time, with greater reason we have to do so on the day dedicated to his most Holy Name Vol. 1, page 79).

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The solemn celebration of this feast in the institute started on January 15, 1888, the second Sunday after the Epiphany, and was saddened: during the novena, on the morning of January 9 our founder's mother died.

We close this topic with the Father's suggestion to the Daughters of Divine Zeal, which also counts toward the Rogationists: “The Daughters of Divine Zeal must know that this great devotion to the most holy, adorable name of Jesus must be in force and fervor in our institute forever, dedicating January to his name, celebrating the feast on January 31, and presenting the petition along with 34 requests to the Father in the name of Jesus” (Vol. 1, page 81).

## 5. The child Jesus

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“I assure you, unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of God” (Mt. 18, 3). The Father wrote for us a booklet of 25 prayers and resolves to implore such a grace from the child Jesus, pledging all our cooperation to become as **innocent and simple** as children. He received such a gift from the Lord, and lived the spirit of spiritual infancy.

Obviously, he was very tender toward the child Jesus. In Christmas time, when we went to visit the baby Jesus in the manger, (which he wanted in each house), he joined us. Then we had to sing the song by Saint Alphonsus: “I love you so much.” His voice sprang from his heart without respecting the value and the tune, because his poetic ear so sensitive to poetry had no gift for song. At the end of the Christmas feasts, on February 2, he carried the baby Jesus in procession and in between prayers and songs he cheered him with acclamations such as these: **“Long live the baby Jesus... the incarnate word of the Father... the son of Immaculate Mary... the delight of our hearts... the lover of our hearts...”** The string of acclamations was more or less long and all the people repeated them, clapping their hands.

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He conceived a special novena for the preparation of Christmas. On December 16, reveille was with harmonium or bag-pipes playing the song “You come down from the stars...” The sacristan was busy in preparing the tools for the novena of nine lamps. During this preparation time, people renounced some of their fruit, which was distributed to the poor on Christmas Eve. Then they prepared the cradle, the little mattress, and the pillow in spirit. Perhaps this kind of preparation was traditional in Sicily, because I have found a booklet of prayers dating back to the middle of the past century which touched upon such preparations. But, the Father impressed the mark of his originality upon them. He was not satisfied with the simple cradle; this should be made of the wood pleasing Jesus, i. e., that from the Gethsemane olive-grove and specifically the tree that will give the wood for the cross, which is the altar of his sacrifice and of our salvation. The practices of the day were: prayer, penance, good work, etc. Each day we were under the protection of a patron saint and said an ejaculatory prayer at each act in common.

The way of preparations *explained how to do the practice. Listen:*

We will fly back in time on the wings of our faith. We'll land nine days before the incarnate word takes flesh, but having the knowledge of Jesus that we have today. We will visit the Bethlehem's grotto where Jesus is to be born, will consider the poverty and the pain that the Son of God will undertake for our sake, and will prepare the necessities for his birth. We will console him, console him with our humble care and love, entreating him to be born not only in Bethlehem's grotto, but also in our hearts. These must be purified during the novena, and adorned with practices of piety, such as fervent acts of love and daily Communion. Living faith and devotion will improve these preparations for the God-child. To achieve our goal, we'll ask the most holy Virgin and the Patriarch Saint Joseph to help us.

On Christmas night we made the following triple offer to the child Jesus:

1. The things we have prepared during the novena to comfort Jesus in the Bethlehem's grotto.

2. Our hearts, symbolized by the paper hearts on which we write our affections, resolves, needs of grace, etc. so that the child Jesus place these hearts in his own, and pierce them with eternal love for himself.

3. A new corporal. We ask the child Jesus to make our hearts pure, white, and neat like the corporal cloth. May he find in them the perfume of his virtues and his dwelling.

How many times the Father appealed to the child Jesus when his institute was in need! On Christmas 1889, he asked the child's special intervention for the institutes' sorrowful conditions. To well understand it, we recall that the Father was almost obliged to neglect the institution because of his brother John's sickness. The consequences were so grave that the Father had to start again the work for the institute for male orphans on November 29, 1890.

Messina, Dec. 24, 1889  
To the infinite love made flesh  
Bethlehem of Avignone  
(For Saint Joseph's sake: very urgent)

Most adorable child Jesus:

I do not know how to start this very humble letter, which I am fortunate to present to your divine majesty. To begin with, I confess my iniquity before your infinite glory and greatness.

My sovereign Lord, I thank you for any grace and mercy you grant me. Meanwhile, since your infinite kindness inspires confidence in me, I address this very humble letter to you in the hope that you will accept it generously.

My very kind Lord, I am addressing to you the most warm and

fervent prayer because of the painful situation of these communities.

Such a situation is very afflicting! Children and youth are undisciplined, idle, frivolous, lacking leaders and the means for their success, such as work, arts and crafts, whereas bad example is settled around them. They are at the mercy of themselves!

In spite of their improvement for the many teachings they have received, the little girls now are slackening, idle, without work, and lacking the means to succeed. They break my heart! While they are growing, their education is decreasing, and their minds become sluggish for lack of instruction.

The *Little Retreat* looks to nurture good souls, but what a pity *I* feel at seeing many souls without guidance, direction, and almost at the mercy of themselves!

What's more, there is something worse: you know it, but let me state it.

He recalls the depressing situation of the little houses which stifle the institution, but he is unable to buy them, and concludes:

Do not delay, O Lord, do not delay! Let us know your will and move hearts to help us. Save these communities. Send, O Lord, the one and those you are going to send!

Sweetest child, I ask you these graces. Hear me for the sake of Immaculate Mary and the glorious Patriarch Saint Joseph.

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Humbly kneeling at your feet, your very humble servant and son,

Hannibal Mary (Vol. 4, page 40).

The spiritual pilgrimage to Bethlehem dates back to 1899. We explain what it is all about.

The Father writes that sometimes he had strokes of luck in devising profitable practices of devotion and piety (S.C. Vol. 7, page 241). Such practices of piety conceived out of spiritual finesse and deep insight, foster the love of God. The padre's poetic imagination and strong feelings for the highest ideals of faith caused him to create them in a beautiful and engaging way to win over hearts (Father *Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 298). The spiritual pilgrimages are among his spiritual industries, which the Father conceived when the institute was in particular need. Leaving from the church, the sisters along with the orphans went through the garden, singing and praying until they reached the spot where a picture or statue of the Virgin Mary or a saint was placed. This spot represented the sanctuary. At the end of these practices of piety, all of them came back to the church, trustful that they had been granted the grace they'd asked for. Sometimes the pilgrimage lasted more than one day (Ibid. page 299).

In 1899, the Father organized a spiritual pilgrimage to Bethlehem, but no prayer or practice remains, except the verses sung in chorus and two stanzas for the offer of the hearts. The offer was perhaps made by an orphan girl:

On tip toe I want to go  
To see Jesus asleep. My heart I want to throw  
In his hand as a loving sheep.  
If he awakens, he will find my heart in his hand,  
Then will look at it from above,  
And will understand  
That he has to renew it in his love.

The child Jesus is in Saint Anthony of Padua's arms. Everyone runs to ask the saint for grace. Are they aware of the child Jesus? That Saint Anthony's power comes from the child Jesus? That Saint Anthony derives the graces for his devout from the heart of the child Jesus? The Father called the attention of the faithful to the child Jesus by crowning him with a silver crown, while staying in Saint Anthony's arms. The Father performed the liturgy on August 15, 1915, feast of the Assumption and ... anniversary of Saint Anthony... These ideas are recalled in the verses ending with the prayer to the child Jesus. He is entreated to accept the crown and the offer of the hearts:

O God-child,  
Your sons and daughters on their part  
Offer you a crown Along with their heart  
And the flowers of the town.  
Kneeling at your feet,  
Your blessing they entreat (S.C. Vol. 2, page 31).

## 6. Jesus crucified

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Preaching in Trani, the Father said:

Dear faithful, we have a book from which all people can learn, the erudite and  
the ignorant,  
great and the little, just and sinners. It is open; anyone can learn the most  
sublime



theology of God's attributes: his power, mercy, justice, and charity. It is written with

characters of blood to explain God's eternal love for men.

This book is the school of divine wisdom and science which formed the greatest saints of the Church, and without it we are unable to understand and practice virtues. The teaching of the gospel is condensed and explained in this book. The books of the Scripture, beginning with the Pentateuch up to the book of Revelation form the pages of this book. The voluminous works of the Fathers of the Church, of the doctors, and the sacred ministers originate from these pages; their works are nothing but the exposition, the explanation, and the comment on this book. This book formed the saints. What is this book of all sciences and wisdom in heaven and earth? The Crucified, Christ Jesus nailed to the cross! (Vol. 13, page 51).

The Father formed in this divine book. In his common picture, he is holding the crucifix in his hands. It is significant, because it shows the characteristic note of his holiness, which is enlightened by the Crucified. To love him and to make him known and loved was the Father's aim, as it is the saints'. However, the thought of the Passion along with the sorrows of Jesus was as explicit and immediate in the Father's various activities as to appear as the outstanding feature of his interior life. The Crucified was his love, his passion, and all. He had the same feelings as Saint Paul for Jesus: "He loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2, 20). "If anyone does not love the Lord, let a curse be upon him" (1 Cor. 16, 22).

Since his early youth, while teaching catechism to children, the Father liked to show them a great crucifix. Pointing to the wounds, the nails, the thorny crown, and the opened heart he made children understand the love of Jesus, who suffered the torments of his Passion and death on the cross, for our salvation. Finally, he used to say with a particular tone of voice: "Do you see how much Jesus loved us?"

A former student of Saccano institute remembers that the Father once fainted while showing the Crucified to children and speaking of the Passion with tears in his eyes. People restored him to consciousness.

"In his report upon the teaching of catechism, he suggests that teachers speak to children 'of our Lord Jesus Christ's love for us, of our duty to love him; of how painful our Lord's Passion was, and the like" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 259).

When he happened to notice that people, especially consecrated souls, offended the Lord mortally, he worried, more than once saying to us: "Because of this, Jesus sweated blood, suffered

bodily torture, abandonment from his Father, and much more" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 283).

He held the meditation on the Passion as duty every Christian and a source of copious good; he worried because the faithful forget it. He wrote,

Forgetting the meditation on Jesus Christ's sorrows is a displeasing ingratitude toward the Lord, and is a reason of his pains in the garden. And yet the meditation on Jesus Christ's sorrows should be our daily bread... It is incredible, but it is true: if a dear person suffers, you comfort him, worry for him, and share his pains, whereas we do not shed a tear for the love of God, our Redeemer, who out of love for us becomes the man of all sorrows (Vol. 10, page 130).

The meditation on Jesus Christ's Passion is more beneficial and effective than any other meditation. Through it, beginners mortify their passions, the proficient improve in the imitation of Jesus Christ, sinners are shaken and converted, the lukewarm are enkindled with divine love, and they just achieve union with God)) (Ibid. page 130).

In the preface to *The Labors and Suffering of Our Lord Jesus Christ* of the venerable Thomas of Saint Augustine, the Father wrote: "It is impossible to persevere in this meditation at least 20 minutes a day without improving in divine love, in interior virtue, and in hating sin. The loving Jesus cannot help giving copious grace, enlightenment, and eternal good to the persons who meditate continuously upon the sorrows he endured for 34 years; (3) they become dearest and beloved" (S.C. Vol. 9, page 133).

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The chief topic of the Father's preaching was the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ: sometimes he went on the verge of crying, and then he shed tears and made us cry. Every year, when he preached on the Lord's Passion, on the three hours of agony, Mater Dolorosa, and the Most Precious Blood, he succeeded in moving people to tears (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 283).

Jesus' Passion was the topic of his daily meditation, which lasted for over an hour. Also during the day, in between his business, he recalled the Passion and invited people who were with him to do the same.

Says a sister: "After mass he retired to the chapel. Thinking that he was already gone, one day I entered the chapel and found him embracing the hanging crucifix. This happened

several times to the sisters, who closed the door to avoid inconvenience and a sure reproach.”

Mother Annunziata of the Missionary Catechists narrated this episode to me: “One day the Father went to visit the community of Marsico, but found the house closed: the community was on a trip. He spent all day in the cathedral, in the chapel of the most holy crucifix. In the evening the sisters apologized, but the Father gladly said: “That’s fine; it is a great fortune to spend a day with the crucified Jesus.”

We have already touched upon the picture of Jesus before the tribunal, the one that the Father sent to the Pope. He often meditated upon that picture, shedding tears. To teach us not to complain for the suffering, but to receive everything from the hands of God and to join our sorrows to Jesus' sorrows, on occasions he drew our attention to the expression of the gospel he kept silent, referred to Jesus standing before Pilate. In the Rogationists' Constitutions is written: “Keeping in mind Jesus crucified, the Rogationists will remember that their life is a life of sacrifice, not of earthly pleasure.”

Writing to Mr. Cannizzaro, the Father talks about his own meditation on the Passion:

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In the silence of my room I meditate on the adorable Jesus Christ every day. I imagine myself in the days when Jesus was living on earth. I will see him beautiful, sweet, gentle, walking on the roads of Galilee; teaching, working miracles, transfiguring himself in his divinity on Mount Tabor. I go from Mount Tabor to Calvary: first I see him in Gethsemane... When I think of my beloved Jesus Christ, my pride does not hinder me from kneeling at his feet. I adore, thank, and bless him, because God took a human nature for the sake of all and mine, and out of love suffered so much, dying on the cross! (S.C. Vol. 5, page 121).

He wished that the members of his communities will meditate on the Passion. He wrote to the mother superior general of the Bocconiste:

I deem that the daily morning meditation, necessary to all the Religious, must be on the most holy Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing else is better to enkindle divine love, especially before Holy Communion. Nor can we better achieve the contemplation of our Lord

Jesus Christ's infinite love, but through the contemplation of God crucified! Since the Eucharist is the memorial of our Lord's Passion, the meditation on other subjects before receiving Holy Communion seems unsuitable. Only meditation on the Passion makes us receive a greater advantage from the Eucharist. I found a few communities which meditate upon other topics. These topics, however, would be suitable for spiritual readings in the refectory, etc. (S.C. Vol. 5, page 223).

The Father enjoined our communities:

The morning meditation will be entirely on the most holy Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ (Vol. 1, page 27). Do not change the meditation book frequently. When you find that one is effective, repeat it several times, because you will not lose holy impressions and loving feelings by repeating. It may happen in profane readings, but usually not in the spiritual ones concerning the mysteries of our faith... The more the soul meditates with love, humility, and purity on Jesus Christ and his mysteries, especially the ineffable mystery of his Passion - even with the same book and the same words - the more the soul experiences more by the intimate, sorrowful, and loving impression of our divine Savior's limitless pain and love... (Vol. 1, page 28).

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For this reason the Father preferred the book by Blessed Thomas of Jesus, which he reprinted and called *golden book*. The Father wrote in the preface:

Through his fifty colloquies, the Blessed pierces the hearts with so many burning arrows as many are his sentences, his words... He shows so great love to the suffering and such an attachment to the cross so as to make the most sheepish soul fall in love with the suffering. The apostrophes to the cross and the demonstration of its preciousness are such as to drive souls to love and desire Jesus Christ's most holy cross (S.C. Vol. 9, page 136).

The Father interpreted Blessed Thomas this way, and so he relived the most holy Passion of the Savior in himself. He ordered all his communities to use the golden book.

But his thought of Jesus' sorrows was not restricted to the morning meditation. Says a sister: "He often meditated on the Passion. Usually at 11 a. m., while working at his desk, and I was with him for some business, he followed Jesus' Passion and invited me to do the same. One day, while traveling he often

talked to me about the Passion. And so he did when he happened to find me in the chapel for an hour of atonement.”

## 7. The Precious Blood and the Sacred Face

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The devotion to the Precious Blood and the Sacred Face is a particular aspect of the Passion.

This is an old devotion in Messina, and Bisazza sang its glories in stanzas which are still on the lips of the citizens. The revolution of Risorgimento somehow repressed it, but the pastor of Saint Luke's revived it by forming a **Pious Association** after the sub deacon Hannibal Di Francia preached a novena in that church, in 1876 . Besides triduos, speeches, and colloquies, the Father preached the novena to the Precious Blood at least five times. He invoked the Precious Blood to be freed from divine punishments and for the conversion of sinners, and ordered his communities to say seven Glory be along with the ejaculatory prayer **“We salute Man-God's immaculate blood, precious money for the sinners' ransom.”**

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After consecrating the month of July to the Precious Blood, the Father also ordered the communities to make the evening meditation upon it in that month, gave the booklet, **“Precious Blood”** for this purpose, and wrote:

“In these gloomy times we can present our regards and homage of atonement to the most Precious Blood that the divine Savior of our souls shed for sinners with such great suffering; we can also present this great price of our ransom to the eternal divine Father for the salvation of the holy Church and of the world through numerous holy workers.” (Vol. 34, page 149).

Now we touch upon his devotion to the Sacred Face. As in the 16th century the Lord chose Saint Margaret Mary to make people aware of his Heart's riches, so in the past century he chose Sister Mary Saint-Pierre (1816-1848) , a humble doorkeeper of Tours Carmel to reveal his adorable Face's beauty. Leon Dupont (1797-1876) derived from Sister Mary this devotion, and became

an apostle of it. He was born in Martinica, achieved a doctor's degree in law in Paris, and became a magistrate. When his wife and daughter died prematurely, he moved to Tours, where he aimed at achieving Christian perfection. As a matter of fact, his process of beatification is in official course. After receiving the picture of the Sacred Face from Sister Saint-Pierre, Dupont exposed it in his house and lit a perpetual light under it. The Lord began working several wonders through the oil of that lamp, and people appealed to the Servant of God for it. Dupont wrote: "I have distributed more than 8.000 cruets of oil" (S. Pedica, *The Sacred Face*, Marietti, Turin, pages 229-235).

The Father's devotion to the Sacred Face derives from France, because the books we read in our communities refer to the writings of Saint-Pierre and Dupont. The Father's devotion to the Sacred Face dates back to 1896. We read in the Father's notes: **Sacred Face Intentions**. Pious Institution: "enlightenment whether I have to continue it or not; increase of virtues, fervor, divine love, perseverance, vocations; clerics; organization and study. May the Sacred Face help me, avoid harm to souls, and make me apt to many things!" Then he lists some pious practices in honor of the Sacred Face such as the offer of 30 masses in relation to thirty attributes of the Sacred Face: The Sacred Face in its formation, formed, born, shedding tears, shining, growing, adolescent, perspiring, with beads of perspiration, sad, serene, praying, zealous, compassionate, sighing, majestic looking, transfigured, charming, enamored, disturbed, resting, sleeping, lifting up its eyes to the Father, speaking, thinking, languishing, agonizing, perspiring blood, slapped, spat upon, scratched, flushing, printing itself on the Veronica's veil, dying on the cross, dead, buried, resurrected and glorious" (S.C. Vol. 10, pages 3910).

**April 1899:** three novenas to the Sacred Face with the prayer to Saint Gertrude, etc., for the salvation of the institute and the spreading of the **Apostolic Mass**. This note refers to the beginning of the Sacred Alliance, when the Father accepted the advice of Msgr. Genuardi, Bishop of Acireale, to call the mass celebrated by the bishops Sacred Allied, "Apostolic."

During the early years of this century, the worship to the Sacred Face received new life from the publication of « A Soul's Story, » the life of Saint Teresa of the child Jesus and of the Sacred Face, as well as from the circulation of the Shroud's picture by Sister Genoveffa, a sister of Saint Teresa.

As soon as the Father had the holy picture, he became a eulogist and a propagator. We quote one of his articles on the Scintilla:

The devout author of this picture is a Carmelite, sister of the young Carmelite Teresa of the child Jesus, who died in the odor of sanctity. She studied the Sacred Shroud's photo in detail for over six months. (4)

Helped by lenses, she has painted the Redeemer's features in detail, caring to make no changes, nor additions. It seems that an angel guided her hand. (2)

Not only the bloody signs, the wounds, the swelling of the right cheek, the bruised nose, and the tumefaction of the right eye stand out in this picture, but also the sweet serenity, the deep calm, the profound suffering, and the sublime majesty of the Sacred Face. Owing to her patient, loving work, for the first time we have the genuine picture of our Lord Jesus Christ in the sepulcher. At sight of that picture we cannot help exclaiming: Oh, this is Jesus, this is really Jesus our Lord!

If we look at it with faith and love, we find all the expressions in the divine Face. We perceive the divinity, the worries and the torments of the man of sorrows, the sacrifice of the divine victim who immolated himself out of love; we can read the story of Jesus suffering from the garden to Calvary. This picture is a memorial of the most adorable Passion.

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It is impossible to contemplate this divine Face so horribly disfigured by our sins without being attracted to it and touched by emotion. Something deep and intimate is transparent, which penetrates the innermost of the soul, arousing a feeling of tenderness. Everyone feels so, and many cry at the sight of it (S.C. Vol. 2, page 19).

Do we know how many tears the Father shed on the Sacred Face's picture?

He had this picture exposed in our communities, and I cannot forget the beneficial effect we youth received from such a picture exposed in the choir, where we made our daily meditation.

The month of April was dedicated to the Sacred Face: we made the evening meditation upon it and said a special litany. During the 1908 carnival, at Andria (Bari - Italy), some persons made a sacrilegious parody of our Lord's Passion. As usual in such circumstances, the Father celebrated a triduo of atonement at the altar of the crucifix in the Holy Spirit's Church, adding preaching, prayers, and songs. On that occasion he wrote the inspired verses in honor of the Sacred Face:

God-man's Adorable Face,  
Your holy features I embrace.  
I long for you; I die for love, Most Holy Face That I love.  
I want to redeem  
My past life And the many harms  
Of any strife.  
More than in tears,  
In bleeding I want to melt,  
O Jesus, my king (S.C. Vol. 2, page 18).

## 8. The Sacred Heart

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Modern society's eagerness for reforms has caused confusion of ideas in all branches of the religious life; therefore, it is not surprising that the beautiful, beneficial devotion to the Sacred Heart has been struck by negative effects. For over 80 years this devotion grew all over the world, but today is going into reverse.

The innovators question: “What is the devotion to the Sacred Heart all about? It is an old-fashioned, anachronistic practice entirely based on emotion.”

We, however, are siding with the Church’s “magisterium,” teaching that the devotion to the Sacred Heart has very solid theological foundations. The *Magna Charta* of this devotion is *Annum Sacrum* (May 25, 1899), by Leo XIII prescribing the consecration of the world to the Sacred Heart; *Miserentissimus Redemptor* (May 8, 1928), by Pius XI developing the concept and



the duty of reparation; and *Haurietis Aquas* (May 15, 1956), by Pius XII, defining and explaining this devotion. We may also add the apostolic letter *Investigabiles Divitias* (February 6, 1965), by Paul VI, who after touching upon the main features of this devotion complains: "The worship to the Sacred Heart is growing feeble, but we hope that it will bloom again. As the Second Vatican Council requires, may people consider it as a most noble practice of piety toward Jesus Christ, **king and center of all the hearts**, head of the body, the Church; he who is the beginning, the first-born of the dead, so that primacy may be his in everything (Col. 1, 18). Since the holy Council warmly recommends the pious practices of Christians... especially when they are according to the Holy See, this devotion is to be recommended, because it adores and atones to Christ in the august mystery of the Eucharist."

Pius XI taught that the devotion to the Sacred Heart sums up the Catholic religion, the rule of perfect life, the easiest way to achieve a deep knowledge of Christ the Lord, and the most effective means to make the souls love him more intensely and imitate him more faithfully. The worship of the most holy Heart of Jesus is worthy to be esteemed as the practical profession of Christianity... On the whole, it is the worship of God's love for us through Jesus, and the display of our love for God and neighbor (*Misericors Redemptor*).

The devotion to the Sacred Heart was the queen devotion in the Father's heart, because it comes to love for God and neighbor. Wasn't that the flame burning the Father's heart?

Let us quote some passages of his apostrophe when he dedicated and consecrated the periodical *God and Neighbor* to the Sacred Heart on June 26, 1908:

A superhuman joy spreads in our hearts. Our longing to publish this paper comes true on the day consecrated to the Heart that makes the elect happy, and gives us good omens of its liking and its merciful blessings.

*God and Neighbor!* To whom but to you, O beloved Heart of God made man, are we consecrating the first fruits, the progress of this humble magazine, which is appearing in the middle of the Catholic press? The consecration we are making at your feet is the affirmation of your eternal right, the delivery of what is eternally yours.

O sweetest Heart, O clearest mirror of purest charity in its intimate essence, please harbor into your gentlest fibers this periodical which aims at two goals in the motto: *God and Neighbor* (S.C. Vol. 1, page I10).

The Father consecrated his institutions to the Sacred Heart even through their provisional names: “Poor of the Sacred Heart, Regular Clerics Oblates of the Heart of Jesus” ; as well as through their final names, “ **Rogationists of the Heart of Jesus**” and “**Daughters of Divine Zeal of the Heart of Jesus.**” (6) The Father remarks: “The specification *Heart of Jesus* crowns everything” (S.C. Vol. 7, page 47).

He adds: “This title will form our decorum, our ambition, our honor, and the rule of our duties. It makes our devotion to the Heart of Jesus very tender, lovable, and delightful, that Heart which holds the fortunes of our institute and disposes of them as he so desires.”

Because the name is combined with the emblem, the Father exhorts: “Both your name and the evangelical motto urge you to be very zealous even at the sacrifice of your life for the interests of the adorable Heart of Jesus, for his glory, and the good of souls” (Vol. 45, page 398).

The Father's love for the Heart of Jesus was sculpturally defined: “The Sacred Heart was his heart.” The beats of his heart were consecrated and vivified by the divine Heart. He was struck by the Heart of Jesus' tenderness and compassion as described in the gospel through the various episodes and expressions, from which he derived his own tenderness and compassion for all human misfortunes.

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He made the Sacred Heart the titular of his congregations, and every year he prepared the feast with at least a triduo of preaching to foster the fervor in the communities: He writes to his daughters: “Today is the feast of the most holy Heart of Jesus; I do not know if you applied yourselves to considering what Jesus our Lord and his divine Heart mean to us. If the precious sparkle of love for Jesus is not lit up in your hearts, everything is useless. We must consider what Jesus, his love for us, and the happiness of loving him mean to us.” Then he explains the nature of divine love: “Keep in mind that loving Jesus does not mean to feel a little sensible devotion; nor the pleasure of doing nothing, nor staying in the church; on the contrary, it means to be mortified, to be subject to obedience, to beware of any sin, to embrace the suffering of the work, want, poverty, contradiction, and any trouble. By doing such things, divine love is lit up in the soul and brings consolation to it o (Vol. 34, page 79).

On another occasion:

On the 21 of May, the month dedicated to the most holy Virgin Mary, we begin the novena to the adorable Heart of Jesus, whose feast is on May 30. You know that this Heart is all for us, because we are consecrated to him, who is the owner of the institute, of our labors, and intentions. Our houses, orphanages, day-schools, and everything belong to the divine Heart. For this reason the novena and the feast of the Sacred Heart are of primary importance for us. We recommend our communities to celebrate them with particular affection, devotion, and love.

After seeing that particular prayers and actions in common be done, he adds: “Pay careful attention to avoiding any fault in the novena; but do acts of penance and love for Jesus, supreme goodness, following one's own devotion” (S.C. Vol. 8, page 196).

To give external evidence that everything belongs to the Lord; he exposed the statue of the Sacred Heart on the institute's entrance with this inscription: “**I am the owner of this house and of those who dwell in it and love me.**”

As to the devotion to the Sacred Heart, he declares:

Nothing is sweeter, gentler, and dearer than it to my soul. I consecrate myself to this adorable Heart, to his will, and his most holy wishes. The interests of this divine Heart will be mine. I will glory in offering myself as a lover, son, slave, and victim of this divine Heart, doing my best to make him known and loved all over the world (Vol. 44, page 3 I ).

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The picture of the Sacred Heart had to stand out in our communities. The Father liked best the kind printed by Rossi Co. of Milan, where Jesus is standing with his blazing heart on the chest in the attitude of protecting, as the Father said in the verses:

Long live the Heart that shows itself  
In so sweet, smiling picture,  
That stretches out its hand from the delf  
As though saying: Children, I'm your cure.  
Do not fear, I am the powerful  
Who broke the hellish door;  
You be to me faithful  
As I was to you before!

The inauguration of the Sacred Heart in the communities was to be carefully prepared. He wrote to Messina: “The most holy Heart of Jesus wants being desired. Therefore, prepare

stanzas, song, petitions, acts of mortification, wishes, etc. He is coming with his hands extended in attitude of divine protection in order to repel the adversary powers in these tremendous times. Let us confide, hope, and love him. Woe to us if we were ungrateful to him after receiving so many graces! Divine punishments are coming.” (Vol. 34, page 100). He wrote these words on January 12, 1915: the war was raging in Europe for six months, and Italy got involved the following May. How happy he was in crowning the statue of the Sacred Heart in Messina in 1912. That statue, however, was lost in the fire at the church!

On June 8, 1923, the feast of the Sacred Heart, the Italian Committee for pilgrimages made a Grand National pilgrimage to Paray-le Monial. Then the Father organized the spiritual pilgrimage in the communities, which he longed for so many years. The dwelling at Paray should last five days, according to the real pilgrimage; they had to spend those days honoring the Sacred Heart of Jesus with special visits, songs, sacrifices, etc. From there they would go to Lourdes - two days travel and three of dwelling - in union of spirit with the real pilgrimage, honoring Immaculate Mary with visits, prayers, and songs. (S.C. Vol. 5, pages 63 and following).

We have several volumes of prayers written by the Father. Most of them are addressed to the Sacred Heart.

## **9. Consecration and atonement**

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The practices of devotion to the Sacred Heart of primary importance are the consecration and the atonement.

Since he was a cleric, the Father was an apostle of the consecration to the Sacred Heart. In fact, the abbess of Citta' di Castello's capuchins wrote to him: “I am spreading the many booklets of the consecration to the Sacred Heart which you gave me; people like them.” Later, when the Father founded the institutes, he made and repeated the consecration several times.

We have various formulas, because the Father adapted them to the needs of the institute. We quote the first of them dating back to 1895: “Loving Heart of Jesus, our Celestial Friend (it was the Eucharistic title of that year), we consecrate ourselves to you, as well as the whole institute along with our hopes and wishes for its formation. O most holy Heart of Jesus, Celestial Friend... place this little seed into your sweetest Heart and see to it that this Pious Institution of your poor derive life and existence from your loving Heart, for the greater consolation of your Heart, O Jesus” (Vol. 4, page 50). We also call to mind the consecration of 1903 on the institute's 25th anniversary. We find a reference in the hymn of that year:

And you, little unknown spark  
That wanders in the joke of the whirl  
Plunge yourself into my shining ark  
Like one of my Heart's pearl.  
Lost in my fire,  
You will burn in the rapture of love.  
You're being burnt in my pyre  
Will make you glory in my love.

As to the atonement, we know how the Father reacted as soon as public offenses came to his knowledge. Here we remember our membership to the “Pious Union of Prayer and Penance” of Paris to honor the Sacred Heart, and the fervent prayer we said for a long time along with five Our Fathers, Hail Mary, and Glory be on the first Friday of month. On that day we abstained from the second dish of food. We also make a reference to the practice of atonement, the hour of the watch, the cards of prayer, and the Communion of atonement on the first Friday of month with particular intentions, according to our early prayer book.

As Rogationists, we have to state the meaning of reparation exactly. The reparation is of honor or consolation. “The former is a tribute of honor and glory to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to counterbalance the dishonor coming from sin. The latter is a show of love and comfort to the Sacred Heart **to** relieve him from his sadness because of sins” (Agostini, *The Sacred Heart of Jesus*, part II, page 277). These forms of reparation are part of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, and are inseparable because they are interrelated. In fact, whoever honors Jesus, also consoles him, and vice versa. Likewise, the effects of sin, dishonor and sadness, are interrelated. This, however, does not prevent people from giving priority to honor, or to consolation.” (Ibid.).

Jesus pointed to this consolation when he said to Saint Margaret: “See the Heart that loved so much humankind... but receives ingratitude and insults in return... At least you, give me this consolation to counterbalance them.” These considerations help us better understand the spirit of the Father, who only wished to do everything for the greater, greatest, and infinite consolation of the Heart of Jesus! The Father wished to penetrate the heavens, and reach the throne of the Sacred Heart in order to give beats of a new joy to the divine Heart, to add smile to his smile, happiness to his happiness, paradise to his paradise, addressing to him the beats of his heart and consuming for him the energies of his life in the charity for God and neighbor. In the fit of his free zeal for conquering souls to the kingdom of love, he waved to the world the banner of the **Rogate,**” which contains all the interests of that divine Heart.”

## 10. Inner sorrows

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The devotion to the Sacred Heart is strictly connected with the Passion. Pius XII writes: “Besides what has been revealed by Jesus Christ to Saint Gertrude and Saint Margaret Mary, we can assert that no one is able to understand Jesus crucified, but those who understand the mystical secrets of his Heart.” (*Haurietis aquas*).

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The bodily Passion of our Lord is understood and fulfilled by the Passion of his Heart. Says the Father: “The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ has three perspectives: the first one is formed by the very cruel suffering of Jesus Christ's most holy human nature; the second, is formed by the insults and infamy he suffered out of love for us; the third, is formed by the inconsolable sorrows of his soul and Heart.” (S.C. Vol. 9, page 134).

These are defined by the Father as inner sorrows of the Heart of Jesus, and their nature is explained thus:

During his life - the nine months in his mother's womb included - Jesus suffered in his divine Heart an abyss of interior sorrows so intense that he could have died at any moment of pure pain if his divine omnipotence had not maintained his life up to the last moment. The prophets announced beforehand such suffering through expressive terms and images. The bitterest waters that flooded Jesus Christ's most holy soul derived from several sources. According to the revelation granted to the Blessed Villani, the main sources were: 1) The sight of all sins that Jesus took on himself as if he were responsible for them in the eyes of his Father's justice. 2) Human ingratitude for his love and suffering, of which the prophet David had said: "What has the shedding of my blood gained?" 3) The sight of so many souls who are lost eternally, which made him say through the mouth of the prophet: "The pains of hell surrounded me!" 4) The fearful sight of his coming Passion and death, which were always present in his mind through the divine vision in such a way that he suffered them all his life. To these sorrows that oppressed his divine Heart other sorrows were joined, such as: the sight of his most holy Mother's sorrows, the Queen of Martyrs, who was the only one able to penetrate in depth the abyss of his intimate sorrows; the sorrows and the torments that the elects on earth and in purgatory had to suffer; the ingratitude, ruin, and dispersion of his beloved people Israel; the ingratitude, obstinacy, and loss of Judas; and so many other causes oppressed the Heart of Jesus! (Vol. 44, page 103). The meditation upon these ineffable pains forms the special character of this humble, small institute, considering it as a special gift of the Lord... Going deeply into this singular, ceaseless, inexpressible suffering of the most holy Heart of Jesus is a great gift and mercy of God, who moves the soul to great compassion, gratitude, and love (S.C. Vol. 10, pages 185-186).

The Father went so deeply into it that even his external features were affected; his eyes were wet with tears, and his face grew pale. He taught us that the **Rogate** derives zeal from the meditation on the inner sorrows:

This institute's particular spirit, which conforms to the saying of our Lord Jesus Christ, "**Pray, therefore,**" is bound to the meditation on the intimate sorrows of Jesus' Heart. By going deeply in these sorrows the congregants cannot be apathetic before the interests of the Divine Heart. They instead feel and share them, and are moved to sacrifice themselves for the divine interests. The divine saying resounds to their ears and makes them obey that command to console the most holy Heart of Jesus in his sorrows. This prayer aims directly at the greater glory of God and at the sanctification of souls in the interests of the most holy Heart of Jesus (S.C. Vol. 10, page 186).

# Notes

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- (1) See Rogationist Anthology, page 89, note (1)
- (2) We recall the very beautiful act of love published in Rogationist Anthology, page 90, note (3).
- (3) The Father talks of 34 years of suffering, because the whole life of Christ was a cross and martyrdom. He stretches out his meditation and compassion for the beloved Jesus to all his suffering, beginning with the incarnation up to his death on the cross.
- (4) She had more than one photo. Her uncle Guerin gave Celina *The Shroud of Christ* by M. Vignon along with numerous plates reproducing into positive forms the negative ones impressed on the cloth imbued with aromas (P. PIAT, *Celina, sister and witness of Saint Teresa of the child Jesus*, page 99).
- (5) We read that Celina mobilized heavens to get help, placing every night brushes and canvas before the **Virgin of the Smile**, and taking it to the Blessed Sacrament as to submit it to divine radiation. She also appealed to Saint Joseph, the celestial army, and even to her own family. When the labor grew hard, she thought of the Madonna in sorrow on Calvary. In that period of time, which lasted a few months, she happened to see three or four times before herself for a minute, but not through the bodily eyes, the Face of Jesus suffering, charming with beauty and clearness. Finally, when she finished the picture, she took it to the holy Virgin as a first fruit. We do not know whether her vision depended on her imagination excited by the work, or by a special privilege as a recompense for her toiling” (PIAT, quoted work, page 101). The Father ignored all this, but he hit the target by writing that an angel guided Celina's hand. The picture turned out to be a masterpiece, which won the Great Prize at the international exhibition of religious art at Hertogenbosh in Olanda, in March 1909.
- (6) When the constitutions were approved, the expression *Heart of Jesus* was eliminated by the title **Daughters of Divine Zeal of the Heart of Jesus**, because the expression **Daughters of Divine Zeal** was considered complete in itself. The Father, however, pointed out that zeal is the zeal of the Heart of Jesus.



# 9.

## THE DIVINE FOUNDER

1. God did something new!
2. Seraphic worshiper of the Eucharist
3. Deep and ingenuous faith
4. July first, 1886
5. The feast of July first
6. Expectation
7. Title of the year
8. In honor of the Blessed Sacrament
9. Most holy Communion
10. Eucharistic fragments
11. Holy mass
12. The value of holy mass
13. The Eucharistic Heart of Jesus
14. Notes.

# 1. God did something new!

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We have to dedicate at least a chapter to the Father's Eucharistic life. We realize the feelings of his heart from the reading of his prescriptions to his children about the worship of the Blessed Sacrament.

The center of all devotions and activities will be the Holy Sacrament; our order will love, honor, and court the Holy Sacrament with such a bliss as to be called a **Eucharistic Order**. Besides the yearly feasts of the most Holy Sacrament, the spreading of its worship and daily Communion, the order will celebrate the real presence of the most Holy Sacrament through the Eucharistic Day on July First, as we have been doing from the beginning of the order (Vol. 3, page 17).

For the Daughters of Divine Zeal and for those who live with them may Jesus in the Sacrament be the mystical beehive, around which they rotate, resting and producing the sweetest honey of the virtues that please Jesus, supreme goodness (Vol. 1. page 98).

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The Father points out the Blessed Sacrament's action in the institute:

The loving, fruitful, dutiful, and continuous center of this pious institute of Jesus' interests is Jesus in the Holy Sacrament. From now on, people must know that the true, effective, and immediate founder of this pious institute is Jesus in the Holy Sacrament. Of this foundation we may say: "**God did something new.**" In fact, usually he places a founder rich with his graces and gifts in his institutions; this institute instead, which was born to promote his Heart's divine command that has been neglected for so many centuries, has our Lord himself in the sacred tabernacle as the real founder. Graces, help, enlightenment, and providence poured out from his divine heart in the Sacrament (Vol. 1, page 96).

Please pay attention to the report of the priest promoter, or better yet, to the priest who set things moving under the Lord's initiative.

This pious institute's trials sometimes were very sorrowful, and it lasted about 25 years; but its divine founder, Jesus in the Sacrament, supported and helped his foundation in everything... The trial became extreme and most suffocating after 22 years. The priest's last means was resorting to Jesus in the Sacrament. He wrote the most fervent, cogent, convincing petition to touch the innermost feelings of Jesus' Heart in the Sacrament as with an arrow; after opening the tabernacle - God forgive, if it happened so - or perhaps after Holy Communion during the mass, he placed that petition under the sacred pyx.

Jesus accepted it. Since then, the sky began clearing, and Jesus in the host began spreading new splendors, which became beams of light, grace, and providence. The institute began increasing.

All this has been written to perpetuate the memory of it, and to make each one bear in mind that Jesus in the Sacrament is the author of this pious institute, which is consecrated to his divine, real heart (Vol. I , page 98).

## **2. Seraphic worshiper of the Eucharist**

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Going into details, first of all we point out the Father's faith and love for the Blessed Sacrament. The Father was a seraphic worshiper of the Eucharist. When a youth, he was a regular worshiper in the churches having forty hours of adoration, but he preferred the churches of Portosalvo and of Jesus and Mary delle Trombe officiated by holy Religious, from whom he took advice.

Passing by, he seized the opportunity to visit the Blessed Sacrament in the churches, even though for a little while.

In the public adoration, he knelt in a straight angelic edifying attitude, the palms joined or leaning on his forehead. When alone, sometimes he bowed to the ground, or raised his arms, or crossed them on his chest, always praying in deep recollection.

Coming out from the adoration, or thanksgiving after mass, he was bright, transfigured in the face. He said: "Being half an hour before Jesus in the sacrament is really delightful!"

Sometimes the people saw him kneeling four to five hours

before the exposed Blessed Sacrament, and on July first, he spent all day long in adoration. In his last years, the Father said to Father Vitale: "I feel weak in the legs, perhaps from my long kneeling during my life." When the Father was in the house, he visited the Blessed Sacrament very often, spending his leisure time in prayer.

Both at his leaving and coming back, the Father always passed by the chapel for a while, and such a usage was prescribed in the rules for the congregants.

He once arrived worn out to Ritiro. Father D'Agostino told him to sit and rest, but he went to the church where he spent a long while despite his pneumonia. Later, he was forced to go to bed for a long time.

When people were already sleeping, he often spent much time in the chapel, his daily hard labor notwithstanding; but when the needs of the institute and of souls were urgent, he prolonged his prayers and adoration much more.

How passionate and ardent are the numerous petitions and invocations he addressed to Jesus in the sacrament! They shine with his faith and vibrating heart!

What can we, say of the Father's fervor when he spoke of the Blessed Sacrament ? Our souls were penetrated by his words, and we were delighted in listening to him.

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When Father Caudo was a seminarian, he went to Avignone for the feast on July first and listened to the Father, who preached before giving the blessing with the Eucharist. He deeply felt as though the Father were speaking with our Lord, and such a feeling lasted in him all his life, which ended at ninety years of age.

Two singular evidences:

"Oh, how his eloquence lit up before the divine Host exposed on the altar; it was simple in a deep thought, calm in a lively ardor, charming in a harmonious timbre of voice, and very apt to convert people through the crystalline candor of each word!" (Father Cosimo Spina).

His conversation was brief, but when it came round to the subject of the Eucharist, then he became so excited that his words seemed to be fiery as arrows coming out of a furnace burning in his chest. The last time I met him, he seemed to me as a holy priest bearing the sacred species, so engrossed in his recollection

was he. The habit of virtue had already made him so impermeable that evil could not contaminate him. He had become so spiritual that it was hard for him to stay in a corporal life. » (Teacher Joseph Giannini).

### 3. Deep and ingenuous faith

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The Father's Eucharistic faith was so deep and ingenuous! For instance, he placed the pyx in the back of the tabernacle not to close the door in the face of Jesus.

Being tall, he did so easily. One day, however, Father Messina was unable to bring the pyx out of the tabernacle because he was short, and complained to the Father, who answered: « Do you think it is right to shut the door in the face of a very worthy person ? We should observe etiquette with Jesus; you may use the footstool, which is under the table, and observe etiquette. »

More than once people saw him walking backward in the church not to turn his back to our Lord, and a sister says that she never saw him turning his back to the Blessed Sacrament. For this reason he told the sisters at the Holy Spirit to go out of the chapel from the side door.

When coming back from traveling he happened to find the community in the courtyard paying respect to him, he used to say a few words of greeting, and added: «Jesus is waiting, I will see you later! » Almost always, we followed him to pay devout homage to our Lord.

As to the genuflection, he was rigorous: he did not admit incomplete ones, which are but a hint of the liturgical action. Until 1924, the Father was able to genuflect by touching the ground with his knee, or better yet, by hitting the predella with his knee and bowing his head.

A sister reports: « One day the Father sent me to the sacristy for his glasses. Passing in a hurry in front of the altar, I did not genuflect well. Immediately he called me back and told me: Don't you know that the Lord is over there, and we have to treat him with importance ? » Two sisters carrying a big bunch of flowers passed in front of the tabernacle, bowing their heads.

The Servant of God invited them warmly to pay five minutes of reverence to the Lord.

When I was in Oria, one evening the Father was in the choir while we said the nightly prayers. From there he saw that some of the children did not genuflect well in front of the altar. He descended from the choir, called all of us back, and made us repeat the genuflection.

Paying visits to Jesus, sometimes he lighted the candles and opened the tabernacle. « More than once I have seen him kneeling in the chapel late in the night; we said to ourselves that he had all the candles lit to be more fervent in prayer while staying alone for long time. » Mother Nazzarena confided to me that now and then he locked himself in the chapel, put on the surplice and the stole, lighted the candles, and began praying with raised hands, or prone on the ground. He happened to do so, perhaps when the creditors were urgent or in case of necessity. On such circumstances, he wanted no one to disturb him.

He liked exposing the Blessed Sacrament, and ordered all his communities to make an hour of solemn adoration once a month, preferably on the retreat-day. When he was present, he himself gave the Eucharistic blessing. During the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament we had to say our vocal prayers more slowly and devoutly. I never forgot my first meeting with the Father. I was twelve when I traveled with him from Bisceglie to Oria. Getting close to the towns, he looked out of the window in search of the church, and said: « You see, Jesus is over there; let us greet him. Perhaps, at this time, he is alone, abandoned... » And he suggested ejaculatory prayers.

## **4. July first, 1886**

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The outcome of the Father's Eucharistic life is his institute's Eucharistic life, which began and developed this way:

We call to mind that his institution was born among the very poor of Avignone, where the Father opened and dedicated

a humble oratory to the Sacred Heart for the instruction of that mob and for the celebration of the holy mass, which was said the first time on March 19, 1881.

«Thus, Jesus in the Holy Sacrament began taking possession of those places, sowing the seed of this new plant in the poor's field. The sporadic celebration of mass was the sporadic presence of Jesus; but his permanent presence in the Eucharistic Sacrament was indispensable for the seed to take root and fructify » (Vol. 1, page 96). Father Cusmano, visiting Avignone exclaimed: « How can you stay here without the Blessed Sacrament in your midst ? » We can imagine how the padre longed for him! » (Father *Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 82).

Therefore it was an instant wish of all of us to have the Blessed Sacrament permanently in the chapel. The starter of this institution was preoccupied by this thought. Truly, it would have been very easy to bring the Blessed Sacrament to Avignone; all it would have taken was the permission of the ecclesiastical authority. But the starter of the institution judged that the permanent dwelling of Jesus in the Holy Sacrament among the poor and the children should be preceded by lengthy preparations to move souls upon its arrival. He judged that the Blessed Sacrament's appearance should be an event, because our Lord Jesus Christ would be in the very midst of the poor, becoming poor himself in these hovels for the sake of his desolate children.

Therefore, we began exciting the children's holy anticipation by means of pious industry e. g. teaching the importance of the coming event and exhorting faith, love, and desire for Jesus. To achieve this, some verses were set to music; the first lines are printed below:

Heaven of heavens, unfold,  
Descend on us our delight...

It was a very loving call; so many innocent, humble souls sang it to draw Jesus down into their midst. A similar prayer from the Song of Solomon was added and said every day. Meanwhile, a choir of female orphans was added to the oratory; the altar was adorned; in short, the little church became acceptable.

Perhaps by divine disposition, July first, 1886 was chosen for the happy event. Both preparation and anticipation were growing with great fervor. A hymn was prepared to be sung at the moment the Blessed Sacrament was placed in the tabernacle.

That day was unforgettable.

Well dressed male and female orphans waited for the great event; the surroundings were immaculate. At about 7:00 a. m., the priest climbed the altar to sacrifice the Lamb of God so that he could dwell in the midst of his poor. With harmonious accompaniment, the innocent voices sang:

Heaven of heavens, unfold,  
Descend on us our delight...

Hymns and invitations to come down to the host succeeded one another.

At the moment of the consecration, when the victim under the species of bread and wine was held up, the moving song of expectation was transformed into a song of rejoicing:

Stop now the tears,  
Stop now the pain,  
Sing the new era  
Of peace really true.  
Era of holy reign  
Jesus is at our view.

After a proper exhortation by the priest, male and female orphans received the bread of the angels. After communion, the priest made an appropriate speech during which he explained the good fortune of those in the Quarter, the transformation of the slum into the royal palace of the king of all kings and the adorable Savior of souls in their midst. Hence it was their duty to keep him company.

The Blessed Sacrament was placed in a solid silver monstrance that a pilgrim lady had donated to the poor the previous year along with a pyx and a silver censer.

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Shortly after the presentation of the Blessed Sacrament, male and female orphans holding candles as well as the poor who encircled them, walked before the Blessed Sacrament through the alleys of Avignone and a street of the city.

After a short walk, the procession returned to the chapel; the Eucharist was placed on the throne among burning candles and remained exposed all day long. Hymns were sung and prayers were said one after another as the children and adults worshiped the Lord. That day, they had no time to prepare dinner, but the children were happy to have a snack instead as not to divert anyone from the adoration.

In the evening, the solemn benediction concluded the memorable day.

The modest solemnity, however, did not end that day. Because the expectation for the Blessed Sacrament had lasted two years, the celebration had to be long; indeed, it continued until Sunday. To entertain the children, a pulpit was set up in the alley near the oratory; in the afternoon, dressed as altar boys, children made short speeches about the arrival of the Blessed Sacrament.

The girls did the same in their institution, as many ladies and gentlemen attended.



On Sunday, the last day of the celebration, both male and female communities, each in the alley behind their respective shelter, had dinner outdoors, happily making appropriate toasts. Zancone, the first poor man met in Avignone, sat at the head of the table. In the afternoon, speeches were given; in the evening, an exhortation and a solemn benediction concluded the feast. *By this time, the institution was in the Creator's hands (From a Father's booklet: The Feast on July First, etc.).*

To have a permanent, accurate memory of that day well worth remembering as well as to revive the excitement of that event, a memorial tablet of thanksgiving was placed on the wall of the oratory.

Some days later, an announcement was mailed to friends of the institution, both ecclesiastical and civil, informing them about the event and inviting them to praise and thank God for the great gift given to the poor. This was the announcement: « Our hearts rejoicing inexpressibly, we bring good tidings to you. On July first, octave of Corpus Christi and eve of the Visitation of Our Lady, we had the good fortune of witnessing the permanent arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament in our little church in the Avignone Quarter. Join us while praising God and our beloved Jesus, who is pleased to dwell lovingly in the midst of the poor men, women and children. »

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In the first days of August, the Father organized a solemn novena of thanksgiving < to the Lord in the Sacrament for having placed his dwelling in the Avignone Quarter, well known before as a center of abjection. The preachers were Canon Di Francia and Father Pulito » (The *Light*, August 14, 1886). (3)

## **5. The feast of July first**

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Those who have not known the Father can hardly realize the importance he attached to the memorable date of July first, 1886.

We have said that since that event < the institution was in the Creator's hands. » The Father develops this idea:

Jesus came to remain permanently. He came as a king to set his kingdom in the midst of his citizens, as a good shepherd to feed the sheep entrusted to him, the flock that had to live with him without fear. He came as the divine farmer to cultivate his little plant, which had the seed of his divine ROGATE in suffering and mortification.

He came as a very loving father in the midst of his children to form a small family living on his body and blood, and to make it able to receive from his divine lips the command of his heart's divine zeal: PRAY, THEREFORE, TO THE OWNER OF THE HARVEST THAT HE WILL SEND OUT WORKERS TO GATHER. IN HIS HARVEST. » This command is strictly connected with Jesus in the Sacrament, which cannot exist without the priesthood.

When Jesus came in the Sacrament, the pious institute was yet a *bambino* in the number of its members, but, it rose as a small caravan to start a very intricate pilgrimage. It was always supported by the true Ark of the Covenant, which was not containing the symbolical manna, but the real bread from heaven (Vol. 1, page 97).

Hence the origin of the feast on July first in the institute, which the Father wanted to be of first rate. Listen: « It is peculiar to human weakness growing feeble in the fervor, unless powerful motives keep it. For this reason, by celestial wisdom the Church celebrates the mysteries of our faith every year. By the same principle it was established that the happy event of July first which stroke people so favorably should be remembered every year to foster faith and piety toward Jesus in the sacrament and the most holy Virgin Mary » (*Feast on July first*, etc.).

The intentions of this happy commemoration were specified by the Father:

The order, the congregants, and the houses, no one excepted, offer this yearly tribute of love and faith to the adorable Jesus in the Sacrament, who is the center of the institute's love, sacrifices, atonements, thanksgivings, petitions, prayers, practices of piety, and holy hopes. He is the fountain of the past and present graces, mercies, and favors as well as of the future graces that he will pour out on this pious institute and its members. This feast is the expression of our gratitude for Jesus' loving sweetest dwelling in the midst of us despite our failings and unfaithfulness, our languid faith and incomplete answer to his love and inspirations (Vol. 1, page 104).

We report a few evidences of this feast: « The Father made the Eucharist the vital center of the institute, and established the

happy feasts on July first to commemorate the first coming of Jesus in the sacrament to the Avignone Quarter after two years of preparation. » « To understand how the worship was zealously cared, was enough to see how the Father made the return of Jesus in the sacrament solemn; he was the life and the soul of everything and all. » < The feast on July first prepared by the Father's exhortations excited even the children with enthusiasm ! »

## 6. Expectation

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The feast of July first is preceded by the para-liturgy of the Empty Tabernacle » in the last days of June. The Father writes: « The previous night, the members of the community keep a vigil of adoration and thanksgiving for the dwelling of Jesus in the sacrament, according to their own fervor » (Vol. 1, page 105). On the following day, the priest consumes all the hosts during the mass of the community and purifies the pyx, while the lamps are blown out. Then he addresses the community tenderly and pathetically, asking: Where is our treasure ? The tabernacle, where Jesus dwelt with us by day and by night, is empty. For about 15 minutes, the preacher helps the community understand the difference that the presence of the Blessed Sacrament makes. People feel this touching liturgy always new, and some of them find themselves with their eyes wet. Because people cannot make an act of faith once for all, the preacher excites their wish to have Jesus again in the sacrament, and concludes his speech with the verses:

Heaven of heavens, unfold,  
Descend on us our delight,  
Hidden in the host, martyr  
Of his divine plight;  
See your children's glamour,  
Our beloved Savior!

« At the end of mass and of the thanksgiving for Communion, people begin adorning the oratory. Those are days of expectation for the coming of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament,

and persons more fervent and with spirit of understanding consider themselves to be in mourning. Entering the church two or three times a day, we sing the song Heaven of heavens, unfold... and say the prayer for the coming of Jesus in the sacrament. Meanwhile all prepare themselves for July first by purifying their conscience» (*The Feast on July First*). In a circular of 1913, the Father described the days of expectation: « In the days of absence and deprivation of our supreme goodness in the sacrament, the communities will be in holy expectation, keeping silence, praying, singing, and paying visits before the empty tabernacle, having a little, moderate recreation, ; they will purify their conscience for the coming of Jesus in the sacrament by going to confession. When it is possible, they keep a nightly vigil of adoration for about an hour before the open tabernacle, also saying special prayers to the most holy Virgin » (S.C. Vol. 5, page 19).

Father Vitale remarks:

Through such a preparation, the Servant of God aimed at making people understand the difference made by the empty tabernacle and the tabernacle inhabited by Jesus. When the tabernacle is empty, the king of the house, the father, the benefactor, the light, the friend, and all is out; hence the longing of hearts for the coming of Jesus among us to fill the afflicting gap.

The removal of the Blessed Sacrament from the holy tabernacle of a public church could raise inconveniences; therefore, the Father cared to have a semipublic sacramental oratory, also to dispose of it for this paraliturgy, which was of great importance in his way of thinking. The bishop of Oria, Msgr. Di Tommaso, always so compliant with the Father, denied the community of Saint Benedict to perform this liturgy for a few years, owing to personal reasons. How great was the grief of the Father and of that community who increased their prayers and sighs to heaven, imploring such a grace.

What a feast they had when the bishop finally consented, and he himself celebrated the mass, placing Jesus in that tabernacle! Unable to intervene, the Father was spiritually present sending the verses for the song and a letter of thanksgiving to the bishop (Vol. 29, page 71). « Later, when he came to Oria and celebrated mass at that altar, we were delighted together with him. » - says a witness.

## 7. Title of the year

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‘One of the preparations for the pious solemnity is vital, and makes people feel the commemoration always new: it is the title of the year given to the Son of God made man and returning in the midst of his poor through the Blessed Sacrament. The chapel began having the Sacrament on July first 1886, and the first title was given on the first anniversary in 1887. Every year, on May first, the spiritual father of the institution communicates the new title in the church at the end of the mass. The thrill of expectation turns into enthusiasm, and the community starts preparing for the feast of July first with preaching, songs, etc. Also the most holy Virgin is given an analogous title » (*The feast of July first*).

Saint Joseph, Saint Michael the Archangel, and Saint Anthony were given a title sometimes. The hymns were written by the Father, whereas the little sermons were also written by cooperators. The volume *Hymns of July First* contains the verses the Father wrote for our Eucharistic feast from 1887 to 1926. He poured into them his love for Jesus and the Madonna.

First July morning revives the event of July first 1886: we have the coming of Jesus in the Sacrament, the song of the new hymn, and the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for the adoration during the day. The feast ends on a Sunday in July with speeches, declamation of the hymns, etc. Sometimes, because the declaimers did not satisfy the Father, he himself recited. For the female communities, the Father wrote *The Daughters of Jerusalem*, a graceful play, and the melodrama *Jesus, the celestial spouse of the elect souls* for the silver anniversary, in 1911.

Since the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the institution should be praised every day, the Father ordered the communities to say this ejaculatory prayer after entering and before going out of the church: « Let us praise and thank in any moment the most holy and divine Sacrament, which deigned to come and dwell among us. » We also said a prayer every day for thanksgiving. Such a prayer and the words « which deigned to come and dwell among us » were taken out of our prayer book when it was reformed. (4)

The last title given by the Father was « Most Perfect Performer of his Father's Will, » in 1927; the following years, the title was given by Father Vitale.

However, a sealed card was found among the notes of the Father, which read: « To be opened after my death by the successor. » People imagined all sorts of secrets, but when the card was opened, something worthy remembering the Father's piety was read: « *Divine Rogationist.* »

Obviously, it was a title for July first, which the Father reserved for after his own death to thank again our Lord for having entrusted to him the mission of the *Rogate*. This title was given to Jesus in 1930.

For plausible reasons, the feast on July first has been changed, always remaining a solemn Eucharistic day for our communities. No titles are given to Jesus, as it has been for 50 years, but he reigns in the institute with the perpetual title of *Divine Triumphant*, which sums up the previous titles, concludes their series, and reminds us of Jesus' rights, victories, and triumphs in our institute.

I feel drawn by a mere coincidence to see the Father's intervention in this final title. After his death, it was the turn of Father Vitale to choose the title of the year for our Lord. He testifies,

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« I deemed to give him the final title of *Divine Triumphant*, which should remain for ever. Some time later, to my great surprise I found a slip of paper, which in the Servant of God's handwriting read: *Divine Triumphant*. Perhaps that was the title he had chosen for the year or for the future, since he had said that the titles should come to an end. »

We conclude this section with the Father's words at the end of his booklet *The feast of July First*, pointing out its good results and importance:

« This family party on July first has been an occasion to revive faith, fervor, and affection to our own institute. The foundation has almost been enlivened. More than once I have remembered the words of the prophet Habakkuk: « Lord, enliven your work in the middle of years.' Amen. »

## 8. In honor of the Blessed Sacrament

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Let us touch upon other manifestations of the Father's Eucharistic worship. He printed and spread the prayer book by Saint Alphonsus, *Visits to the most holy Sacrament.* '

« Upon agreement with the bishops of the dioceses where he went preaching, the Father organized a Eucharistic procession in order to gather people, especially men. Shortly after he spoke like a seraph, filling with enthusiasm the crowd willing to listen to him at a greater length. »

Sister Ignazia of the Daughters of the Sacred Side reports in detail what happened at Marsiconuovo when they inaugurated the sacramental chapel after a preparation with prayers and songs. At the end of the Eucharistic day of September 15, 1915, the procession with the Blessed Sacrament and the participation of the authorities was ready, but the chapter of the canons had not come yet. An idea crossed the Father's mind. He told Sister Ignazia: « Sister, bring the torches, then lead the procession through the house with the censer, going to the public square. » When they brought the torches, the Father addressed the authorities: « You, gentlemen, have the honor to accompany the Lord, bearing the torches! » A death like silence reigned for a few moments. Most of them were socialists not accustomed to such a parade; yet, each of them picked up a torch and went into the public. The Lord rewarded their courage, because they felt honored. »

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The spiritual participation of the institution for the grand Eucharistic procession of Lourdes at the end of the international Eucharistic congress on July 26, 1914, was an original thought of the Father. Through a circular letter, he remembers the sick people in line at the passing of the Blessed Sacrament, crying:

« **O Lord Jesus in the Sacrament, have mercy on us, please heal us, heal us!** » Probably, sudden healings may happen during the procession as it happened in the past... Well, we all are sick in the soul more than in the body; we have to long for healing spiritual more than bodily sickness. For that reason, several persons will place themselves on the right and the left side of the places through which the Holy Sacrament will pass in procession in our houses.

One will represent the **Pious Institute of Jesus' Heart's interests**, two will represent the orphanages for boys and girls, two other persons

will represent the **religious communities**, another one will represent the poor, and another will represent the absent people who are willing to be represented. All of them will wear a badge indicating the people represented, such as: Pious Institution, Orphanages, etc. Together with the crowd they will cry: « **Lord Jesus in the Sacrament, have mercy on us, please heal us, heal us!** » These invocations will be spoken now and then with raised hands, at aloud, plaintive voice during the procession, beginning from the time it starts. The two rows of the representatives will face each other so that the Holy Sacrament will pass through, without interference from the general public.

If the procession is public, nothing hinders this devout, effective practice from being done. Done with faith, humility and love, it will obtain spiritual healing from Jesus in the Sacrament! (S.C. Vol. 5, page 26).

An annual homage was given to Jesus in the Sacrament by the sacred garbage sweepers. They are the padre's orphans who cleaned the streets for the Corpus Christi procession and tossed flowers before the Holy Sacrament. At the beginning of the institution, children were lacking shoes... but after the Father conceived the sacred garbage sweepers, shoes never failed. He could not suffer seeing Jesus passing in triumph through the dirty streets of the city because of the coming and going of calashes, carriages, and vehicles of any sort - cars were still to be invented. The most pious and devout orphans were appointed to this office as a reward. Provided with brooms, bags, and little shovels, they preceded the grand procession, preparing the way for the Lord by cleaning the streets and tossing flowers. The days previous to the procession, the orphans called upon the gardens and the villas surrounding the city to pick up the flowers which were gathered in the institute.

Perhaps in 1925, a few rascals decided to impede the sacred garbage sweepers from doing their office. The orphans, however, deemed that it was the time to show their courage; after giving the eye, three or four of them lifted up brooms and shovels, threatening the invaders... who sneaked off, leaving the orphans holding their ground.

The day after, the Father went to Avignone Quarter, gathered the boys in the yard to know personally the brave, and complimented them:



- Bravo! Well done!... Ready to do everything for our Lord ? - Yes, Father, ready to everything...
- Even to death for him ?...
- Yes, Father, with his divine help...
- Bravo, blessed, blessed boys...- He lifted up his hand to bless ...and went away, his eyes wet with tears!

After the 1908 earthquake, the Father was glad to continue a singular Eucharistic tradition of Messing.

In the last three days of the holy week, when the cathedral closed the adoration of forty hours, Saint Joakim's parish exposed the Blessed Sacrament and covered it with a transparent veil, beginning at noon of Wednesday up to about 11:00 a.m. of Saturday. They had the reposition of the Sacrament every night and the exposition every morning. Such a practice dated back to a few centuries, because Saint Joakim's church was built in 1645. The historian Caio Dominic Gallo from Messing touches upon this extraordinary exposition, whose sister practice - says he - is held in Trieste.

When Saint Joakim's church was destroyed by the earthquake, this pious practice was dying out. But a fervent layman by the name of Mastro Pasqua intervened, and he himself testifies: « I, a barber, went to the late Msgr. D'Arrigo and said my wish to continue such a devotion. We agreed to contact Canon Di Francia, so I did.

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He accepted the proposal with joy, chose a better room than the usual one, and organized the adoration of 40 hours to a great consolation of the citizens survivors.» Another witness recalls the Servant of God's participation in this triduo: « I remember very well the triduo from holy Thursday to holy Saturday when he read the most beautiful prayer on Jesus' Passion before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the monstrance, covered by a transparent veil, even in the night. »

Writing to the communities, the Father aimed at renewing their faith and fervor by recalling the presence of Jesus in the Sacrament...

I express my satisfaction to you, because your beloved has come again to dwell with you in the holy tabernacle, whence he looks at and keeps you lovingly. Blessed daughters, keep him a good company, thinking of the supreme goodness and holding yourselves fortunate to have such a treasure so near! « Wherever the body is, there will the eagles gather >> (Lk. 17, 37). Flying over the earthly things, may you be as eagles and doves gathering with your hearts and affection around the most holy body, which is our food! (S.C. Vol. 5, page 7).

Consider that you have the most adorable lover of souls, Jesus! He is with you, loves you, wants you to belong totally to him; keep him holy company together with his most holy mother and Saint Joseph ! (Vol. 38, page 57).

He exhorts the mother superior of the Sacred Side in Potenza: « Urge the sisters to keep Jesus in the sacrament good company; he is with them, whereas he is not at Spinazzola, nor at Marsico ! Therefore, the sisters of Potenza should win the others in humility, obedience, charity, spirit of prayer and sacrifice » (S.C..-Vol. 8, page 123).

As to him, he was very careful to practice everything he exhorted the others to do.

After reading that Saint Veronica couldn't get to sleep, because she thought of receiving Jesus in the Sacrament the following morning, he prays to her:

« Ah, see to it that I be so enamored of the supreme goodness in the sacrament, so thirsty for receiving him and staying in his presence as to be unable to get asleep. May I only think of him, only feed spiritual things, nothing tasting and seeking but you, my enjoyment, my food, my delight, my all, Jesus in the Sacrament » (Vol. 6, page 131).

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## 9. Most holy Communion

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Let us touch upon holy Communion. In the early years of Mary Hannibal, in Messina a Jansenistic mentality prohibited children under 12 to 14 years of age from receiving first Communion. The Father had the fortune to receive it at the age of seven to eight in the boarding-school, owing to the Cistercian Fathers' spirit and to the zealous Father Ascanio Foty, who prepared him. The child often asked the good father: « **What do I have to tell Jesus, when he comes into my soul ? What do I have to ask him ?** » Jesus himself taught him

what to ask, because he excited in his soul a strong desire to receive Communion every day; but due to the above conditions, he was permitted to receive it only on Sunday up to the age of seventeen, a few months before he took the cassock. Later, he will endeavor to recover the Communions he lost in his childhood by praying as many spiritual communions. He writes:

« To make up for the sacramental Communions I have lost at the age from seven to seventeen, I have to pray 2,355 spiritual communions, about three a day for three years and a half, with God's blessing. Messina, June 7, 1907, Friday, feast of the Heart of Jesus » (S.C. Vol. 10, page 69).

Some evidences read: « He complained to himself because at the time of his childhood receiving holy Communion at a tender age was prohibited. And he excited the little children to desire first Communion. » We cannot help remarking a « dear coincidence, » as the padre called it, between the title of the Eucharist (**Tender and Sweet Lover of Little Children**) and the *Quam singulari* decree of Pope Pius X on August 8 of the same year, through which he called children to the Eucharistic table. The padre had written in the July first hymn:

Come, dear children,  
He prepared the mystical table for you.  
Please do not say « you are too little » to them,  
They may understand the Host through.  
Please say: he is ours: we are his beloved,  
By him we are loved.

Please say: to understand the great call  
Human wisdom is foolishness,  
Even space is too small, But our faith is not littleness !  
- I am speaking to the simple - this is the regimen  
- Of the sweet lover of little children.  
(Vol. 46, page 193).

In the verses by the Father we read ahead of time the reasons that the Pope brought into the decree, which is about to give us the saints even among children - it's the Pope's expression. Shortly after, Cardinal Gennari published a commentary on the decree, and the Father reviewed it in *God and Neighbor* (S.C. Vol. 1, page 140).

Preparing children to receive first Communion was dearest to the Father, and he applied himself to it until he was able to do so. How much he praised Pius X for having lowered the age for Communion so that children might receive it. « At the age of six or seven years we orphans received first Communion, and

when the Father was available he himself prepared us, suggesting frequent, and even daily Communion. »

In the rules, the Father reminds the sisters that one of their best tasks is preparing the little girls for first Communion in such a way that the memory of that day be unforgettable; he treats the topic in detail, as it has been published in the Rogationist Anthology (Ch. 22, note no. (5), page 453). While governing the communities, the padre learned that several sisters and Rogationists did not remember the day of their first Communion; such forgetfulness is usual for those who received their first Communion without proper preparation. This fact grieved our founder, who felt that everyone should have a fond memory of this great benefit in order to thank the Lord throughout their lives. His love of Jesus, which was restless like fire, made him find a means for a new practice: First Communion Renewal.

On a set date, a person would pretend to receive his first Communion after preparing himself with those acts of love that he would have made in his early years. For this end, the padre wrote many loving colloquies... Proper songs accompanied prayer » (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 300).

A sister reports: « Several sisters did not remember the day of their first Communion; the Father gave them a white veil along with candles, celebrated the mass making a special speech, and donated a religious picture as memento, as though that day were the real day of their first Communion. »

He was an apostle of daily Communion.

He promoted daily Communion in his institutes since their origin, giving detailed prescriptions about preparation and thanksgiving. His children followed easily the Father's advice, and when people talked about general Communion, he said: « By God's grace, general Communion is practiced every day in our institutes ! » He spread the decree by Pius X *Sacra Tridentina Synodus* (Dec. 20, 1905).

A former female orphan wrote to the Father from America, saying that she was receiving holy Communion every week. The Father answered: Why not every day ? I am mailing to you the book having the decree along with the explanation. Profit by it » (Vol. 42, page

65). He erected the « Priestly Eucharistic League » in our church in Messina, and joined it to the main one in Saint Claude's church (Rome) in order to spread frequent and daily Communion among people.

When the Servant of God paid a visit to Msgr. Loiacono, « those who took more advantage of his teaching were the seminarians, who had the chance to meet him because the seminary was next to the bishop's palace and had internal communications. At the Father's question whether they received holy Communion, the seminarians answered that they did so more than once a week. And the Father: « How many times a week do you eat ? » The obvious answer was: « Every day. » Then, the Servant of God concluded: « As you need to feed on material food every day, so you need holy Communion every day to feed your souls. »

Talking about the spirit of the institute, the Father gets the point in the following perspective: « We call the Daughters of Divine Zeal's full attention on this chief point, on which their sanctification, their salvation, the progress and the steadiness of their institution depend » (Vol. 1, page 1).

« He wants the soul to be desirous and thirsty for Jesus while receiving Communion. The natural affections, the sentiments of the heart, human faculties and sensitiveness, everything should be transformed into spiritual understanding, into hunger and thirst for Jesus » (Ibid. page 3).

His insistence on the preparation and thanksgiving for holy Communion is continuous and considerate.

« Remote preparation consists in a religious irreproachable life. You will direct the daily acts of virtue, patience, work, mortification, prayer, spiritual reading, silence, and everything toward the accomplishment of this goal » (Ibid. page 4).

One of the sisters' nightly prayers regards holy Communion on the following day. The soul should go to sleep thinking of the next Communion so that awaking in the night she may pour out fervent ejaculatory prayers to Jesus, who is waiting for her in the tabernacle.

The immediate preparation begins with the morning meditation on the Passion, as « the very happy but indispensable condition to receive holy Communion with compunction, fervor, and love, as well as to take advantage of it » (Ibid. page 28).

Before the mass, the Father used to exhort the community briefly, always touching on two topics: the first was the divine sacrifice; the second, holy Communion. With grave voice and

significant gesture of the right hand he said: « Now, let us touch upon the persons who are going to receive holy Communion. **This is the point...** » And he continued exhorting them to be fervent in receiving it. He did not suffer giving Communion before the mass, as the female communities did in those times; it should be done at proper time, during the mass. After the consecration no other prayer was admitted in common, but the preparation for holy Communion, and some minutes of silence.

After receiving the Lord, people had to begin not a fleeting, but a combination of thanksgivings lasting all day long up to the next Communion (*he describes them in details* .~. (Vol. 1, page 8). He said that each Communion should be a thanksgiving for the last one and a preparation for the next so that each Communion be more fervent and beneficial than the previous one.

The Father thought that the existence of the institution depended on Communion well received. We quote:

In the most holy name of Jesus I urge the present and future Daughters of Divine Zeal to consider that the improvement in the Lord of their humble institute along with its aims depends on receiving frequently Eucharistic Communion with the dispositions, preparations, and thanksgivings we have expounded above.

The Daughters of Divine Zeal must be convinced that union of love with Jesus in the Communion gives life, existence, growth, fecundity, and firmness to a religious institute. Mutual union with Jesus founds the institute on a firm rock, which hellish powers are unable to throw down nor to impair its beneficial results in the holy Church...

On the contrary, when a community slackens the remote and the immediate preparation for frequent Holy Communion as well as adequate thanksgiving, quite the reverse will happen. Jesus is displeased by the indifference of the consecrated people who receive him every day while their hearts are attached to their own ego, while they are full of selfishness, perhaps dirty with serious faults, envy, and grudges. In such a case which are the consequences we have to face ? God withdraws his mercies and reduces his grace...

I heartily recommend that the mother superiors be most watchful, that the sisters receive Holy Communion with the dispositions, devotion, and recollection we have described above, and make the thanksgivings as well (Vol. 1, page 10).

The Father was most precise even in the least details of this topic, such as in teaching how people ought to receive the

Eucharist, at what height the plate should be placed, how to open the mouth, how to put the tongue out, etc. He often made people have such rehearsals under his guidance. Says a sister: « His teaching notwithstanding, one day I was holding the plate far below my throat while receiving Communion; the Father grasped the plate and put it at the right place.

While going to receive Communion, they should hasten as to show their eagerness for meeting Jesus. A sister remarks: « A few of us sometimes smiled when the Father denied us Communion during the mass for not having hastened to the Communion rail; soon after, however, we altogether begged pardon, insisting to reopen the tabernacle and give us Communion. When he denied it, we ran after him who was almost indignant with us. We knocked at his door begging pardon again. One time, he yielded to our demands at 11:00 a.m.; he behaved so because he thought we did not desire Jesus, and charged us with that. » It could be a pious industry to excite **hunger for Jesus**, or a measure of prudence. In fact, we read another report: « He exhorted us to go to the Communion rail all together to show that we were anxious to receive the food of our souls; but someone guessing said that he acted so to make the persons who did not receive Communion remain unnoticed.»

## 10. Eucharistic fragments

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The Father had already planned to write a booklet about the Eucharistic fragments when he sent a notice to his communities saying to them to post it in the sacristies. Through this notice he exhorted the priests to take care of the Eucharistic fragments.

Father Vincenzo Iuvara, a chaplain of the Daughters of Divine Zeal at the Holy Spirit's church, reacted to the notice as it were a warning to him.

Not at all. The Father wrote the notice because Eucharistic fragments can be dispersed by lack of proper care. It is a general principle, and calling the attention of the priests on this point offends no one. Was it an exaggeration of the Father ? We cannot deny that the Servants of God have a way of thinking of

their own. When a consecrated host falls to the ground, it is picked up and placed in the pyx. That's it. But the pastor of Ars considered the risk of trampling on it... « One day he cried while talking about the fragments which can fall to the ground, running the risk of being trampled on, and said: « Therefore, the good God is trampled on ! Oh, how much painful it is ! It is terrible, we cannot think of ! » (Fourray, *Il Curato d Ars Autentico*, page 264, note 137). Such a mishap also happened to the Father: « He picked up the host and placed a bell on that place. When the service was over, he said to us that he was unworthy of holding the Lord in his hands, and begged pardon to Jesus in public. » There is more, something heroic. Sister Gertrude reports that an orphan girl of seven or eight years vomited after receiving Communion. When the Father was alone, he gulped it down, thinking there was still the real presence. Another sister reports that it happened twice on different occasions.

The liturgy provides the proper way in dealing with such a case. The Father taught us not to fill up the pyx, lest the hosts might fall down while lifting up the cover.

The Father began writing the booklet of the Eucharistic fragments on November 26, 1926, giving it the form of a circular letter to the bishops, exposing several cases in which he had witnessed evident infringements and profanations of the sacred fragments, and suggesting the remedies. The first one was: the good confection of the hosts. But the manuscript ends at this point without the complete description of the first remedy. The Father fell sick in January 1927, and did not recover (S.C. Vol. 9, pages 2362).

## 11. Holy mass

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First of all, the Father was very careful of the holy sacrifice's matter. He wrote: « The superiors cannot confide in the hosts they buy, unless they know where the hosts come from » (Vol. 1, page 42). When he opened his mill in Messina, he cheered up because the ecclesiastical authority obligated



the priests to buy the hosts from him or from those who used his flour (Vol. 45, page 452). Raging the first world war, in 1916 he inaugurated a mill next to our orphanage at San Pier Niceto, in the presence of the authorities and numerous guests. Coming close to the end of his speech, he reminded them that wheat is the remote matter of the Eucharist, and continued:

From this point of view, the installation of our mill is of greatest importance for it provides pure flour for the hosts that perpetuate our Lord Jesus Christ's sacramental life on earth... Ladies and gentlemen, I let you know that with this mill we aim at our best service to the Eucharist. I wish that this wheel and stones continue to rotate by day and by night to form purest flour to form the hosts of which thousands and thousands of souls in San Pier Niceto, in the province, and in Sicily are fed ! Then the abundance of divine providence will fill the earth and the punishment of the Lord will be averted ! (Vol. 45, page 520).

As soon as he knew that a congregation was making the hosts with the flour sold in the common market, he wrote to the superior general: « They are making the hosts for the mass with the flour sold in the market ! Please prepare three boxes of pure flour of wheat for hosts, and send them by parcel post to the three houses » (Vol. 35, page 122).

He worried for the wine of the mass as for the flour, hoping to have his own production to supply his communities (Vol. 1, page 46). But in Messing the wine for the mass was supplied by the good families Ciccolo and Antonuccio, and the Father was more confident.

On one occasion, perhaps in a town of Calabria, when the Father was about to say mass, the sacristan sent for some wine from an inn. The Father refused to say mass; but, from then on, he always brought hosts and wine with him when going to say mass to unknown churches. He had written:

Because I am unworthy and want to be always aware of my unworthiness of ascending to the altar, I mean to spend all my life in a continuous preparation and thanksgiving for the celebration of the tremendous sacrifice and for the holy Eucharistic Communion. To prepare myself, before the mass I will kneel and pray for some minutes according to our constitutions, avoiding any talk or distraction. While celebrating, I will pace the pronunciation of the words... To avoid making mistakes or leaving out some part or changing things with each other, I will prepare everything before the celebration, following the ordo... Mindful of the well-proceeding of the mass, I will admonish the altar boy, even severely if it is necessary, when he rushes the words or is distracted.

After the celebration I will make a thanksgiving of at least twenty minutes in the church or in the sacristy; sometimes, however, I will be available for charity or the works of ministry (Vol. 44, page 127).

We report a few evidences on how he kept his resolves.

« He said mass every day; while traveling he endeavored to say mass, even changing trains, if it was necessary. He wrote the number of the masses he was unable to say because of sickness. He did so in order to make up for them by saying more than one mass a day when it was necessary. Our priests were few in those times. »

« He said mass every day, his health permitting... Only in the last times he succeeded to refrain from tears while saying mass, above all because people around looked at him on purpose. For the same reason he prohibited the altar boys to be too near him, especially at the consecration time (Then the altar was turned toward the wall). His thanksgiving for the mass was long and deeply touching. »

To follow his preaching carefully and to have the joy of attending a saint's mass, Father Sibilia asked to attend the padre's mass from the side sacristy instead of from inside the church (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 277).

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The cathedral's Archdeacon Francis Della Queva testifies: « Usually he celebrated in the cathedral, and he himself brought the host and the wine for the mass. During the preparation and while dressing the vestments, a somewhat seraphic ardor transpired from him. Because he happened to say mass at noon, I was unable to assist him, but the Sacristan Ruppi Leonard related that the Father lengthened the mass, and compensated him for the service. »

Before saying mass, he emptied his pockets to be free from earthly things, holding glasses and handkerchief. As to silence before mass, a Daughter of the Sacred Side says that one morning she told the Father something, but he answered: « For this matter a sign was enough. »

Brother Louis Mary Barbanti reports:

The Father said mass with great fervor, never speaking during the celebration, nor he allowed other persons to speak. He seemed to be in rapture... I remember that one day before the December 28, 1908

earthquake I was saying the prayer of the community during the mass celebrated by the Father. At the time of lavabo he sent the altar boy for me. I thought it funny, because the Father was never disturbed from the outside during the mass.

He told me: « At the door there are a few persons asking of me: tell them to wait until the end of the mass. » As a matter of fact, there were people traveling from Rome to Catania, vivaciously speaking with the doorkeeper, who was telling them that only at about 8:30 - 9:00 the Father could receive them. The chapel was far from the doorkeeper, so the voices could not be heard from the inside of the chapel; but I thought of it later.

I often saw him shedding tears during the mass; perhaps for this reason he told me to stay a little far from the altar: he disliked being observed. When I was a waiter for some time, I realized that his breakfast got cold because of his prolonged thanksgiving after mass.

His mass was longer than the other priests'; but the words he addressed to us at the main parts of the mass made it delightful.

The following evidence is more exhaustive:

When the Father said mass for us (it was ordinary in the early times), he addressed to us a little speech as preparation for Communion, also explaining the intention of the sacrifice. On the holydays, he explained the intentions of the mass at the beginning of the celebration, had the homily after the gospel, and a colloquy before Communion to prepare us to receiving Jesus. Sometimes, on holydays, his mass became too long, and we got tired; his words, however, especially at the gospel, were always new and welcomed. Later, when he realized that his mass was too long, he confessed that old age was necessary to understand that people get tired. But, he alone had to give Communion to about a hundred people.

While traveling, he stopped to say mass, fasting even up to 1:00 p.m. When a second mass was necessary, he reserved the right to say it, declaring that he was ready to receive Communion endless times a day. He wondered why the Church commanded to receive it *at least once a year*.

At Ariano Irpino, « he said mass and preached in the cathedral, the people holding him as a saint. » This evidence by Msgr. Loiacono is matched by Father Angel Rizzi, then a seminarian and an altar boy in the cathedral on that occasion. « The Servant of God celebrated with so much piety and recollection. He

warned us mildly because we rushed our answers at the introit. »

Thomas Pasqua, the sacristan at Saint Dionisio's, testifies: « More than once I served as an altar man to his mass; he greatly edified everyone, seeming to me like a priest in rapture. After mass, he remained kneeling and deeply bowed before the Sacrament for his long thanksgiving. One day, he retired to the choir for thanksgiving. Closed the church, he remained over there, and went out at the coming of the parish priest. »

## 12. The Value of holy mass

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The Father's devotion and recollection was the outcome of his faith in the value of holy mass. Usually, he did not accept any offering for the mass « not to alienate his daily intentions of the sacrifice's special fruit » (*Adhesions* 1919) from his most holy aims, such as: the glory of God, the triumph of the Church, the progress of the institution, etc. « Having his own intentions, he rarely celebrated according to others' intention, but handed the offerings to our priests. »

In a nightly prayer dating back to the early years of his priesthood, he remembers the masses which are said during the night:

As thanksgiving for the graces you have granted me during this day, above all for the mass you let me say this morning, for the help, providence, and preservation from so many evils; in expiation of my weakness and sins and for the patience with which you have tolerated and benefited me, I offer your merits and your divine Heart along with the Immaculate Heart of your most holy mother, the merits of the angels and the saints. I also intend to present the divine masses which are going to be celebrated this night all over the world along with the masses which have been celebrated and will be said... I intend to present this offer at any moment of this night, at every beat of my heart, at every breath... for the souls in purgatory, for the conversion of sinners, for the salvation of all souls, for the interests of your divine Heart, for all people and for everything (Vol. 6, page 104).

When in need, he appealed to the mass; triduo, septenary, novena of masses. In extraordinary cases, he said 33 uninterrupted masses to honor the years of our Lord. In his old age he increased the number to 34, considering the life of our Lord since the moment of his conception.

« He made the mass esteemed in his community, teaching that through the offering of the mass we obtain everything, that the mass is all, because heavens open, pouring down graces at the immolation of the divine victim » (*Adhesions 1919*).

He wrote:

To win spiritual and temporal graces for God's glory, for the good of the holy Church, the whole world, and their own sanctification the sisters will attend mass with faith and hope.

Through their faith, the sisters will see during the celebration of the holy mass immense rivers of graces and blessings coming out of it and expanding all over the Church and the world...During the celebration of the holy mass Jesus pays to the most holy Trinity the homage of all creatures, adores the divine attributes on our behalf, and offers himself to the most holy Trinity as victim of infinite satisfaction for the graces the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit grant; being the powerful mediator, he implores graces and mercies... Special attention must be paid to the persons who **offer** the mass. These people are: our Lord, the celebrant priest, and the faithful attending the mass with faith and love. The sacred authors say that those who do not receive grace during the mass owing to negligence, lack of faith or devotion will never receive any (Vol. 1, page 37).

The Father wrote some prayers for the intentions of the mass, which were said every day, and many others for special occasions and circumstances, which are gathered in his writings.

How did the communities attend mass ? In the times previous to the Vatican Council, people attended mass saying prayers. Leaving out the historical question about this topic, we recall that the Father was leading with children, and children are usually unable to pray, but by word of mouth. That was the practice of the saints, such as Saint Joseph Cottolengo, who filled up the community's mass with prayer; furthermore, the community also attended a second one, called the « **55 Our Father Mass** » in which the community said 55 Our Fathers for specific intentions. Saint Giovanni Bosco made children say prayers **during the mass**, according to the liturgical laws of those times. Leo XIII went on in exhorting the faithful to say the rosary during the mass (*Supremi Apostolatus*, September 1, 1883; *Superiore Anno*,

August 13, 1884).

Pius XII (November 20, 1947) said in the *Mediator Dei* that not everyone is able to rightly understand the sacred rites, nor is everyone having the same genius, character, and disposition; therefore, they might attend the mass by « piously meditating on Jesus Christ's mysteries, or performing practices of piety, or saying prayers. » These words were inserted in the instruction of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (no. 29 on September 3, 1958, shortly before the Second Vatican Council.

The Father allowed the communities to say prayers, novenas, etc., during the mass up to the consecration. The remnant time was reserved for preparation for holy Communion. I report an episode. One Sunday, the reader began saying the prayer to be liberated from diving punishments along with the « seven Glory bes » with raised hands. The prayer ended at the Communion. The Father extemporized a colloquy, but after the mass said: Blessed children, don't you know that the first condition to be liberated from divine punishments is receiving the most holy Communion with good preparation ? »

## **13. The Eucharistic Heart of Jesus**

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The devotion to the Sacred Heart is strictly connected with the most holy Eucharist, because the Sacred Heart shows Jesus' love for humankind, and the Eucharist is the highest manifestation of Jesus' love for us. Hence the devotion to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus came forth. This devotion was born in the past century to honor Jesus' love for having given the most holy Eucharist. The promoters were Saint Julian Eymard, Saint John Bosco, Msgr. De Segur... At the end of the past century this devotion had already spread to the nations through many brotherhoods, and the one of Rome officiated by the Redemptorist Fathers was erected as archbrotherhood by Leo XIII in 1903.

The Father felt drawn to this devotion which joins the Sacred Heart with the Eucharist, and he proclaimed the **Eucharistic Heart** of Jesus absolute, immediate, and effective superior of the Rogationists in Oria, on July first 1913, after fervent preparation of the communities through a triduo of prayers and instructions (S.C. Vol. 9, pages 26 and 34). Then he prescribed the community to say this Latin ejaculatory prayer at the start of any act in common: « Sacratissimum Cor Eucharisticum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi tanquam preceptor noster in medio nostrum praesens, una cum Superiorissa nostra Immaculata Virgine Maria, nos dirigat, regat et gubernet. Amen. »

In that year, the Redemptorist Father Alphonsus De Feo presented a report on the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus to the international Eucharistic congress of Malta.

The Father read that report and congratulated De Feo, asking him for a singular grace:

My beloved father, kneeling I ask you for the following grace: everything you do and think of for the glory of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, our supreme goodness, do so joining me to you in spirit, not as a companion but as your boy who follows your steps. As your boy, I intend to think of and work with you in everything you think of and work for the love and honor of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus. Blessed be the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus! (S.C. Vol. 5, page 289).

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But one evening, about a year later in Oria, the Father ordered the community not to say **Eucharistic Heart**, but simply **Heart of Jesus**. What had happened? What usually happens at the rising of new devotions. Persons zealous to excess misunderstood, exaggerated, and made mistakes about the meaning, the object, and the aim of the devotion to the Eucharistic Heart; therefore, the Holy See condemned the mistakes with a decree on July 15, 1914. People said that the devotion was condemned, but the Holy See intervened again on April 3, 1915, to state more exactly that the devotion to the Eucharistic Heart, well understood, was not prohibited, it was rather **positively recognized**. The Father greatly delighted in it, especially when Benedict XV published the mass and the canonical hours of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, on November 9, 1921.

This devotion has been confirmed by Pius XII's *Haurietis aquas* (May 15, 1956). It is recommended, because « people cannot easily understand the strength of the love which urged the Savior to become our spiritual nourishment without cultivating a special devotion to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus » (no. 71).

## Notes

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(1) To greatly excite the tender hearts to long for the coming of Jesus in the Sacrament, the tabernacle remained open and people looked at it desirously (Vol. 1, page 96).

(2) *At the entrance to the Quarter:* Slums of the poor, rejoice- the king of eternal glory- Jesus in the Sacrament -thirsty for love - is coming to dwell - in the midst of the poor - O infinite mercy - how worthy of praise and gratitude you are.

*At the entrance to the kindergarten:* Children, praise the Lord - Poor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus - rejoice - Your loving father - Jesus in the Sacrament - is coming to dwell - in the midst of his - O eternal love hidden in the Sacrament - your children and poor - now are fully happy.

*At the entrance to the chapel:* Inebriated with joy - the Avignone chapel is jubilant - because it has become - the house of the living God - myriads of celestial spirits - are in and around it - sighs of virgin hearts - songs and prayers - of children and poor - as a cloud of odorous incense - are rising to the presence - of God hidden in the Sacrament - O our loving Jesus -please reign and triumph in our hearts for ever.

*In the little Retreat:* Little Poor of the loving Heart of Jesus - praise the Lord your eternal lover - hidden in the Sacrament - has pitched up his tent - in this humble place - O Father, O Spouse, O Brother - how beautiful - how desirable you are - You, the only beloved - reign in our hearts for ever.

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(3) After the coming of Jesus in the Sacrament, the Father wrote a long prayer « to the Emmanuel dwelling in our chapel in the night » (Vol. 6, page 33), whence « the protest for the night » was derived. Through several changes, this prayer has been inserted in our prayer book.

(4) O loving Jesus, we thank you, because you deigned to dwell in the midst of us. We offer the thanksgiving of the angels, the saints, your most holy mother, and the thanksgiving you yourself offer to the Father.

From this tabernacle of love, take possession of our hearts! See to it that this sacrament of love be our loving center, our treasure, and all. Guide our thoughts, our affections, and our conversation to this tabernacle, inspiring in us the practices through which we can counterbalance your invaluable favors and please your divine Heart in everything.

*Ejaculatory prayer according to the Eucharistic title:* Jesus our king, reign in the midst of us - Jesus our Pontiff, offer yourself to the eternal Father for us - Jesus our father, have mercy on us...



# 10.

## MARY

1. One cannot be a follower of Christ without being a follower of Mary
2. Evidences
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4. The institute's special card
5. It grew over the years
6. Dreaming of Carmel
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11. Notes

# 1. One cannot be a follower of Christ without being a follower of Mary

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After Jesus, Mary. As people grew feeble in the devotion to the Sacred Heart in the last years, so they did in the devotion to the Madonna, under the pretext of making Jesus stand out as mediator between us and God.

This pretext, however, is an old heresy. In his times, speaking of the scrupulous devout who said, “Talk to us of those who are lovers of Jesus. We have to appeal to Jesus only, because he is the only mediator. We have to speak of Jesus from the pulpit,” Saint Louis of Monfort points out that they often mention the name of Jesus without taking their hats off, and adds, “They do not realize that the devil is concealed under the pretext of a greater good. As a matter of fact, the best way to honor Jesus Christ is honoring his mother” (*Treatise of the True Devotion*, no. 94). The Father says, “Whoever does not love Jesus, does not love Mary. The more we love Mary, the more we love Jesus” (S.C. Vol. 10, page 184). “Mary's intercession is morally necessary for our eternal salvation” (Vol. 22, page 84). “Without being devout to Mary, we cannot be really devout and virtuous, nor can we achieve eternal salvation” (S.C. Vol. 6, page 231).

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The Church's teaching is the following. Saint Pius X states: “Unfortunate and unhappy are those who disregard Mary under the pretext of honoring Jesus. They ignore that we can only find Jesus through Mary, his mother” (*Ad diem illum*, February 2, 1904).

Pius XII: “The worship toward the Mother of God is an essential part of Christian life” (October 12, 1947). “Marian devotion will lead you to understand Christ better and to be more intensely united with his mysteries. You will receive Jesus from

the hands of Mary, who will teach you how to love and imitate him” (September 29, 1957).

The Second Vatican Council: “Mary's function as mother of men in no ways obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power” (L.G. 60). Paul VI: “Devotion to the Madonna becomes necessary to each faithful » (January 1, 1967). When he spoke in Sardinia about the Madonna of Bonaria, he stated more exactly the role of Mary in the spiritual life by saying, “One cannot be a follower of Christ without being a follower of Mary” (April 24, 1970). Such a statement drives away the false devotee's scruples condemned by Monfort.

The saints are perfect Christians, consequently they must be perfect followers of Mary! For this reason, in the process of beatification of a Servant of God, the nature and the degree of his Marian devotion are examined. After becoming a Christian, the Jew Blessed Francis M. Paul Libermann (1802-1852) wrote, “As soon as the baptismal water touched my Jewish head, I began loving Mary, whom I hated before” (*Robaldo, Esercizi mariani, page 159*).

It is not a surprise. The Father says,

“The tender, deep, sweet, gentle love toward the most holy Mary, Mother of God, forms the saints, is strictly joined with the love for God, and is necessary to obtain any grace. The predestinated love Immaculate Mary” (Vol. 45, page 160). “Please consider Mary's greatness, following the example of the saints, who achieved holiness by being particularly devout to the Mother of God. Saint Louis Monfort wrote that devotion to the most holy Mary is a **secret of holiness**” (S.C. Vol. 3, page 183).

Talking to the seminarians, the Father exclaimed, “If I knew the cleric who is the most fervent lover of the most holy Mother of God, I would embrace him, congratulating him. He will become a saint, surely a zealous minister of the Lord, an apostle of faith and charity, a savior of souls!” (Ibid.)

What fits of enthusiasm for the Madonna we find in the Father's writing!

“Mary! Your name is the sweetest music appeasing the storms in the hearts; it is a very gentle balm, sweetening the spirit overwhelmed by grief” (Ibid. page 60). “It is sweet and gentle to speak of Mary, whose name is a honeycomb, whose picture enraptures the heart, whose remembrance makes people languish for love” (Vol. 20, page 2). One year, at the beginning of the Marian month of May, he declared, “I am very happy to sing the praise of Mary, for whom I wish to shed my blood” (Vol.

24, page 92). “I love you, O Immaculate Mary, the dear dream of my life. After Jesus, you are my love and hope! You know that I love you!” (Vol. 21, page 172). “Through Jesus, my supreme goodness, Immaculate Mary is my sweet love, my sweet hope, my refuge, glory, and salvation” (Ibid. page 99).

Father Vitale, reporting a conversation with the Servant of God, seems to throw cold water on the flames of our founder's Marian love:

“Once, in his simplicity and out of confidence, the padre asked me: “Do you love the Virgin Mary as much as our Lord?” My answer was: "Padre, not that much!”

"Oh, yes, he said, it is the same for me, because my love of Jesus overwhelms me!”

But it is understood that his words “it is the same for me” had a different meaning from mine, as we realize from his explanation: “My love of Jesus overwhelms me!” Under this enthralling yoke, he perceived love for Mary as if under clouds that veiled his loving flame toward the Virgin” (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 285*).

But, it was not a question of clouds, because the Father's love of Mary was perfect.

The Second Vatican Council states that the nature of the devotion to the Madonna should be such that “while the mother is honored, the Son through whom all things have their being (Col. 1, 15-16) and in whom it has pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell (Col. 1, 19) is rightly known, loved and glorified, and his commandments are observed” (L.G. no. 66).

Saint Louis Grignion exposed the same concept in different words two centuries and a half before. “Devotion to Mary is necessary to find Jesus perfectly, to love him with all the heart, and to serve him faithfully” (*Treatise of the True Devotion, no. 62*). The more souls are united with Mary, the more Mary guides and unites them to God. Mary is God's marvelous echo, which answers his name when people say “**Mary**” (*The Secret of Mary, no. 21*). This confirms the Catholic saying, “**To Jesus through Mary.**”

The Father writes, “Jesus cannot be separated from the most holy Mary. The praise of Jesus is complete when it is combined with her praise. We cannot reach Jesus, but through Mary” (S.C).

Vol. 3, page 87). “**Praised be Jesus and Mary**” was the greeting the Father used in our communities.

While exhorting his daughters, he states more exactly, “Loving and serving this great mother is the only way to know, love, and possess Jesus our Lord with union of charity. This must be our final aim. However, those who do not seek Mary cannot find Jesus, whereas those who seek Mary will find him.”

It was from his early years that the Father sought Mary, and Mary filled him with Jesus Christ. He concludes, “Love the most holy Virgin with transport of love, and you will grow in any virtue, belonging totally to our Lord Jesus Christ” (Vol. 34, page 219).

## 2. Evidences

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How did the Father's contemporaries consider his devotion to the Madonna? We point out beforehand that he had some preferences for a few titles or privileges of the most holy mother. But since the Madonna is always the same, any of her titles enflamed the Father in such a way that his listeners considered the title he was talking about as his favorite one, because of his zeal, enthusiasm, and fervor. By taking this introductory statement into consideration, we are able to understand well quite a few evidences.

“He loved the Madonna under the well-known titles, as well as under the ones he found out and submitted to us to foster our veneration for her during the Eucharistic year.” “His life, preaching, and writings bear witness to his love and veneration for the Madonna. Since his early years he never separated the devotion to the Madonna from our Lord, lecturing about her under all liturgical titles. Most of his poetic work sings the Madonna. For instance, the somewhat classical poem (1) to our Lady of Lourdes which Cesareo appreciated (2) was written by the Father in his youth. As a preparation for the Marian feast, and according to the spirit of the ancient Christian vigils, he combined prayers with vigils, fasting, and mortifications, also fostering a “**Virtue Contest**” in the communities.”

To sing her praise, he wrote many prayers in prose and verse. When the Religious practiced the custom of charging themselves with their faults at the end of the week, the Father taught them to end their talk with the mother superior by saying this ejaculatory prayer: “Immaculate Mary, our superior and mother, chastise, but forgive me.” “The Servant of God was very devout to the most holy Virgin. Every year he combined the Eucharistic feast with the Madonna, composing a hymn for each of them under a specific title. He often preached about the devotion to her, writing pretty pieces of poetry for the people, who still sing them.”

“He was madly in love with the Madonna, whom he venerated under any title, above all as Immaculate, Our Lady of Carmel, etc. If it had been feasible, he would have made us Carmelites. Our garb has the Carmelite color.” “He loved the Madonna unboundedly, and made us love her, joining us to the Marian congregations and to the slavery of love.” A venerable Religious says, “His devotion to the Madonna was very singular. I remember his preaching about Our Lady of the Ladder. It was a masterpiece. But what enraptured the people was the manifestation of his sentiments of filial love toward the Virgin, which he infused in his institutions.” “He talked to us of the Madonna tenderly, loved her pictures, but eliminated the ones inspiring no devotion. He was enamored of *Mary bambina*.

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About 1890, he set a *Salve* of his own to music, and the people of the Holy Spirit Quarter sang it... The Servant of God did the same when Canon Sofia invited him to preach a triduo for the dedication of an altar to the Madonna of Pompei. The people sang his *Salve* with enthusiasm.

A devotee from Messina said, “He invoked the Madonna's help for us, while talking with me and others. I think that the offering prayer we say in Messina was written by him, as most of the songs that the congregations sing during the main novenas.”

The offering prayer begins, “O Mary, sweet patron...” “As far as I know, beginning with the 1834 publications of the rosary by the Dominican Fathers, no prayer is more suitable than this one at the end of the rosary.” “His devotion to the Madonna was deep and varied, as we see from the very many prayers he wrote on this subject. One year, he devised the spiritual pilgrimage to Lourdes. For quite a few years he led us on a spiritual pilgrimage to La Salette, writing the prayers for the going, the

dwelling, and the return on September 29, feast of Saint Michael the Archangel. The spiritual round-trip included Mount Gargano. It fostered our fervor with many prayers and meditations.”

“On the whole, I think that the devotions he suggested to us were his own devotions, such as those of Our Lady of Carmel, Visitation, and the Madonna under the chief titles. He combined the novenas and the prayers with his preaching and the explanation of the daily little sacrifice we had to do. We also made spiritual pilgrimage to Lourdes and La Salette... One day of May was chosen to bitter our food with a specific powder for penance in honor of the Madonna. The sister waiting on the Father said that he did so.” “Lecturing to the sisters and while urging us to love the Madonna, he told us that he was a lover of her since the age of three.”

### 3. Mary in his preaching

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“Being enamored of the Madonna, he spoke often of her. At Saint Pier Niceto, where he used to preach the novena of May 8, his words enraptured people. He gave Our Lady, as divine superior, several titles.” “The Servant of God was very fond of the Madonna. On the occasions of feasts, novenas, triduos, and months consecrated to her, he spoke of her, making us practice sacrifices.” “He was madly fond of the Madonna, especially under the title of *Mary Bambinella*, wrote ejaculatory prayers, and made us repeat them during the procession in the institute. Fond of the Marian sanctuaries, he had some grottos built, similar to the one at Lourdes.

After the spiritual pilgrimage he gave us some blessed water to drink. He urged us to join the Marian Unions. We all are slaves of Mary and renew our vows on the feast of Immaculate Conception. He wrote so much about her in prose and verse.” A former student printer of ours remembers: “The titles he gave to Our Lady on the feasts of July first are an indication of his devotion to her. I have printed so many booklets in verse and prose praising the Madonna under several titles.” “Expounding the hymn *Christmas*, by Manzoni, he worried about the expression

“her pure womb he opened.” If the poet were alive, he would have written to him suggesting a change.” The Servant of God saw in that verse the Madonna's virginity denied; or, at least, it was given no prominence. “Any of his preaching included some thoughts about the Madonna, at least at the end of the speech. How many titles, prayers, poems, triduos, and novenas he wrote, preached, and proposed to others for the Madonna!”

“As a deacon, he preached about the Madonna in the Messina churches, held his vocation to the priesthood as a gift from Immaculate Mary, and often went to pray in the Immaculate's church, where he donated his canonical ring. We have so many manuscripts and notes of his preaching, which help us understand how much he endeavored to instill into souls his deep and filial devotion to Mary. I do not know how many statues of the Virgin he donated to outsiders. But it is well known that the spiritual industries he devised to foster people's love for Mary were varied and successful.”

Says a Daughter of the Sacred Side,

“Enamored of the Madonna, especially under the title *Mary Bambinella* along with her Presentation to the temple, he did his best in celebrating her novenas solemnly. Often speaking of the Madonna, he endeavored to make us hold her as a mother and superior, under whose eyes we should work. If he happened to see a chapel of ours having no picture of the Madonna, he himself bought one. He preferred the statue of Immaculate, eyes cast down and palms joined.”

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“His devotion to the Madonna under so many titles was very tender, but Our Lady of Carmel and *Mary Bambinella* were his favorite. For the latter we say a novena, observe a vigil, and make a procession on the feast.” “The theme of his preaching harmonized with the liturgy, but a thought about the Madonna was never lacking.” “His special love for the Madonna was evident from his preaching and prayers, but he celebrated the Immaculate, the Assumption, and Our Lady in sorrow with a particular, tender devotion. His speeches fostered our love for the Virgin.” “His great devotion to the Madonna became the lever of his holiness. While preaching, he always mentioned the Madonna, and we became inflamed.”

“Happy for bearing the name Mary, he called the Madonna *mamma mia*. When he brought a pretty statue of Our Lady of



La Salette to the community of Trani, the people celebrated festively. They were told to expect a great lady with a warm welcome, and they welcomed... the statue of Our Lady.” “He was madly in love with the Madonna under any title, but especially under the title of Perpetual Help, La Salette, Our Lady in Sorrow, Immaculate, and *Bambinella*. I still feel the novena the Father preached in the shape of a spiritual pilgrimage to the Madonna of La Salette. He excited our minds so vividly that we felt to be really on the mountainous roads, the stations, etc., every day advancing toward our destination. On the ninth day, we were filled with a thrill of anticipation, because we were about to reach the sanctuary!”

## 4. The institute's special card

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Let us go into details.

The Father was born to spiritual life bearing the name of Mary. His family had a strong devotion to the Madonna, and his parents used to give their children the name Mary as a second name. As to the Father, the name Mary is the first in the religious and in the civil registry. Surely, there has been a misunderstanding, but the Father saw in it, with a founded reason, the Madonna's sign of predilection for him. Therefore, he rejoiced, and gloried in it. He said, **“I think that the devil raged at that moment because the Madonna took me under her particular protection, without which I would be lost.”**

As a founder, the Father wanted the Daughters of Divine Zeal to bear the name Mary before their religious name, but he did not give it at the taking of the garb. The professed in perpetual vows had to implore the name Mary by asking for it three successive times with petitions, *instantanter*, *instantius*, *instantissime*. They had to prove that they deserved it through their ever more good behavior. Then the Father conceded the name with joy, but he reserved to himself the right to deprive of such a name the sisters who would become unworthy of it.

Because grace derives from the Madonna's love, the Father wrote to his children,

“Mary is standing before the divine treasure of grace. Whoever loves, trusts, invokes, and honors Mary will grow rich with abundant graces by God's will; but whoever stands aloof has no hope, because the other exercises of devotion will fail, and perseverance will totter” (S.C. Vol. 5, page 59).

The Father wanted the devotion to the Madonna to be a characteristic of his institution.

“It is the institute's special card” (Vol. 44, page 113). “This little community's rule proposes devotion to the most holy Virgin as an effective means to reach sanctification and any good success. May love for the great Mother of God and devotion to her form a chief point of this little order's spirit! Probationers, when the love for the most holy Mary enters our hearts, love of Jesus will reign among us.

What about a probationer whose love of the most holy Virgin is indifferent? Not only will he not persevere in his vocation, but he will also run the risk of going off course!” (S.C. Vol. 10, page 168).

“The Rogationists of the Heart of Jesus will glory in the greatest devotion and transport of love for the great Mother of God, the most holy Mary, who is the patroness of the order. As much as they can, the congregants will endeavor to make the people come to know and to love the Virgin Mary, propagating her devotion and celebrating her novenas and feasts with greatest fervor” (Vol. 3, page 17). “May devotion to the Virgin Mary be a characteristic of the Rogationists” (S.C. Vol. 5, page 59).

Therefore, the Father insists on stressing the importance of this devotion for the Rogationists.

The congregants should consider the superhuman importance of the devotion to the most holy Virgin on the ground of the doctrine that faith, the word of God, the holy Church, the saints, the Fathers, the doctors, the revelations, history, the monuments, humankind, and the sanctuaries say of Mary. Our teaching that the devotion to the most holy Mary should be more than singular must stand out. It forms a pride and glory for the institute. The congregants should use all means to keep the Marian flag high. They will study and consider the greatness of the most holy Virgin, will celebrate her feasts exactly, some of them with particular practices of devotion, and will appeal to her in their needs. They will also endeavor to preach her glory and to have her known and loved by souls. They will ask our Lord Jesus Christ to make us know and love

his most holy and sweet mother, who is also ours; as well as to be able to make her known and loved by all the hearts. All of us, our belongings, and the Rogation of Jesus' Heart are and will be for ever consecrated to the sweetest hearts of Jesus and Mary! (S.C. Vol. 10, page 184).

In one of the petitions presented to God in the most holy name of Jesus, the Father implored, "We beg you, o Lord, to give us the gift of a tender devotion to the most holy Virgin Mary, mother of your only begotten son and ours. See to it that this devotion stands out in this institution" (S.C. Vol. 9, page 66).

Read how the Father expounds the *Rogate* as the Madonna's gift to the Rogationists, in a little sermon on July first.

"O Immaculate Mother of God, do not stop giving us your protection. We put our hope in you and entrust our interests to you, especially this sacred banner (*Rogate*), which is our glory, and the labarum of our religious expectation. We are gathered around it. Through it we are strong despite our weakness, rich in our poverty, and fearless in the fights: we entrust it to you. Having kept in your motherly heart the words spoken by your divine Son, you also kept this saying of the most holy Heart of Jesus' zeal, "Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest to send workers in his harvest." O admirable mystery of your motherly kindness! You deigned to reveal this sacred word, this divine command you kept in your heart to us, who are very little children dwelling in these slums. Through us, you deigned to spread it somewhere else, calling the Church's attention upon it o (S.C. Vol. 3, page 157).

Writing a letter, he insists upon the predilection of the Madonna for **this little seed**, for the sake of the divine command.

May devotion to the Virgin Mary be a characteristic of the Rogationists, drawing upon them a special love from the Mother of God. When Jesus reigns among the youth of a religious institute Mary loves them. But she loves more a community of dear children who besides devoting themselves to charitable institutions also promote the divine command of our Lord Jesus Christ: "**Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest.**" Of course, Our Lady takes delight in it because she knows how this prayer fosters the greatest glory of God and the good of souls. Therefore, she looks with particular favor on this community which is the only one having such a mission in the Church.

Since we should deserve this predilection, the Father concludes, "The little seed, however, needs to grow rich with holy virtues, especially with elating love for Jesus!" S.C. Vol. 5, page 59).

## 5. It grew over the years

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The Father's devotion to the Madonna and the role of the Virgin in his spiritual life grew over the years. His personal prayers and the prayers of the community prove it.

When seventeen years old, he asks the Madonna for help and offers his juvenile lyre to her:

O divine Mother, subvene  
In the bursting storm of evil;  
In my verses I will praise you a queen,  
Holy, and immortal!

(Vol. 47, page 167).

On December 8, 1868, when the Father had not yet decided about his future, he published a poem dedicated to the Madonna. At the end of it, he tenderly invokes the Virgin to help him achieve his dream of possessing God:

I too weep at your feet, O Mary,  
in the suffering of my disenchantment:  
how many errors, inside of me  
embitter the life of my soul !  
But in the flower of my years,  
kneeling at your holy knees  
I sought you with tears in my eyes,  
there I found the cross and the altar!

(Vol. 47, page 138)

His varied poems to the Virgin under so many titles are numerous. When the congregants were allowed to publish some of his verses in 1921, the Father dedicated the volume *Faith and Poetry* to the Madonna. The dedication is a song of love:

Staring with love - I offer these humble verses to you - divine Immaculate Virgin Mary - star shining for ever in God's thought - the only object - of possible extension of the divine creator power - to a pure creature to you - the great Italian poets from Dante to Tasso,

from Monti to Dante and Bisazza - consecrated their poetic inspiration - and classical verses - sign of lofty poetry - against which are – the hideous, muddy Muse of those who praise Satan - who is shuttering and writhing under your feet to you the sweetest - the Urbinate dedicated his brushes - Buonarroti his chisel the oversea geniuses and ours from Gounod to Mercadante - dedicated their enrapturing melodies - to you, Queen of the Angels and Mother of God - animator of beauty, goodness, and sublime - very clement Lady - who accept splendid flowers - and humble fronds.

Besides the petitions we have mentioned, in which the Father asks Our Lady for his own conversion, we have three novenas in verses to the Immaculate. He entrusts himself to her in order to improve his virtues.

The first novena dates back to 1876 or 1877, when the Father was not yet a priest. He talks to the Madonna:

...I dedicate, consecrate, and give myself to you as a slave. For the sake of the eminent virtues, privileges, and prerogatives adorning your head like twelve stars, I ask you for twelve graces: 1. Holy paradise for me and for mine, without going to purgatory. 2. An ardent, continuous, fervent love for your divine Son, for you, Saint Joseph, the angels and the saints that you want me to love more, as well as a working charity toward my neighbor. 3. A living faith along with a filial confidence in Jesus Christ's merits and in your powerful intercession. 4. Heroic internal and external humility. 5. A perfect god like uniformity and conformity to God's will. 6. The grace of pleasing your divine Son in everything, up to the end of my life. 7. The holy priesthood, ecclesiastical science, and apostolic zeal in order to work with pure intention continuously, effectively, and abundantly for the salvation of souls, for the greater glory of God, and for your honor. 8. A spirit of prayer and meditation upon Jesus Christ's sorrows and yours. 9. The grace of profitably preaching and praising your divine Son, you, Saint Joseph, the angels and the saints that you want me to love more. 10. Continuous holy recollection, the practice of being in the divine presence, and the virtue of silence. 11. A tender, predominant devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament; the grace of receiving him in the host every day; of receiving him in the spirit very often, and in the viaticum at the hour of my death. 12. Finally, for the sake of your Immaculate Conception I ask you for holy perseverance up to the end, and the best grace for my sanctification, the sanctification of my neighbor, and the greater glory of God. Amen (Vol. 7, page 163).

When he was already a priest, the Father wrote another prayer asking Mary for twelve favors, in honor of the twelve symbolic stars surrounding her virginal head.

1. Give me the grace to annihilate my will before the will of your divine Son so that the will of your divine Son be mine. 2. Kindle my heart with divine love! See to it that the purest flame of God's love penetrate deeply in my spirit and rout out my selfishness. Give me a tender devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and your holy love in order that I love you as you deserve. 3. Help me detach perfectly from everything, creatures, and myself, renouncing myself and everything to live only in God. 4. My tender mother, obtain for me deep humility from God, internal and external humility, a deep knowledge of me, and a spirit of mortification so that I humble myself before God and creatures. Help me to have contempt and humiliations loved, but myself despised. Mirror of humility, grant me the virtue of humility and obedience. 5. Grant me the virtue of meekness and sweetness so that I treat people with kindness, especially when I meet the ones against whom I feel repugnance. Give me a simple, merry, sweet, gentle, kind, benign, compassionate, humble, and meek heart. 6. Impetrate for me a profound contrition and intimate sorrow to make my heart bleed for my offenses against your divine Son. 7. Grant me a spirit of holy prayer, the grace of meditating upon the sublime truths of faith, especially the passion of Jesus and your sorrows. Give me the grace of praying on the occasions of sin. Grant me a holy recollection, the grace of being aware of your holy presence, and the virtue of silence. 8. Grant me from God the holy virtue of spiritual and bodily purity; as well as purity of conscience through humble, frequent, and sincere confession, for the greater glory of God. 9. Obtain for me a heroic faith along with a loving, filial confidence in the most sacred Heart of Jesus and in your motherly affection. 10. Grant me fervent zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, letting me perform the duties of my priestly ministry perfectly. See to it that I celebrate the holy sacrifice of the mass and recite the holy, canonical hours with deep recollection and intimate devotion. 11. My tender mother, give me the virtue of fortitude to prevail over myself through internal and external mortification. O valiant Lady, you have won hell. Give me strength to triumph over the devil, the world, and the flesh. 12. You are our life and hope, please grant me holy final perseverance in the grace of your divine Son. See to it that I live and die saintly, and love you in paradise for ever (Vol. 7, page 137).

A third prayer for the novena of the Immaculate has a different feature. It is made of twelve little prayers, each one of them remembering a privilege of the Madonna. The Father relies on her for the grace he needs. In each prayer he repeats, "Immaculate Mother, for the sake of God and for this your privilege grant me the grace I need to become such as the Sacred Heart of Jesus wants me to be!" (Vol. 7, page 157).

## 6. Dreaming of Carmel

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The Father thought for a few years that he was destined to live a Marian life as a Carmelite, whereas his work in the Avignone Quarter's institution should be temporary, because that institution was too sublime to be entrusted to him; that the Lord had chosen him to be the starter, but would send an elect to push the institution forward. The Father prayed insistently, "Lord, send the one you have to send!" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 34, 35). After entrusting the institution to a more expert person, he would become a discalced Carmelite to live a religious life closer to Mary. He took action by joining the third order. We have found a prayer « to the holy Virgin of Carmel for obtaining the great grace of becoming a tertiary Carmelite » (January 1, 1888) (S.C. Vol. 10, page 18). At the end of the prayer, the Father does not speak any more of the third order, but of the first one, and asks to enter it. He began the novitiate for the third order on August 26, 1888. We have the list of the daily, weekly, monthly, and annual practices.

Among the monthly practices, the Father notices the supererogatory one of writing to the superior general giving him the account of oneself. If such letters were found, we would know better the Father's Marian life. He professed in Naples on August 30, 1889. (3)

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The Father had no chance to go beyond the third order. But, if God had sent the man of the Father's dream... the one God had to send, the Father would have flown to the first order! He notices, "On December 27, feast of Saint John the Evangelist, after the holy mass, I felt a joyous increasing wish to become a discalced Carmelite after inaugurating and handing the institution to an elect" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 36). We do not know what the Father meant for "inauguration of the institution." Wasn't it already inaugurated? However it may be, the elect did not come. The elect was he himself, who was living the Marian spirit perfectly, and had to infuse it in his institutions.

## 7. Holy slavery of love

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The apex of the Father's devotion to the Madonna resides in his perfect consecration to her in the holy filial slavery of love, according to Saint Louis Mary Grignion of Monfort's teaching.

Today, the word *slave* makes people grimace. We are in the century of democracy and absolute freedom, which often go beyond the bounds of license... And yet, Saint Paul was not ashamed of calling himself and the Christians slaves of Christ (1 Cor. 7, 22 1 Tim. 2, 24). Someone could say, “slaves of Christ, yes; of Mary, no.” Says the saint of Monfort, “Well, if we dislike to be called slaves of Mary, it does not matter, because being slaves of Jesus Christ is being slaves of Mary, since Jesus Christ is the fruit and the glory of Mary” (*Treatise of the True Devotion*, no. 77).

Besides, the *Marian Legion* is based on this holy slavery of love, which is conquering the world.

When did the Father know Louis Grignion of Monfort? Preaching in 1876, he touches upon “a Servant of God who lived in France in the past century,” often predicting that “times were not far when the Lord would manifest the glory and the power of the most holy Mary more solemnly than before; that the most holy Mary would be made known and revealed everywhere by the Holy Spirit; that she had to shine with her mercy to convert sinners, to destroy the kingdom of Satan, and to sanctify the peoples with her grace” (Vol. 17, page 123).

This Servant of God was Monfort (1673-1716), as it appears from the references to the no. 49 and 50 of the *Treatise of the True Devotion*. The Father, however, did not call him by name, perhaps because it was unknown to him. In 1876 or 1877, during a novena to Immaculate Mary, the Father dedicates and consecrates himself to the Madonna as a slave, but such a title should be considered as a spontaneous declaration of his fervor having no



relation to the Monfort's teaching, which was then unknown in Italy. The *Treatise of the True Devotion* was translated into Italian in 1887 and published by the Salesian bookstore of San Pier d'Arena. The Father had it, and that book remained in the house of Saint Paschal, in Oria, for many years.

On June 10, 1888, the Father consecrated himself with a formula of his own, through the intercession of Blessed Monfort (S.C. Vol. 9, page 13). The formula reflects perfectly the saint's teaching, but it is improbable that the Father lived perfectly that formula ever since, because in that time he did not penetrate the deep meaning of the Monfort's devotion as "a secret of holiness, and a method of life." He held it like one of the many consecrations to the Madonna that he himself had written before. In fact, for many years after this consecration we find no hint to the sacred slavery in his writings, nor in his private prayers, or in the prayers of the communities. And when he touches upon the Monfort's "secret of holiness," in a speech of 1903, such a hint is a reference to the devotion to the Madonna on the whole, not to the specific devotion taught by Monfort (S.C. Vol. 3, page 183).

It is not surprising. Monfort teaches that such an internal devotion has several degrees, and "a few people will climb only one step. But, who will climb the second? Who, the third? Finally, who will dwell in it firmly?" The saint answers, "Whoever will be told of this secret by the spirit of Jesus Christ" (*Treatise of the True Devotion no. 119*).

Such a secret came to the Father's knowledge several years later. (4)

It was in May 1906, in Rome, whence he wrote to his children, in Messina, around the end of the same month.

During my trip I have experienced a great treasure of devotion to the most holy Virgin, a secret of sanctification, which opens a new horizon on the luck of belonging to the most holy Mary, helping find Jesus through her. This particular devotion was outlined by a great Servant of God, who has been beatified some years ago.

The devotion I bring to you with the Lord's help is like a priceless treasure from far off that will fill the proclamation of Immaculate Mary as mother, owner, master, and absolute superior. It is like the answer of the most holy Virgin to our proclamation... Through the doctrine of that blessed Servant of God I am going to make you belong totally to the most holy Virgin and to Jesus through her (Vol. 34, page 219).

We will talk about this proclamation, but now we go back to the days when the Father consecrated himself in Rome, in the

Sanctuary of Mary Queen of Hearts, as Father Callisto Bonicelli of the Monfortans reports:

We had the good fortune to know him in 1906. While staying in Rome, he came to the sanctuary four days to say mass. On the last day he had the consecration. We can still see him going to the bottom of the sanctuary, doing the solemn act, and remaining with raised hands to pray to “the beautiful queen,” as he used to call Our Lady. Happy for having strengthened his chains, on May 13, the feast of Our Lady's humility, he left” (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 288*).

It was on this occasion that the Father deepened his understanding of the Monfort's Marian spirit, as we know from his letter, in which he treated the “Sacred Servitude's Chief Points” (S.C. Vol. 9, page 14). (5)

Back to Messina, the Father did his best to prepare the consecration of his communities to the sacred slavery, on the Immaculate's feast, in 1906. Writing to Father Bonicelli, he says,

“I can never forget the good fortune of consecrating myself, as the last slave, to the most holy Virgin, Queen of Hearts, on May 13. I hope that the congregants of my institutes may have the same fortune after my instructions about the sublime doctrine of the great enamored of the divine mother, the Blessed Louis Mary » (S.C. Vol. 7, page 145). On September 11: “The wish to achieve the goal of Blessed Louis Mary's devotion is increasing in my communities” (Ibid. page 146).

After inaugurating a picture of the most holy Bambinella in Taormina, he writes to Mother Nazzarena and to the community on September 10. The “*Bambinella* is waiting for something. She expects that all of you surrender to Jesus, our supreme goodness, through the perfect slavery of ourselves to Mary. She is Our Lady, superior, owner, teacher, and mother, according to Blessed Louis Mary's inspired teaching” (Vol. 35, page 16).

The immediate preparation is made by strictly applying what “our beloved Blessed, the apostle of the Holy Spirit and of the most holy Mary, enjoins in his *Treatise of the True Devotion*. Those who want to achieve the incomparable fortune of becoming perfect slaves of Jesus in Mary, and of Mary through Jesus, do it” (S.C. Vol. 7, page 146). Specific practices are performed during 33 days. Such as: the daily offering of the holy mass through a special formula; twelve preliminary days, and three weeks, which aim at

achieving a particular purpose. The preparation begins on November 5. On November 3, the Father writes to Father Bonicelli informing him that his children “are enamored of that revealed doctrine, and long for becoming slaves of the most holy Mary!” They are imploring the prayers of the Monfortan Fathers, “followers and children of the great Blessed, in order to become worthy of perfectly achieving such great sublime fortune.” Furthermore, he begs Father Bonicelli “to implore the prayers of his own institute's communities, especially the Sisters of the Wisdom, by sending a specific letter with the approval of his superiors. We will pay the expenses.” Besides the preparatory practices prescribed by the *Treatise*, the Father added a daily prayer « to the dearest Blessed. From now on, he will be our special patron!” (S.C. Vol. 7, page 146). Obviously, *The Secret of Mary* and the *Treatise of the True Devotion* by the Blessed were the foundation of their preparation. “How much we enjoyed his Treat and Secret during this month of preparation! All of us have been deeply impressed. These books are full of celestial fire, and shoot arrows burning with love for the most holy Virgin, as the Blessed Louis did. For sure, he has a special place among the lovers of the Madonna” (Ibid. page 147).

They observed a strict fasting on Immaculate's feast's eve. The saving was sent to the sanctuary as a tribute to the Madonna.

So that the Father might officiate both liturgies, the male community made the consecration in the vigil, at midnight; the female community, in the morning of the feast. “In both institutes, we made the consecration with great enthusiasm and faith... undersigning the acts and placing them in a framework at the foot of the most holy Virgin, our sweetest mother and owner” (Ibid.).

Ever since, the Father prescribed that every year the preparation of 33 days, the fast, and the tribute to be sent to the Monfortan Fathers, in Rome, be done by the new applicants and the old ones. And how the Father cared for it, as well as for the Marian magazine *Queen of Hearts*, which was the official organ of the archbrotherhood. He wanted all his communities to be subscribers of this magazine. He did so also with the Daughters of the Sacred Side when he took over their direction (S.C. Vol. 7, page 152). He introduced the slavery of love among them.

Saint Louis M. Grignon recommends the “very praiseworthy, honorific, and beneficial custom to bear blessed iron chains as a token of one's slavery” (no. 236). Listen to the Father:

Now we have to perform the paraliturgy of bearing the chains. To be effective, I have conceived how to do it. Up to now, no one has

received them. I longed for and promised them as a token of faith, fervor, devotion, etc. Some persons are longing for, but, to have them, they have to request them to create a solemn tradition. The predominant idea should be that all of us are slaves of the most holy Virgin, but those who receive the chain are looked upon by Immaculate Virgin, celestial owner, with a particular attention and affection (Ibid. page 148).

On purpose, the Father had already introduced the devotion to the most holy Virgin of the Chain in his communities, but he was forced to renounce the paraliturgy, rather he limited the permission of bearing the chain, because the wisdom of the youth did not correspond to their fervor, to the prejudice of their health.

## 8. To Mary, Queen of Hearts

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The Father also offered his poetic fire at the disposal of the Beautiful Queen praised by Monfort.

“We notice that even though he was always busy, he did whatever we asked for the sake of the beautiful queen and Saint Louis.” Upon Father Bonicelli's request he translated Saint Louis' song “My soul, tell everybody!” into Italian. This poetic translation became the hymn of the archconfraternity. He translated the following poems for Queen of Hearts: “Mother of God, Queen of the World,” “I love Mary Ardently,” “The Triumph of Hail Mary,” “I Trust in Mary,” “Birth of Mary's Children,” “The Holy Rosary's Mysteries,” “Crowning of Mary.” Translating the lines into rhyme took some time, but they wanted Italian people to sing them, as they did in France.

A fault of the copyist brought about a gracious remark. The translation according to the original is, “Who is the man who assails my peace? Here is Mary. I sleep on her Heart!” The Father writes, “Perhaps the copyist wrote “may she put me asleep "instead of” I sleep.” Such an idea is pretty and loving,

even though it is different from the Blessed's idea. That we sleep on the most holy Virgin's Heart is as a beautiful idea as the one that the Virgin puts us asleep on her motherly Heart" (Ibid. page 155).

The "Song to Mary, Queen of Hearts", by the Father, about the holy filial slavery of love is original:

Hail, Mother Queen of Hearts,  
Paradise of the incarnate Son.  
The Triad his love to you imparts,  
Unable to have you more beautiful.  
    Oh, three times is happy the one  
    Of Mary's slavery masterful!

Sweet knots, gentle chains,  
You are my sacred long;  
Oh, tie me in the domains  
Of the high Queen of heaven !  
    Thus, as a slave I will belong.  
    Faithfully to God's regimen.

I hate the unhappy days  
Of the age I spent in vain !  
My heart, go to the places  
of the Lord, shedding tears.  
    May the celestial Queen deign  
    to give you her helping cheers.

Get up without your parts,  
As the pitiable prodigal son;  
Full with love see two Hearts  
Waiting for your loving spring;  
One is the king that raising won,  
The Queen of Hearts is next to the king.

Do you dare call you a child  
Of the parents to whom you rave ?  
Cast down your eyes reviled;  
Say, « I have not the name of a son !  
    May I be the last slave  
    That the Queen and the King won. »

O Blessed Louis, O serene  
Flame shining with love and zeal,  
New lover of the loving Queen,  
Founder of the great slavery,  
    I beseech you with panting appeal  
    Make me a slave of Jesus in Mary.

I will be shedding my tear  
On the traces of your adored feet,  
I will moisten the mantle  
of my dear The sublime Queen of Hearts;  
Remembrance of my past cheats  
Will be an arrow driven with arts!

I do not want, do not want the jewels  
Of my King's and Queen's rainbow;  
His thorns, nails, and swells  
Be with the cross in my heart engraved.  
The divine Mother's sorrow  
Will be the heritage of the slaved!

Messina, July 23, 1906  
(S.C. Vol. 2, page 53)

May God grant us to penetrate the Father's soul to see the results of his total and absolute surrender to the Madonna!

In August 1906, he beseeches Father Bonicelli to obtain “from the great Mother of God the very humble, but wise spirit of devotion, respect, and love towards herself, as the happy Blessed Louis Mary did. We hope to praise him on the altars.” (6)

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He remembers with satisfaction his consecration day. “I am feeling the sweet effects of this grace I longed for, over the years... Through unexpected ways... the great Mother, on the feast of her humility! ...Praised be God and Mary!” (S.C. Vol. 7, page 145).

In a note of October 19, 1907, the Father manifests the intention of writing a petition to Saint John the Evangelist. He aims at “being allowed to dwell in the saint's house (*in sua*), in Jerusalem, to serve Immaculate Mother of God after the death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. He wants to serve her very humbly, being always at her feet, loving and serving her in everything. He will be also at the disposal of the beloved disciple and the pious women” (S.C. Vol. 10, page 63). We don't have this petition, but the Father lived this spirit of servitude and love toward Immaculate Mary.

## 9. The priceless grace

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Among the joyous results of a good consecration, Saint Louis Mary Grignion lists the presence of the Madonna in the soul, as well as the life of union with her, in various but imperceptible ways (Secret no. 57).

What about the Father? Was he endowed with an extraordinary gift regarding the union with Mary?

We quote from the Father's notes. "On May 13, 1911, the most holy Virgin took me a prisoner in Rome, *immediately*, first in the chapel of the Snow, and then before her holy picture" (Vol. 6, page 102). That's all.

"On August 30, 1912, starting the novena to the *Bambinella*, he talks to her in a petition. "Kneeling at your little feet and kissing them over again, I present my wish of having you in my heart for three years... May the Heart of Jesus grant me this **priceless grace!** ... My empress, may I be born again and regain the lost goods for the sake of the most holy Heart of Jesus, the souls, and me! (Vol. 7, page 110).

Reading the Father, we notice that he was endowed with such a grace.

"On the happy midnight of December 8, 1913, in Trani, I was kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament and the miraculous statue of Immaculate Mary, in the chapel of Immaculate Conception. I was wearing surplice and stole while all were praying in silence. At midnight sharp, the infinite kindness of the most holy Heart of Jesus gave me the priceless grace, desired, and sighed by the angels and the saints !... At that moment we have renewed the sacred filial slavery!" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 90).

A more accurate study may state exactly the value and the nature of this grace, which surely refers to a particular presence of Mary in the Father's soul. In fact, after reporting the above quotation, he recalls a strophic unit of his verses to the Madonna dells Mutata:

In the innermost fibre  
of my afflicted heart  
is a **joy** to all unknown  
such a good I was given;  
no sight of creature

can this fortune feature !  
My serenity is too great,  
my joy is complete! What a great fate  
Mary delta Mutata made me meet.

But he does not quote another strophe, which sheds light upon this singular celestial favor from heaven:

As a fortunate merchant  
In the paths of life,  
To buy a pearl gallant  
I sold everything with strife.  
My precious pearl,  
Elect, hidden pearl!  
Oh, mystery, oh, surprise!  
Oh *Bambina* recent born!  
God's Daughter is my paradise...  
Mary delta Mutata I adorn.

The two strophes have this title in the original: "A great, singular grace has been granted: the possession of the most holy Virgin" (Vol. 47, page 99). Meanwhile, the Father notes, "On December 9, 1913, I began 36 divine masses for thanksgiving, offer, and petition for correspondence" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 91).

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## **10. The Madonna in the institution**

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When the Father began the mission at Avignone, he spoke of the Madonna to the crowd of children and poor as he did of our Lord, fostering their love for Mary through prayers and songs. How tender are these strophes to the "Madonna, Mother of the Poor":



O Mary, beloved mother,  
we love one another;  
the children of Eve of course  
to you have recourse.

Hurry Virgin the beautiful  
be to us merciful.

We are wretched and oppressed  
we are out of bread and distressed;  
if our life is worn out  
among pains it goes out.

Of the afflicted mother the beautiful  
be to us merciful.

The wind whistles and the storms  
pour down in many forms;

O Mary, if you are late,  
This winter we'll capitulate.

Mother, Mother the beautiful  
be to us merciful.

Little children, little youth,  
little virgins out of truth,  
women sinners repented,  
old men by ages lowered.

Mother, hasten to us  
have mercy on all of us.

As the institution progressed, so did its worship and love for Mary.

The blessing of the Virgin Mary is done daily through this prayer: “O beautiful Immaculate Virgin, beginning with this new day we lift up our eyes to you, who are the beautiful dawn. O mother, bless and save us. Amen.” Another pretty prayer to obtain the holy virtues:

“O Immaculate Mary, teacher of any perfection, teach us the holy virtues so that we may please God, source of the virtues. Give us a living faith, a steady hope, an ardent charity, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. O very humble Virgin, grant us humility of heart and of works, as well as the virtue of obedience, meekness, and patience. O most pure Virgin, purify our souls so that Jesus may rest in us. Grant us conformity to his divine will and holy final perseverance. Amen” (Vol. 2, page 19).

The Father celebrated the Madonna's feasts solemnly. He prepared the people beforehand with novenas or triduos, mortifications and ejaculatory prayers, and sometimes with the vigil on

the eve: 11:30 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. At refectory, people were dispensed from keeping silence, but their talk reflected the solemnity with toasts to the Madonna, the superiors, the brethren, etc. One year, on the Assumption's feast, people were lacking high spirit at refectory, perhaps because of the hot weather. The Father excited enthusiasm quickly.

-Children, what is there in paradise today?

-A great feast, Father.

-Well. What do you think the angels are saying to the Madonna?

-They proclaim her the Queen!

-What do you think Saint Joseph is saying to her?

Not satisfied with their answers, the Father began, "Sweetest spouse, the exile and the martyrdoms ended. Receive the greatest award; ascend into the highest of heaven, up to the right hand of your divine Son, because your humility was as profound as an abyss..." And continued...

The Father was very watchful that all the communities celebrated the month of May with fervor, mortifications, ejaculatory prayers, and appropriate readings instead of the boys' sermon, when it was lacking. The month ended with the offer of the hearts. Everyone wrote on a heart shaped piece of paper what he wanted to say to the Madonna. These papers were deposited at the feet of the Virgin and were burnt.

In Messina the month of Mary lasts 33 days, because it ends on June 3, feast of Our Lady of the Letter, patron of the city. One year the Father offered 33 masses to the most holy Trinity in adoration of the divine attributes and in thanksgiving for the graces, gifts, and privileges granted to the most holy Virgin Mary, above all for her **divine motherhood**. On June 3, the mass was offered to thank the Virgin for her letter and her particular, perpetual protection upon the citizens of Messina" (Vol. 6, page 154).

In October, the whole rosary was said in three times. According to the pontifical dispositions, the first five stations were recited before the opened tabernacle during the mass, in the morning.

Every Saturday, people meditated on the Madonna, abstained from fruit, and listened to a little Marian sermon.

One Saturday, upon a sister's insistence to eat some fruit

because it was a feast, the Father said, “No, when I was a child I promised the Madonna to abstain from fruit on Saturdays.”

The consecration to the most holy Mary of Perpetual Help was made on the first day of each month. In 1886, the Father introduced the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and a prayer for the conversion of sinners, every Saturday. In 1913, he introduced the Communion on the first Saturday of month for atonement. He did so before the Madonna asked for it in her apparitions at Fatima. These apparitions did not come to the Father's knowledge. He wanted the picture of the most holy Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary to stand out at the entrance of our houses, with this inscription, “I am the owner of this house and of those who dwell in it and love me.”

To entrust the orphans to the Madonna through the intercession of Saint Louis, the angelic saint of the youth, the Father formed the Pious Union of the Luigini. It included three categories: aspirants, Luigini, and Luigini of Immaculate Mary.

In July of 1903, while preaching; the Father recalls how much sweetness Mary gave to the institution.

Who ignores the sorrows of life? Who did not drink from the cup of bitterness, saying together with the prophet Jeremiah, “The Lord inebriated me with absinthe?” Bitterness is more than tribulation, or suffering, or pain, or affliction.

Bitterness is a combination of tribulation, suffering, pain, and affliction. It penetrates the deepest feelings of the spirit, saddens it, but it does not destroy the peace of the soul that is resigned to the divine will. Hence, the prophet Ezekiel said, “The very bitterness is in my peace.” A nascent institution has to pass through these paths, and those who start such works are sometimes inebriated with absinthe. What does the most holy Virgin do in these cases? She, who is called sweetness? She is not indifferent. She hastens to console the afflicted hearts, to dispel their bitterness, and to fill them with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

For several years, on the days of greater tights and anguish we have imagined ourselves on a boat loaded with people sailing through a stormy ocean in the darkness of the night. No one can see the sky, nor the earth. People only hear the rumble of thunder, the roaring storm, and the moaning winds... Then, kneeling together at the feet of the most holy Virgin, we have lit the candles on her altar, singing from the innermost of our hearts the sweetest hymn with which the Church greets her, “Hail, Star of the Sea!” Oh, the most holy Mary's admirable mercy! More than often this Star dissipated darkness, made the storm still, filled us with joy and happiness, and changed bitterness into holy sweetness! (S.C. Vol. 3, page 154).

These were the community's prayers under the Father's guidance. But, he often treated the affairs of the houses with the divine mother by himself.

After presenting a petition to the most holy Virgin, the Father writes to Melanie to have her interested in the prayer.

I tell you that is a matter of a door locked with two keys, and I do not know how to open it. There is a padlock: to open it, one must know the password: perhaps the word is "atonement or penance" or something like that, but, because I do not know how to read it, I do not know the secret to open it.

Scripture says that when God locks something, no one is able to open it. I think that the Virgin Mary is exempt and that she opens and locks it at her pleasure. As a matter of fact, the beloved disciple saw a door in heaven, the door they say is the Virgin Mary. Consequently, the holy mother not only opens and locks the door, but she herself is the door through which every grace comes to us (S. C. Vol. 8, page 4).

The Father's idea is that Mary does not contradict God's will or his justice, but God himself adapts the requirements of justice to his abundant mercy through the Madonna's intercession.

The petitions the Father addressed to the Madonna are very many and overflowing with fervent faith and filial candor. He placed them at the feet of Immaculate Mary or the *Bambinella*. We quote some passages. "Ah, O very powerful empress, have mercy and save us. We have no bread for tomorrow, nor dough, nor income. Please work the wonders of your power and mercy." He lists the debts amounting to 3,291 liras, and adds, "For today, December 2, (1899), Saturday, the daily bread." Signature: Slave H. M. di F. (Vol. 7, page 39). (8)

Another time he presents a list of debts amounting to 590 liras, adding a foot note.

"Virgin Immaculate, loving mother, deign to provide me with this payment and bless me« (Vol. 7, page 45). "Oh, hasten to help me! Provide me quickly with a providence, plus 500 liras. I have to pay 200 liras to T. A.; (9) fifty liras to the shopkeeper, fifty liras for the gas, extra money for expenses, and fifty liras for Mrs. Nazzarena. December 27, 1900. Slave, slave, slave. Son, son, son. Hannibal Mary" (Vol. 7, page 4). We are at death's door. The little boat is overflowing with persons in the gale and in the flood tide... Star of the sea, Dawn of comfort and salvation, rise!

You already know our situation. Means are failing, and we are deeply in debt. Some debts are very urgent... We are going to be lost! I feel faint! Children, clerics, youth, sisters, poor, and afflicted need food. I have to face all of them! Most holy mother, what am I going to do? Who will give me a helping hand? You are the mother of help, the helper of the Christians. Save us ! It is enough that you want it, because you are the arbiter of grace. O beautiful empress, be not late! As for me, everything is lost. I cannot, nor do I know what to do! I am fainting! Beloved mother, I want to trust and hope in you! You always helped us. Most holy mother, help us now, quickly! ... Beloved mother, I am in need of persons, of means. Be not late, be not late. Help us. The very pitiable H. Di F. (Vol. 7, page 48).

We conclude these quotations with the following, very significant petition ! It reveals the intimate torment of the Father, who is compelled to involve in his activities many persons, who are going to suffer with and for him!

O sovereign empress, *Bambinella* Immaculate Mary, I beseech you to stretch out your powerful hand to remedy the harm I have done by starting this Pious Institution! I am making many persons suffer with me! I am about to implicate the priestly honor and character through so many irresponsibilities, inconsiderations, oversights, and miseries! Furthermore, I am heaping debts without having the means to pay them off! Ali, what do I have to do? I am hemmed in on all sides! If I appeal to the people, you know what I find! Now I am at your feet, O my empress. Your heart is so tender and merciful that it cannot help remedying our troubles!

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Then, he writes the list of his debts amounting to 10,250 liras (Vol. 7, page 51).

The most holy mother never disappointed her faithful son's expectation. Through her motherly readiness and generosity, she always found a way to provide him.

## Notes

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(I) The Father called it a poem. It is made of seventeen octaves.

(2) John Alfred Cesareo (1860-1937), a learned poet of Messina, taught for several years at the University of Palermo, where he died. "Ineffable pains, which he considered as expiation for his faults, started him off toward a religious conversion. *Canti di Pan*, *Poemi dell'ombra*, and *Colloqui con Dio* are the story of his soul upset by mystery, tortured by dissent between spirit and sense, but purified by pain and religious anxiety" (Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 3, col. 1348). Our founder was god-parent. In fact, he writes, « On January 28, 1912, in Palermo, Sunday, I was the sponsor of Prof. Cesareo's two sons, Guido, fifteen years old, and Ugo, 14. They received the sacrament of confirmation from His Eminence Archbishop Lualdi » (S.C. Vol. 10, page 64).

(3) To be exact, we let you know that we have two identical formulas of the Father's profession. They are on the same page, but one is in Latin and the other in Italian, having different dates. The Italian one was made on August 30, 1889, at Saint Teresa (Naples). The second one was made on September 10, 1895. The Father was given the name of Brother John Mary of the Cross, christened Mary Hannibal Di Francia. The 1889 formula is authenticated by Father Marcellus of Immaculate Conception, delegate of the superior provincial; the second formula, by Father Alexander of Saint Francis, at Saint Teresa a Chiaia, Naples, in a private chapel. Perhaps the first profession happened at the same place, but the Father's name is not recorded in the book of the third order at Saint Teresa a Chiaia, nor at Saint Teresa at Museum. We ignore the reason of the double identical profession on the same page, at a time difference of six years.

(4) The Servant of God Don Silvio Gallotti (1881-1927) found himself in the same condition with respect to the Treat by Monfort. "As it happens to those who are not in favorable dispositions, he read it without finding anything new. He considered it one of the many devotions" (Father F.M. Franzi, *Un Sacerdote di Maria*, page 70). "The spirit of Jesus Christ revealed this secret to him" after ten years, and he became a **seraph** and an **apostle** of the Virgin.

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The same thing happened to Frank Duff, an officer of Treasury in Dublin (Ireland). He stopped reading the Treat several times, because its style and the Marian exaggeration irritated him. Finally he came close to the end of the reading and a new world was opened to him... After that, he founded the "Legion of Mary" (Cardinal Suenens, *Edel Quinn*, page 68).

(5) Here it is:

Rome, May 13, 1906

The Marian Servitude's chief points as I understand and apply them to myself are the following:

1. I do not belong to myself any longer, but to Mary. My body and its physical, social rights, senses, faculties, etc. belong to Mary, who may dispose of them at her will.

2. The soul and its spiritual, intellectual faculties as well as its powers, rights, etc. belong to Mary.

3. The merits, graces, virtues, either past or present or future, that I may have or practice with God's omnipotent help, belong to Mary.

4. What I possess for any reason, either things or persons, as for instance the rights of physical, civil, social, moral life, etc. belong to Mary. Just as a slave and his things belong to an absolute owner and lady who purchased or received him as a slave gift, so my things belong to Mary.

5. Since this donation and servitude are going to be eternal, so also the eternal glory that I hope to receive in a Christian spirit belongs to the most holy Mary. She may dispose of it, making other creatures she wants to save, share in it according to her pleasure. While making this donation, I humbly request that my power to love God and the most holy Mary for ever and beyond measure be not reduced by my glory's renunciation.

6. This perfect, complete servitude will be practiced by these means:

a. Meditation on the servitude of love and renewal of it.

b. Virtual or at least habitual awareness of the servitude in order to receive **everything in any moment** with humble gratitude from my owner's hands as her gift or grace.

c. Request of or at least virtual permission from the most holy Virgin to act or use the physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual life. d. Behavior according to the owner's will, to avoid any sin and to work the greatest good. A Servant must take care of his lady's things.

d. Tolerance of any crosses, suffering, humiliation, opposition, etc. I will hold them as serious, lovely punishments from the celestial owner, who aims at my atoning and amending.

e. Filial love. I will consider that I am a son, who out of love wants to become a Servant of the celestial queen; or that she adopts the Servant as a son making me a son and a Servant altogether, out of love.

7. Last end: becoming a perfect Servant of Jesus, our supreme good. He will bring about his reign in me perfectly through the most holy Mary.

8. Finding of Jesus. If until now I have sought to find and have Jesus without succeeding, it happened because I circled the mystical city's walls without entering through the door. Now is the time to enter through the door, which is the most holy Mary. Amen! (S.C. Vol. 9, page 14).

(6) He was canonized on July 27, 1947.

(7) We make a correction on this topic. Writes Father Vitale:

“On a Saturday feast in the refectory, we were relieved from silence, and fruit was brought to the table. The padre didn't say anything, but he did not eat any. When someone ventured to say that that day even Our Lady would have been indulgent, he responded: “Keeping resolutions is part of loyalty; if we have pledged abstinence from fruit to Our Lady, we have to uphold our conviction always” (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 314).

The episode is related by a witness in the process of beatification, but it was me that referred is to Father Vitale. The episode, however, did not happen on a Saturday. The Father cared for the virtue of loyalty for himself and others. If loyalty had been at stake, he would have had the fruit withdrawn from the table. I remember the episode perfectly, because the date was June 15, 1924, Sunday, the day of my first mass. I was sitting at the Father's left hand; Father Santoro, at the right. The Father ate no fruit. I invited him to eat some... He smiled, saying, “Don't you remember our pledge about fruit? I did immediately. On 1924 New Year's Day, before we drew the picture for the yearly virtue and sacrifice, the Father pointed

out that harder is the abstinence the more we must be joyous for showing our love to Jesus. Each one should rather ask Jesus for the picture of greater sacrifice. Addressing the child Jesus, he concluded, "O Jesus, let me draw the picture that pledges abstinence from all fruits. I want to give all of them to you." Jesus was pleased. When the Father drew the picture, it was the one pledging abstinence from all fruits. I knew the episode, but on that extraordinary feast, the ordination of the first two priests of the congregation, I took the liberty of adding that the child Jesus would have been indulgent in such a case. The Father however responded, "Keeping resolutions is part of loyalty." In 1924, he did not eat any fruit.

I remember that the Father let us eat fruit on a Saturday, and he himself ate it. Someone had made a donation, but that fruit was so ripe that it would be lost if we had not eaten it the same day. We had no refrigerator. The Father explained, "The Madonna dislikes seeing the grace of God decayed. It would be against the virtue of poverty." This is part of the Father's spirit.

(8) To understand well these figures regarding debts and alms, we must keep in mind the money's value in those times, when the bread was worth a few cents and a dinner one lira.

(9) Teresa Avignone: the matter is about the rent of the little houses.



# 11.

## A WREATH OF ROSES FOR MARY

1. « Numerous and glowing titles »
2. Mother of the Church
3. Our Lady of Carmel
4. Our Lady of Itria and Pompei
5. Morning Star
6. Our Lady of Lourdes
7. Immaculate
8. Our Lady of the Sacred Letter
9. Mary *Bambina*
10. Mary's sorrows
11. Our Lady of La Salette
12. Our Lady of Mercy
13. Our Lady of Vena
14. Our Lady of Guard
15. Our Lady of Rogation
16. Notes

# 1. Numerous and glowing titles

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The stars in the sky are fewer, less bright and shining than the numerous titles glowing with celestial beauty, which adorn the one, whom God created as the marvel of his omnipotence, the abyss of his grace, and the wonder of the universe. The very beautiful Immaculate Mary is endlessly rich with the most beautiful, singular names and titles” (S.C. Vol. 3, page 203).

So the Father said. We repeat that he venerated the Madonna under any title, seizing any opportunity. Here, however, we briefly remember the titles he loved and recommended most. (1)

To begin with, we touch upon the Father's Marian culture.

Chiefly, it is based on Scripture, of which he was so enamored. In his youth he studied also the following works: *The Mother of God* by Father Joachim Ventura; *The Month of May of the Preachers*, a big volume of sermons enriched with a collection of the Fathers' writings; *Mary in God's Counsel*, three volumes by Father Ludwig Castigliano of the Friars Minor; *The Foot of the Cross* by Father Faber; *The Glories of Mary* by Saint Alphonsus; *The Treat of the True Devotion to Mary* by Saint Louis Grignon De Monfort; *The Mystical City of God* by Blessed D'Agreda; and *Story of the Marian Sanctuaries*, twelve little volumes, by Vigo. Besides, the Father, who was so fond of his city, had a deep knowledge of the religious history of Messina, rich with religious memories and Marian sanctuaries.

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To heartily exalt the Madonna in his frequent preaching to the people and in his conversation with the members of his institutions, our Father often resorted to his Marian culture. He expounds the orthodox doctrine about the Madonna not in terms of scientific rigor, but according to the Mariology of his time, and through a popular oratory, which is always required by pastoral ministry.

Passing over the theological controversies, the Father proclaims

the truth about the Madonna according to theology, tradition, history, and teaching of the saints. The Madonna is Mother of God and men, is Mother of the Church, Immaculate, co-redeemer, and mediatrix. To avoid confusion in the faithful's mind, the Father eliminates distinctions and subdistinctions.

## 2. Mother of the Church

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Paul VI acknowledges that calling Mary Mother of the Church “is not a new title for the faithful's piety, because it belongs to their authentic devotion” (*Osservatore Romano*, November 22, 1964). Leo XIII had already pointed out to Mary as to the “Mother of God, Teacher, and Queen of the Apostles” (*Adiutricem populi*, September 5, 1895). However, because the Council’s commissions pointed to many difficulties, the Council itself made no official declaration. But Paul VI, as a Pope having authority higher than the Council, declared the most holy Virgin “Mother of the Church” at the closure of the third session, and added, “From now on we want the Christian people to honor and invoke more the Virgin through this gentlest title” (November 22, 1964).

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Even though the Father made no special notice of this title, we are recalling it to point out that he had no difficulty to name Mary “Mother of the Church.” Such a title for him was obvious, and he saluted her as such on the proper occasion. For instance, in the prayer to obtain good workers to the Church from the Lord, the Father says, “For the sake of your most holy mother and Mother of the Church.” Praying to the Madonna, he writes, Immaculate Mother of God and ours, you are the Mother of the Church, because you received from your divine Son the mission to plant it and to illumine the apostles.” It was an evident reference to the Acts of the Apostles (1, 14) relating how the disciples prayed in the supper-room together with Mary.

“She began exercising the office of Mother of the Church by comforting the first faithful through exhortations, advice, examples of holy life, and motherly cares. In her frequent prayers, she asked God to convert sinners, to confirm the good people, and

to help the tottering. The conversion of a thousand people through Peter's preaching was the result of Mary's prayer. The loving Savior left Mary on the earth after his ascension into heaven to support the nascent Church through her motherly care” (S.C. Vol. 3, page 187). (2)

*Lumen Gentium* presents the Church as the mystical body, whose head is Jesus (no. 7). The Father refers to the “mystical body of all believers. They form the great family of the gospel, in the union of the same faith and in the profession of the same truth.” As “Mother of the Church,” Mary is committed to save the Church. She took care of Jesus in his mortal life, so she keeps, protects, and looks after the Church of Jesus in this world, because the Church is born of Jesus' and Mary's sorrows” (Vol. 17, page 98).

### 3. Our Lady of Carmel

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“To implement his devotion to Our Lady of Carmel, the Father became a member of the third Carmelite order. Being unable to belong to the first one, he wished his communities somehow to share it. In his last years, petitioning on the feast of the most holy name of Jesus, he never forgot to ask for a special union of our communities with the order of Carmel, through which the most holy mother should hold us as particular sons and daughters” (S.C. Vol. 9, page 84, no. 30).

Owing to the very special character and singular mission of our institutes, destined by the Lord to take care of *Rogate*, the Father wished a “free association,” which should imply no dependence, nor assimilation with the Carmelites. To avoid any assimilation, he wrote on one occasion, “Due to this sublime mercy of the “One who blows where he wants, and looks upon the heavens and the earth below, " I feel compelled by conscience to keep this divine mission and to entrust it to my successors” (Vol. 37, page 52).

This was the reason the Father shelved the case of our aggregation to the Carmelite order.

But his devotion to Our Lady of Carmel was intense. To put his daughters under her particular protection he gave the Carmelite color to their garb; and to Our Lady of Carmel he dedicated the church built near the institute in Giardini.

## 4. Our Lady of Itria and Pompei

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Let us remember two novenas of the Father in honor of Our Lady of Itria and Pompei.

*Our Lady of Itria.* Itria is an Italian word which stands for a Constantinople's street, where the Empress Pulcheria erected a sanctuary in honor of the Mother of God as a memento of the Ephesus Council (431). At the emperors iconoclasts' times, the Basilian monks stole the sacred picture, landed at Bari around the year 718, and spread the devotion in Southern Italy. The historians report that such devotion was practiced in 6 churches of Messina, and the picture exposed at Saint Nicholas' was famous for variety of miracles. More than once the face of the picture shone, and shed tears. It happened, for instance, during the 1598 earthquake (Samperi, *Iconologia Mariana*, book IV, ch. 25).

Nor less prodigious was the picture at Saint Leonard's church (Ibid. ch. 30). The Father pronounced a panegyric about Our Lady of Itria in 1889 at Pezzolo (Messina), where the faithful celebrated her feast solemnly.

Our Lady of Itria at Polistena (Reggio Calabria) is co-patroness of the city together with the most holy Trinity. When the very zealous Msgr. Dominic Valensise was the church's director (before becoming the bishop of Nicastro), he fostered the worship to the Madonna by solemnly celebrating the month of May in her honor. On Aug. 20, 1885, through the intercession of about 40 bishops, he obtained from Leo XIII to conclude the Marian month with a mass in honor of the **divine motherhood, without any restriction of time and place**, as we read in a Latin tablet by Father Angelini, S. J., in that church.

While preparing the feast, Msgr. Valensise begged his friend Mary Hannibal to write the prayers, the strophes, and the hymn for the novena. The Father inserted them into the narration of Constantinople's famous picture, and a devout faithful printed this work in Siena (Tipografia Editrice S. Bernardino, 1889).

The worship to Our *Lady of Pompei* began in the last quarter of the past century. The Blessed Bartolo Longo and the Countess De Fusco, who became his spouse, fostered this devotion in the desolate valley of Pompei. They had a mind to build a little church for the neighboring peasants, but it turned out to be a very precious temple rich with marble and art, famous all over the world for the graces and the miracles Our Lady granted under the title of Pompei.

As soon as the Father heard of the sanctuary, he put his poetical fire at Our Lady of Pompei's disposal by writing the above mentioned *Salve*. He entitled it "Greeting of Messina to the most holy Virgin of the Rosary - Pompei Valley - with Strophes for Song." The work was printed by "Tipi Fratelli Bertola, Piacenza, 1890, but it was not published, perhaps due to interference of Bartolo Longo, who was a friend of the Father. Our founder wrote the prayers for all people, without pointing to a specific case, and according to the sanctuary's story" (Vol. 7, page 143). Bartolo Longo instead had published his novena "to obtain favors in urgency cases," which was already spread all over the world to great satisfaction of the faithful. Therefore, there was no need for substitution. But the strophes and the *Salve* were welcomed and printed at Valley of Pompei; they are very popular in Sicily.

The Father put the mark of his spirit in the novena by adding two prayers to the most holy Virgin of Pompei: one, to obtain good workers, the other for the triumph of the Church.

In 1909, Dean Francis Antonuccio's generosity gave the Father the opportunity to open an Anthonian orphanage at San Pier Niceto (Messina). The church was dedicated to the most holy Virgin of Pompei, and the Father preached the novena for quite a few years. The topics of the 1910 novena were: "Our Lady of Pompei is the teacher of the peoples." She teaches: 1. the mysteries. 2. Vigilance and prayer. 3. The pilgrimage in this life. 4. The works of charity. 5. Patience. 6. Attachment to the Pope. 7. Attendance to the sacraments. 8. Supernatural faith. 9. Resort to her in this vale of tears (Valley of Pompei) (Vol. 21, page 44). (3)

## 5. Morning star

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Sister Mary Luisa of Jesus (1799-1875), a Dominican of the third order endowed with extraordinary virtues and charismas, was the apostle of the devotion to the most holy Virgin under the title “Morning Star,” in Naples. She built and dedicated a monastery and a church to Morning Star. The Father met her in Naples, and after 50 years, on December 3, 1922, he still feels the freshness and the enthusiasm of that meeting, in which the pious sister foretold his future. “My mind, my heart, and my whole self were planning for my July 26, 1870 visit to Naples. I experienced such sacred excitement as I stood before the gate of the Morning Star Monastery. Then again, my heart swelled when I was in the presence of the humble Servant of the Lord. She foresaw my future under the inspiration of the heavenly bridegroom” (Vol. 45, page 553).

The Father became an apostle of Morning Star in Messina. In 1875, he published a booklet of prayers and verses, expounded the title Morning Star in a chapter, and added, “I have written the novena as a thanksgiving to the beautiful Morning Star for a grace she has granted to me.” The grace was his healing, perhaps.

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The devotion was introduced first in Saint Julian church; then it was definitively transferred to Saint Mary of the Arch, where a picture by Joseph Minutoli was exposed for the faithful's veneration. On July 25, 1877, the Father introduced this devotion to the public through an article in *The Catholic Word* (S.C. Vol. 1, page 18).

The yearly solemn feast was cared for by the “Pious Union of the Most Holy Virgin Morning Star for the Triumph of the Faith”; and a prayer to Immaculate Mary Morning Star for the triumph of the Catholic faith was added to the booklet. Besides a crowd of faithful, noble citizens headed by Prince d'Alcontrez joined the Pious Union, acting fervently until the 1908 earthquake that destroyed the church.

We remember the Father's panegyric in 1875 and 1877, the novena in 1877 and 1879, and two sermons in 1880 and 1889. All of them on Morning Star.

## 6. Our Lady of Lourdes

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The devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes stands out in the ministry of the Father, who introduced it in Messina. (4)

As a subdeacon, he preached the 1876 month of May in Saint Laurence parish, speaking of the Virgin's 18 apparitions at Lourdes. While remembering those days after so many years, the Father exclaimed, "That tender and touching story attracted and impressed everyone favorably! The crowd of people increased with enthusiasm, evening by evening!" (Vol. 19, page 169).

Unfortunately, we have only a little page of his monthly preaching, which shows the Father's ingeniousness in drawing wise moral applications from the very simple happenings and humble circumstances in order to foster love of the Madonna in souls (Vol. 22, page 138).

To prepare his communities for the February 11 feast, the Father made them say the novena and a special prayer on each day of the apparitions. Besides, he saw to it that they built a Lourdes grotto, and he himself led them in spiritual pilgrimages over there to obtain graces. The memoirs report that on the occasion of a long drought in Messina, the Father ordered a procession for three days to the Lourdes grotto with prayers and songs. At the closure of the liturgy on the last evening, the rain began pouring down while the community was singing the last strophe of the Father's hymn to the Madonna, which recalls the miraculous rain of Elijah.

Pure white from the dry horizon  
You appeared to Elijah's view,  
When he said for that phenomenon,  
"See, Ahab, the rain will come."  
Pure white appeared, out of the blue,  
In the grotto's shadows silent,  
As to say to the people present,  
"It is Mary, the rain will come!"



## 7. Immaculate

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The Marian title which struck the Father, centralizing in itself all his love, is “Immaculate.” Besides grace, also the times and the family's environment were contributing factors of this devotion. Messina has always been very devout to Immaculate Conception. The great church built in 1254 is entitled to Saint Francis of Assisi, but this title is usually unknown to the faithful, who call the church Immaculate.” This is due to the traditional devotion to Immaculate Mary, whose feast is celebrated in that church every year with great concourse of people.

The 1854 dogmatic definition lighted a flame of enthusiasm for Immaculate Mary all over the world. Di Francia's family was very devout to her. The mother started her son very soon on this devotion, which improved at Saint Nicholas' boarding school, under the direction of Father Ascanio Foti. He was the master of the novices, and said his daily rosary in honor of Immaculate Mary together with Di Francia, a school-boy. Since his early youth, Mary Hannibal consecrates his muse to Immaculate, who inspires the strophes in which the young poet pours out the flow of his feelings. In 1868, he publishes melodious octaves in honor of Immaculate in *The Catholic Word*; in 1870, he writes *Faith and Dogma*, a various-measured poem. We quote a strophe, in which the poet sums. Up the biblical symbols of the Madonna in a speech of a Christian mother to her children:

The mother is telling her offspring:  
Mary is the star gilding the sky;  
The Most High's clear spring  
Watering the rye;  
The loving dawn dispelling  
The nightly shadows of decoy;  
The rose, the air embalming  
With mysterious joy;  
Palm stretching out a veil  
On the pilgrim frail.

In 1874, he sings a new song to Immaculate Mary with *Sin and Redemption* in blank verses, divided into four parts and ending with the apparition of Mary, who saves the world.

Spending the sacred hours of my life  
at your feet, O Virgin,  
I say a confident prayer,  
While seeing the fading age  
And the darkness of sins  
So deep around. Yet a hope,  
An intimate, secret foresight  
Smiles at me. You, o Mother,  
Will come again to triumph  
Gloriously. In the brotherly hugs,  
Drawn by mysterious celestial truth,  
The betrayed peoples will rise,  
And the Cross will reform the world  
In its grandiose hands,  
Rising over the ruins,  
Triumphantly redeemer.

We have two more poetic works in prose. The Father called them *Psalms*. One was published in the *Catholic Word* (December 7, 1878) with the title *Sine Labe* (*S.C. Vol. 2*, page 232); the other, in *The Corriere Peloritano* (December 8, 1894), with the title *Hymn of Praise and Wail of Prayer* (*Ibid.* page 237). In 1904, the Father commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the definition of Immaculate Conception with a new hymn.

As a founder, the Father consecrated his institutions to Immaculate Mary, who is the chief patron of them, and proclaimed her Divine Superior. The Daughters of Divine Zeal did it on the 50th anniversary of the dogma of Immaculate Conception, on December 8, 1904. The preparation began the previous December with special daily prayers. The Father explains the nature of such a proclamation in the petition to the Madonna,

You are really the owner, the superior, and the mother of all the religious institutes. Such titles are related to the faith and the wishes with which each institute implores and desires this priceless good. Therefore, in our understanding we want you to be the owner, the superior, and the mother of this institute as though you were living among us as the owner, the superior, and the mother who directs, rules, commands, corrects,

punishes, supervises, and governs us. We ask to do this in the spiritual and temporal matter; in the observance of the rule, piety, and discipline; in the acts in common, and in the matter of importance. May the person who governs us as a superior be really your vice superior, your vicar, or representative” (Vol. 7, page 62). On September 28, the Father began saying 71 masses to the most holy Trinity in thanksgiving for the graces granted to the most holy Virgin in her life of 71 years. A popular tradition says that this was the age of the Virgin at her death.

As practical acknowledgment of the subjection to the most holy Virgin, every evening the house keys are deposited in a basket at the feet of the Madonna, in the mother superior's room. The Rogationists proclaimed the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus as Divine Superior on July 1, 1913, and Immaculate Mary as Divine Mother Superior on the following day, July 2. During the triduo of preparation, the Father commented the formula of the proclamation in detail so that its intimate meaning be well understood by all.

In the morning of July 2, the thrilling expectation for the unveiling of the Immaculate's very beautiful statue came to an end. It was contained in a box in the cloister. The altar boys with candles, cross, and holy water are there. The musicians and the singers along with the community are around it. Wearing surplice and stole, the Father begins opening the box with the tools... When all of them are going to salute the Madonna at her first appearing, the box opens, but nothing appears... the box is empty. As feeling mortified, the Father exclaims, Oh, the Mystical Dove has flown... » Following him, all people go searching in the house, in the garden... Finally, a small light is seen at the bottom of an underground ambulatory, a cooing sound is heard... “There she is, the Mystical Dove... sheltered in the cleft of the rocks...” The song-call bursts out enthusiastically:

Rise, ethereal dove,  
Leave the stony nest,  
Get out of the ruins  
As the sun from darkness.  
Don't you hear? Crying from their hearts,  
Your children are next; God, your Son, in the tabernacle  
Is waiting for the shepherdess!

People in procession begin singing, “Sing a song, beautiful souls.” The Father wrote, “It was delightful! The statue was brought into the church. I celebrated the mass, and preached... At noon, we proclaimed the most holy Virgin absolute, effective

superior, etc... handling the keys, books, etc. Now we feel more secure! Long live Jesus and Mary! Tell the community (the Father is writing to Mother Nazzarena) that the Divine Superior wants all of them to persevere in her motherly obedience” (Vol. 34, page 97).

As to these original practices, a witness points out that “the manifestations of piety of the Servant of God were sometimes childish. Some would have smiled at his expedients about searching for the statue he had concealed somewhere before the blessing; but the orphans followed him and were happy.” By hearing, these happenings seem truly childish, but the sharing of them together with the Father and his spirit and fervor filled up people with enthusiasm and fostered their devotion. Father Cosimo Spina from Ceglie Messapica happened to be a guest when the Father made the above inauguration. After forty years, the priest recalls that event:

You had to see the Founder's interest in that circumstance, how he shone with his tenderness toward the Virgin, whom he called “The Dove.” How restlessly he searched in the mystical clefts, in the garden echoing with the songs which his children were singing in praise of the Virgin. When “The Dove” was found, all of them welcomed and brought it in procession. At a certain place, the procession stopped, some boys pronounced a few addresses, and the Father headed a warm applause with childish simplicity, which I would call Franciscan. Then, the procession continued, went around the church square, and entered into the church triumphantly with the crowd of the faithful, singing the praise of the Mother of God.

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An additional episode of the Father's piety. One day, going from Messina to Oria, he found the statue of the Madonna on the altar. It was placed to stand out as a mother and a queen. The Father, however, ordered to place it on a lower pedestal in the holy of holies, near the children. He said: « I like to see her like a mother in the midst of her children. If children do not see the Madonna, they do not pray well. »

Our communities prepared themselves for the feast of Immaculate Conception with special prayers and songs in the previous twelve Saturdays, as well as with sacrifices in the twelve days previous to the feast, and fasting on the eve. Usually, the Father was the preacher.

In the first days of December 1918, the Father was expected back in Messina from Apulia. But a letter from Saint Eufemia of Aspromonte came in, announcing that he had stopped to visit our community. Because the parish had no preacher for the Immaculate's triduo, our Founder decided to preach it himself!

I thought that Our Lady wanted it! We must serve our sweetest mother everywhere! She will see to everything, because she returns great favors for small ones!" (Vol. 32, page 167).

When the institute was in trouble, Immaculate Mary always reciprocated with her powerful protection the Father's filial trust.

On the morning of May 25, 1897, the sisters noticed that the wooden statue of Immaculate, in the oratory of the Holy Spirit (Messina), appeared to be perspiring oil on its hands, chin, and bosom; more on the hair, and a little bit on the lips. The occurrence lasted for about a month, decreasing. The base of the statue was moist, and people dried it up with paper and cotton. A little bit of the liquid was even gathered with a teaspoon » (S.C. Vol. 10, page 226). By the vicar's advice, the Father asked Anthony Sacca', a renowned sculptor of Messina, to find out the possible cause of the perspiration. After examining the statue carefully, Mr. Sacca' said that the cause of the droplets was not the linseed oil. Once dry, the oil would not liquefy regardless of the temperature. He also said that the poplar wood used for the statue would not produce the liquid, because it was too dry.

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The Father considered the event a warning for an impending danger to the institute, as well as a protection of the Madonna, who was imploring salvation from the Lord. As a matter of fact, some time later, the above mentioned vicar general issued an ordinance stating that the sisters were to leave and go home. This ordinance was delayed one year to further trial. Meanwhile, Melanie, the little shepherd of La Salette, came to Messina and consolidated the congregation.

The Father recalls the episode in his *Melodramma for the Silver Anniversary of Jesus in the Sacrament*. Jesus Speaks to the Daughters of Divine Zeal:

With his machinations, the fraudulent,  
The great enemy, had done so much...  
You trembled pitiable and penitent  
Without a look, nor a touch!

Vigilant on your fortune,  
The sweet mother took you in her lap.  
She moved against the dead importune;  
The ordinance was delayed to avoid the mishap...

How sad were those days! Gracious,  
The mother's statue shed droplets.  
Like a pilgrim sweats anxious,  
So she did for the abolishing threats.

For you she sweated, asking for a way out.  
She seemed to shed tears with you.  
For you she sweated, to drive Satan out  
Sharing the sadness of the coming ruin with you.

Our Lady's merciful, motherly kindness showed up: the morning of December 28, 1908, the orphans were in the dormitory around the statue of the Immaculate for the morning prayers, when the earth shook formidably. In the midst of a dreadful roar, the walls jolted, and the empty part of the dormitory was destroyed under the banging collapse of the roof. As sustained by Immaculate, the boys remained standing in a safe place. They ran out safe and sound from the catastrophe, whose toll numbered more than 80.000 persons in Messina.

In the community of Trani there was a girl in the last stage of consumption when the community was about to inaugurate a statue of the Immaculate. It was in a room next to the infirmary. The evening of April 12, 1912, after insisting very much, the girl was brought there, and the Father gave her the responsibility of lighting the lamp in front of the statue. After praying to the Virgin Mary with all her heart, she said, « My Madonna, here I am. I am waiting for your grace! » She was taken back to bed. Contrary to the previous nights, she slept soundly. While asleep, a vision appeared to her. The statue of Immaculate Mary became animated. It moved like a living person, stopping near the girl. She made the sign of the cross on the girl's back with the thumb of her right hand. It was like a physical contact on her damaged left lung. She awoke and found herself sitting up in bed.

It lasted only an instant. She fell asleep again, and the Madonna shows up again, saying, “Daughter, a lung was missing; I have restored it to you. You are already healed. Wake up Sister Mary Hope (the teacher of the orphans) and tell her to wake up the community. Go to the oratory and give thanks to the Lord for the miracle!” They spent the entire night crying tears of affection before the Blessed Sacrament. In the morning, the physicians declared that the girl was cured. The Father immediately informed Pope Pius X, who prohibited to publish the event

without the archbishop's approval. After one year from the apparition, the diocese began the canonical examination, which ended with the declaration of a miraculous healing... The proceedings were sent to the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome.

The miraculous statue with joined palms, which the Father liked so much and defined “the glorified humility,” was made by Cantalamessa. The Father bought a statue of this kind for the male community of Messina in 1911; but, after the miracle of Trani he saw to it that all his institutes have the same statue. Also other religious communities were provided with it. The perspiring statue of Immaculate Mary is at the Holy Spirit.

## 8. Our Lady of the Sacred Letter

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As a citizen of Messina, the Father could not help nourishing a deep feeling of love toward the glorious patron of the city, the most holy Virgin of the Sacred Letter.

It is obvious that the Father put his muse at disposal of the Madonna on the day of her feast, June 3. In 1868, he published a saffric ode; in 1870, a hymn; in 1871, melodious octaves, in which he sang the historical events of the Mother of the Letter; in 1879 and 1892, two psalms.

When he was a youth, the Father thought that the tradition about Our Lady of the Letter was tardy and lacking solid evidence. It was his confessor, Canon Ardoino, that led him to the study of the documents of the past, as the Father himself reveals in the eulogy for Canon Ardoino. “I feel grateful to you, and I bless your holy memory from the innermost of my heart, because you led me to learn, appreciate, and love this great glory and treasure, of which I was unaware, as many citizens are today” (Vol. 45, page 14).

He devoted himself to study the expert authors, such as Belli, Saint Peter Canisio, Perrimezzi, Samperi, and many others.

These authors date back to 1600. The subsequent writers reaching to Baron Nicholas Gallucci and Father Fazolis of Turin, of the second half of 1800, as well as Father Robert of Nove in

his preaching of 1928, made only popular, hortatory works. They accepted the tradition as it was presented by the previous authors. From 1600 to modern times, literary criticism has gone so far as to even bite the pages of the gospel! Could the Sacred Letter be spared? No matter how, we cannot charge the Father with lack of study, since he had chosen to plunge into the work of the poor and the abandoned children. He had no time, nor will to be engulfed into questions of historical criticism. As to the tradition of the city, he trusted the authors who merited his respect and faith; therefore, he said, « This glorious tradition is based on incontrovertible documents >> (Vol. 47, page 185). He acted accordingly, also exhorting his children to study the tradition and to keep the worship of Our Lady of the Letter in Messina.

He wrote a booklet about the embassy of Messina to the most holy Mother of God and how they received the letter. She assures the city of her blessing and perpetual protection. The prayers and verses of the Father are still used in the cathedral for the novena.

In 1881, he preached the month of May on Our Lady of the Letter in the parish of Saint Laurence. He talked about the protection that the Virgin gave Messina during the centuries with miracles, apparitions, and miraculous pictures, which originated several Marian sanctuaries in the city and environs.

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In 1890, he said the panegyric in the cathedral, on the solemn feast of June 3. He tried to be always present on this feast, giving his filial homage to the celestial patron. One year, he was in Naples, but said mass in the church of the Sacred Letter (Vol. 32, page 130).

As to our communities, he ordered a novena for their preparation for the feast of Our Lady of the Letter.

Let us recall his panegyric in Messina on June 3, 1909, when the citizens celebrated the feast in a barrack, over the earthquake's ruins. On that pitiable circumstance, they had not even thought of a preacher. As soon as it came to the Father's knowledge, he went to the archbishop on the eve of the feast and offered himself to make a speech during the Pontifical Mass. He addressed the faithful, "Indulging in rhetoric today would be a crime. What matters to me is your steadfast faith in the perpetual protection, which the Mother of God has promised to us. » Then, he continued saying that the punishment had not come to lead to perdition, but to correction, as it happened in the past; thus,



Messina would rise purified from its misfortune. Tears and sobbing of the **faithful sealed the words of the preacher, who exhorted** them to renew their faith in the protection of the Madonna, and to sanctify their lives.

## 9. Mary Bambina

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We have already seen some evidences about the Father's devotion to Mary *bambina*; now, we quote additional ones. “He was so fond of the Madonna, especially under the title of *Bambinella*. He quoted a saint, “Whoever loves the Madonna is sure of going to heaven.”

“He loved so much the Madonna, above all under the title of Immaculate and Mary *Bambina*. He wrote verses and hymns, which he used to sing with raised hands. But the *Bambina* was the poetry of his heart. We are unable to describe his preaching on her feast. With naivete of his own, smile and words gushing out tender and creative, he brought us in spirit to Nazareth, making us waiting for Joachim's and Anna's permission to visit the new-born child. We still feel it, but do not know how to express it. » He was madly in love with the *Bambinella*. He let people photograph himself bearing her in his hands.

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The Father wanted the statue of the *Bambina* in each house, and the solemn celebration of her feast was prepared with novena, prayers, sacrifices, and vigil on the eve. A procession through the house in the evening concluded the feast. You can imagine how the Father exclaimed vibrantly and heartily in between prayers and songs, « Long live Mary *Bambinella*! Long live the beloved by God! Long live the empress of the universe! Long live the sovereign enchantress of hearts! »... And the community responded enthusiastically! Long live! Long live! »...

The devotion to Mary *Bambina* is particularly connected with the house of Taormina, which was dedicated to her from its origin and had her statue placed in the refectory. The divine mother was pleased and showed that she had to hold an important position in that house. But, let us follow the events.

A hive of about 600 bees donated by Father Anthony Catanese

was in the courtyard. The morning of July 26, 1906, people went to open the beehive, but found it empty. Mother Carmel D'Amore informed the Father, who smiled at the news.

The same morning, the sister sacristan was putting things in order when she found a little statue in such an unrecognizable state that she mistook it for Saint Anthony. She brought the statue to the Father just when Mother D'Amore was informing him about the empty hive. As soon as the Father saw the statue, he exclaimed, "Oh, this is not Saint Anthony, but Mary *Bambina* ! Addressing the mother superior, he added, "She is the queen bee, and our souls are the bees."

The Father brought the statue to Messina, made the painter Salvatore Ferro restore it, and the sisters of the Holy Spirit dress it as a queen. Then the statue was brought back to Taormina. On the night between September 7 and 8 "he sounded the reveille at 11:15 p.m. The community entered the sacristy to pray before the divine *Bambinella*. Then the statue was brought in procession with candles and songs through the house, and was placed in its niche. With joy of the orphans and accompanied by the music of harmonium, we said the prayer to Immaculate Bambina" in the open loggia. The sky was serene. The candles lighted before the sacred statue burned in the still of the night" (Vol. 35, page 16, see S.C. Vol. 5, page 237).

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The color of the statue grew pale at the exposure to sunlight. The Father made it restored again in August of 1908. To excite his children's enthusiasm, after announcing the return of the statue to Taormina, the Father brought it a few days before November 21, feast of the Presentation of the most holy Virgin in the temple. But, the *Bambinella* was not the same any longer; she had grown up, wearing a pretty dress in attitude of blessing with her little hand. The Father expounded his plan to the community. The *Bambinella* was already three years old; he wanted to commemorate her presentation in the temple, where she lived for twelve years, according to an ancient tradition. Therefore, he made the sisters prepare a room for the Divine Superior. The room was called *Conservatorio*. The members of the community were given a Jewish name, and all of them should be at the service of the divine owner to counterbalance her hidden life in the Jerusalem's *conservatorio*.

In the evening of November 20, the *Bambinella* was brought to Saint Catherine's church. The following morning she was

accompanied to the institute by two persons who symbolized the Madonna's parents. As **soon as they entered the church, the *Bambinella*** was warmly welcomed and brought to the altar. Everyone can imagine how the Father fervently greeted her, inviting her to dwell in that house in the midst of her daughters and slaves of love... We quote two strophes the Father wrote on that occasion.

Hail, loving *Bambina*,  
Mystic tuberose  
Which the empyreal fields  
Make gloze.  
Your fragrances breath  
The virtues divine  
Which the souls refine  
To the heavenly wreath.

O tender child, are you coming  
In your celestial coat ?  
O longed for, talk to us  
With your holy note!  
Make us share a gleam  
Of your pretty face;  
With your divine grace  
Your daughters will be supreme.

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On that circumstance, the Father dictated the following inscription:

To the three years old - Immaculate Mary *Bambina* - *who* enters the house - of the Daughters of Divine Zeal - by the Heart of Jesus -in Taormina - to dwell for twelve years - as she entered the Conservatorio - by the side of Jerusalem temple -then unknown - now known and welcomed - by her slaves and daughters - as superior, teacher, mother, and owner.

Beginning in 1908, November 21 was a fixed date for the Father. Until 1920 he never failed to stay in Taormina for the *Bambinella's* anniversary, giving her his service of chaplain slave of the divine *Bambina*.

In 1917, people thought that the danger of torpedoes in the strait of Messina could retain the Father from going to Taormina. But, on August 10, the Father wrote from Altamura, "I always keep in mind the Taormina community with the divine superior, who lets me be away until November 15. On that day she tells me, "Come here quickly, return to my feet!" "yes, my lady.

With your divine help, on November 21 I will be at your feet as a slave and unworthy son!... » (Vol. 34, page 33).

At the end of October, in the days when the military front broke, a ship sank in the strait, perhaps because of a mine. Our Founder and Father Palma decided to pass the strait by a little boat. Writes the Father, « The waves were strong, and the sea seemed to engulf us. Smashing against the boat, the water sprayed us. We spent our time saying a hundred requiems, and other prayers to the most holy Mother, Saint Francis of Paola, Saint Anthony, the holy apostles, etc. Our sailing lasted an hour. We landed at Ringo, and got a bus for the station » (S.C. Vol. 5, page 257).

On January 23, 1921, her fifteenth birthday, Mary got married to Saint Joseph, according to the ancient missal. From then on, Saint Joseph's statue was placed near the Virgin Mary in the chapel. Mary's parents, Saint Anna and Saint Joachim, were placed to the side of them, and the chapel was called, « The room of the divine superior. »

How watchful people were to be respectful toward the celestial lady! Sister Lauretana, the doorkeeper of Taormina, reports that one day she rushed to open the door without venerating the *Bambinella* while passing in front of her. The Father stopped her, saying, « So do you treat the queen of heaven? You must bow down before going out. » The sister remembered, « I still hear the admonishing voice of the Servant of God. »

## 10. Mary's sorrows

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Since we are so indebted to Mary's sorrows, the Father wanted us to be very devout to her under the title « Our Lady in Sorrow. » He preached:

« When we go to heaven, we will share the glory of Jesus and Mary; but, while living in this vale of tears, we have to weep with them. We should busy ourselves in contemplating Jesus' and

Mary's sorrows, and all devotions to the most holy Virgin should make reference to her in sorrow. In any picture of Our Lady, we have to see her suffering »» (Vol. 21, page 69).

Specifically, he wanted us to meditate on the Madonna's desolation, above all on holy Saturday, the time which reminds us of Mary suffering while Jesus was in the sepulcher. We quote:

The contemplation of Mary's sorrows is different from the contemplation of Mary desolate, because her pains are different. The latter are the peak of them. When Our Lady is suffering together with her son Jesus, she shares his pains, his bitter cup, she is in sorrow. When Jesus dies, she becomes desolate, and the cup of her sorrows reaches the brim, overflowing. »...The martyrdom of the desolate began at Jesus' death: « Jesus bowed his head and died » (Jn. 19, 30). In that moment his pains ended: Jesus, the man of suffering, stopped suffering. But, the partner of his suffering, the co-redeemer of humankind did not stop suffering. Rather she entered the endless sea of desolation! (Vol. 20, page 69).

The liturgy of that time consecrated two feasts to Our Lady in Sorrow: Friday before Palm Sunday and September 15. The Father celebrated both of them in our communities with special prayers, but the preparation for Friday before Palm Sunday lasted seven Fridays.

On the feast of September 1913, two sisters had gone to Bordonaro begging must. The Father called them back urgently.

I am very sorry that you dared go begging must on the day sacred to Our Lady in Sorrow, who is the divine superior, leaving out preaching, liturgy, and the monthly retreat! I am also very sorry that your superior gave you such a permission. Return to Messina quickly! » On that occasion he did not sign « The Father, » but « Canon H. M. Di Francia » (Vol. 34, page 99).

We find an edifying episode about Our Lady in Sorrow in the Father's life. He writes: « On February 11, 1905, the Pastor Chille' gave us the beautiful statue of Our Lady in Sorrow and Immaculate (sic): two mysteries related to February 11 » (S.C. Vol. 10, page 235). The statue was abandoned in the sacristy's pantry at Saint Anthony Abbot's (the former parish of Avignone Quarter), and the Father had asked for it.

The Father hastened to bring it to the Holy Spirit by coach. He rang the bell, gathered the community, and announced the arrival of a great lady, who was waiting in the parlor... when who should appear but a statue carried by the hands... hurrah, applause, and prayers burst out. The statue, however, was in bad condition. It was without feet. The Father had it restored and wearing new clothes, making her enter again on May 19, 1906.

The Father was in Rome, so the sisters organized the welcome in the Father's style, informing him. He answered,

You wrote to me about our sweetest mother, owner, master, and superior's entrance in this lucky community, making my cool heart's flint spring a few tears! May your Immaculate Mother in Sorrow, and superior bless you daughters, disciples, and subjects filling you with her most chosen graces. May she make you always grow more in the holy fervor of love and service for the consolation of the Celestial Queen of Hearts. Love for the most holy Virgin mainly consists in the imitation of her virtues, especially humility, purity, strong and constant love for our Lord, zeal for his glory and salvation of souls as well as great charity and meekness in all encounters.

Everything you had arranged for the hearty reception of our sweetest Mother was wonderful, inspired, and pleasant to her and her divine son Jesus. I did not deserve being there, and I was unaware of it! (Vol. 34, page 219).

The Father placed that statue on the side of the superior general's room to remind the sisters that the superior general is the vicar of Our Lady. A sister remembers, « He cautioned us to pay respect to it, every time we passed in front of it. »

## 11. Our Lady of La Salette

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Owing to the Father's relations with Melanie Calvat, who had seen the apparition of the virgin at La Salette at the age of fourteen, the devotion to Our Lady of La Salette stands out in his life.

The Father was not yet a priest when he talked about the apparition of Our Lady at La Salette in his preaching in Saint Laurence's church, on September 22, 1877. The manuscript of his speech (Vol. 18, page 130) has this note under the title: Melanie was present. » But, the note by the Father's handwriting is written with the same ink he used in the years

1897-1898, when Melanie was in the institute. Obviously, the news was confided by Melanie to him. As a matter of fact, in that time Melanie went to Father Cusmano, in Palermo, where she spent some time, and passing through Messina incognito, she stopped to listen by chance to the Father's preaching on La Salette.

The devotion to Our Lady of La Salette was being practiced for a few years. The society of Our Lady of La Salette had been erected at Saint Nicholas archbishopric in 1878 (*The Catholic Word*, April 30, 1878). The same society was erected at Saint Mary of the Slaves, under the cathedral, in the chapel of Our Lady of La Salette, in which the faithful placed a very beautiful statue from Paris. The chapel was restored with taste and without thought of cost in 1892, and the solemn feast of that year was prepared « by a devout triduo preached by the young priest Don Francis Vitale » (*Corriere Peloritano*, September 22, 1892).

After Melanie came to Messina, the Father felt himself more obliged to cultivate and spread this devotion as a thanksgiving to the most holy Virgin, from whom he was expecting the institute's salvation. He also published a booklet about the apparition of the Virgin with prayers and verses for the stations.

In 1898, the Father made a pilgrimage to the holy mountain < to thank the Mother of God for having sent Melanie to the Pious Institution for as long as God wants. » He writes to Melanie,

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I was unworthy of going to the feet of Our Lady, Queen and Mother, the most holy Mary of La Salette. I am unable to express what I have felt. Here people feel the most holy Virgin's presence. The place is very picturesque, solitary, and silent. At the time of the apparitions, such a solitude among the mountains had to enrapture the soul who was far from creatures, seeking God alone while the quiet cattle was grazing about... As soon as I arrived, I knelt at the feet of our sweetest celestial Mother, represented by the beautiful bronze statues, masterpieces of art and faith. As a sinner, I began thawing my heart, but I still need to be presented to the most holy Virgin through a letter of the little shepherd. I have to present the other letters and petitions... Until now, I have not yet put on the priestly robes to present myself on the altar to my august Lady and Mother, in the abyss of my nothingness » (S.C. Vol. 8, page 10).

The Father spent three days at the Madonna's feet at La Salette, but he did not unveil the secret of his love toward the celestial Mother.

While praying before the three bronze statues representing

three different stages of the apparition, he regretted that no lamp was burning in the night before the statues. He sent to the sanctuary a significant gift: three bronze angels, one meter in height, by Ditta Bertarelli, bearing a lamp in the left hand, and this inscription with the right one, « The angels of Messina illumine the Queen of the Alps, the most holy Virgin of La Salette, in the darkness of these mountains. O Mary, Mother of God, the city of your sacred letter greets, loves, and begs pardon from you. »

Because the Father meant that the offering be a gift of the city, he started a course of preaching on La Salette in the churches of the city, such as Saint Clement, Catalani, Annunciation of the Theatines, etc. On that occasion, he exhibited the design of the angels to the public.

On several occasions, he made his communities make spiritual pilgrimages to La Salette. The first one was on September 19, 1898, at his coming back from the sanctuary. He writes,

When I came back from La Salette, I proposed a spiritual pilgrimage to Sister Mary of the Cross (Melanie), who planned the pilgrimage with enthusiasm, and set up the standard. The three stations were fixed in the west. At the foot of the first station representing the crying Madonna, we placed a vessel filled with water mixed with the prodigious one of La Salette; it represented the miraculous source. We began the procession on September 19 with prayers and songs that I wrote for that occasion, and Melanie pilgrimaged with us. We celebrated our arrival at La Salette on the anniversary of the apparition. We prayed, offered written petitions to the most holy Virgin, sang the hymns of the three stations, and the French song « Je to benis, o Montagne cherie, » which has an angelic leitmotive! Because a missionary priest plays the recital of the apparition when a pilgrimage reaches the mountain, I asked Melanie to give the account of the events at our spiritual pilgrimage. The humble Servant of the Lord at first refused, being repugnant talking about herself, but, warmly urged by me, at the end she accepted the invitation. We were deeply silent around her before the three stations in the open, calm air. According to her custom, Melanie began the narration with a very feeble, gentle voice, « I was watching my owner's cows... » and continued narrating the apparition of the most holy Mary. After the recital, Melanie distributed the water with a little glass, which I still keep. These are very tender memories if we have simple faith in God, love Jesus and Mary, practice virtue, and live in the hope of everlasting life!>) (Vol. 45, page 84).



## 12. Our Lady of Mercy

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The devotion to Our Lady of Mercy was very popular in Messina and one of the Father's first devotions; in fact, a church dedicated to Our Lady of Mercy was near his family house, he often went over there, and as an altar boy he said a panegyric in honor of Our Lady. In 1918, on occasion of the centenary, the Father sought to renew such devotion in the faithful, after the earthquake had buried so many monuments. He writes to Father Vitale on July 13, 1918, < On the centenary of the most holy Virgin of Mercy let us endeavor to be freed from spiritual slavery through the most holy Mother » (Vol. 32, page 138). On July 18, 1918, « besides our two communities, see to it that the faithful of Messina participate; our city had three churches dedicated to Our Lady of Mercy!... You should advertise according to the news of the circular, the membership card, etc. The novena with prayers, songs, and hymn is in the Bisazza booklet, as indicated in the circular. Please exhort the faithful to attend the mass at midnight. » By mailing booklets, cards, scapulars, medals, etc., the Father exhorted the Daughters of the Sacred Side, the Sisters of Morning Star, etc., to celebrate the centenary. By authorization of the vicar general of the Mercedarians, the Pious Union of Our Lady of Mercy was erected in the houses of Messina and Oria. To foster the devotion in the congregants, the Father wrote two circulars, one on June 13, the other on July 16. After briefly describing the origin of the Mercedarians, their aim, and glory, the Father recalls the letter of the Holy Father Benedict XV to the vicar general of the order. The Pope indicated the aim of the celebration: « To obtain from the most holy Virgin redeemer of the slaves the grace of being freed from the devil's slavery, from sin, and passions. »

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Writes the Father,

To achieve this aim, I call the attention of our communities to celebrate this centenary with devotion and living faith so that the most holy Mother free us from any bond of passion, break the attachment to ourselves, our wishes and tendencies. May we gain the freedom of spirit and the union of love with Jesus, our Lord and God.

Since we glory in being slaves of love of our Divine Superior and Mother, let us achieve the centenary's intention: being free from the slavery of sin. Let us be more bound and tied to Jesus and to the most

holy Virgin Mary with the strong, sweet chains of divine love (Vol. 34, page 140).

## 13. Our Lady of Vena

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The devotion to Our Lady of Vena is a legacy of the Father to the house of Giardini.

Vena is a hamlet of Piedimonte Etneo, in the diocese of Acireale (Catania). It has a renowned sanctuary which was built to remind the faithful of the quick spring of water under the pawing horse that was carrying a picture of the Madonna. According to the tradition, the event happened at the time of Saint Gregory the Great on land belonging to Saint Silvia, Saint Gregory's mother. She had donated a good piece of land to the Benedictine monks to build a monastery, which became glorious during past years.

At the end of many vicissitudes, the monastery was destroyed and the sanctuary fell into oblivion. In the first years of the twentieth century, Msgr. Joseph Alessi, a learned, pious, famous man, succeeded to build a new sanctuary, and had the faithful practice again the devotion to Our Lady of Vena. Actually, the sanctuary is visited by many pilgrims, and is also officiated as a parish.

The Father had opened a house in Giardini for the Daughters of Divine Zeal, not far from Piedimonte. They faced stormy obstacles, oppositions, and fights. The case of closing the house was taken into consideration. After the Father made the vow of introducing the devotion to Our Lady of Vena in the church of the community, the sisters overcame the difficulties and lived in peace. Then the Father erected a new altar in the church, commissioned a replica of Our Lady of Vena's picture from the painter Teresa Basile of Taranto, and placed it on the altar.

The inauguration occurred on December 15, 1916, after a triduo of preparation preached by the Father. On that occasion,

the faithful were given the prayer book of Our Lady of Vena.

Writes the Father from Altamura, « On December 15, octave of Immaculate, we have inaugurated in Giardini an oil painting of Our Lady of Vena. May she be the source of new graces, thanksgiving, and new praises! » (Vol. 34, page 110).

After the second world war, the church has been rebuilt. But, superficiality and unconsciousness prevailed over the Father's vow: the altar was eliminated, and the oil painting was sold to an individual !

## 14. Our Lady of Guard

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Besides the renown sanctuary standing out over Marseilles and dating back to 1214, several sanctuaries in Italy are dedicated to Our Lady of Guard. Most of them in

the province of Genoa or in the near vicinity, such as Tortona, where Don Orione has built a new one. Directly or indirectly, they are related to the sanctuary of Mount Figogna (Genoa), which was erected after the apparition of the Virgin to Benedict Paredo on August 29, 1490. To signal the movements of the troops, in the time of the Romans there was a guard post over there, and the church built up on the side of it after the request of the most holy Virgin was named Our Lady of Guard. Benedict XV defined that church « Chief sanctuary of Liguria » (*I mille santuari mariani d'Italia*, page 228).

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The Father loved this title in relation to an apparition of the Madonna near the torrent running between the villages Pace and Saint Agata. Climbing the torrent on the right side, not far from the beach, people met a little church dedicated to Our Lady of the Ladder, and nearby the Azzarello tower, a post guard against the pirates infesting the area. On February 2, 1554, the guards fell asleep, and the pirates landed undisturbed to attack the village Faro. But, the Madonna awoke the peasant John Dominic Sieri, who sounded the alarm, and the pirates were driven back into the sea. (5)

From then on, both Our Lady of Scala and the torrent were given the name of « Guard. » The church was officiated on

Sundays and holidays until the end of the nineteenth century, when the new owner demolished the church and the tower, planted a vineyard, and built a villa.

When the Father bought country land in 1920 to relieve his communities, he revived the worship to Our Lady of Guard by building and dedicating a church to her. When the faithful climbed in procession along the torrent, carrying the statue bought by the Father, they found him in front of the church, wearing surplice and stole. He blessed the statue, said the mass, and spoke of the Madonna in his own style. It happened on April 25, 1924, second Sunday after Easter. (6)

The Father spent his last days here, at the Madonna's feet, and transferred to heaven on June 1, 1927.

## 15. Our Lady of Rogation

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Our Lady of Rogation » and « Our Lady of Divine Zeal » are private titles that the Father proposed to the community.

Before proposing a title to the faithful's devotion, the title needs the Church's approval (Can. 1259-1261 - Code of 1918). The above titles were never submitted for approval, but the Father hoped that one day it would be done, because these titles illumine the Madonna's mission about the *Rogate*, and as such the Madonna is our Mother... For this reason he wrote for the Rogationists, « As much as I can, I will spread the devotion to the most holy Virgin Mary under any title, Our Lady of the Evangelical Rogation by the Heart of Jesus and Our Lady of Divine Zeal included, when they are approved » (Vol. 44, page 133).

To be approved, a title must be based on theological ground. As to Our Lady of Rogation, Father Cecca did a notable work, which should be mastered to become worthy of such a purpose. We quote the conclusion of the study:

After examining the value of Jesus' command, « Rogate ergo... » we have realized how Di Francia made it the banner of his mission to increase priestly vocations. We have also realized that Mary is a Rogationist model, since through her prayer she obtained the Redeemer and cooperated with him for the salvation of souls, becoming universal Mother and Queen. Since vocation is a call to become an apostle, who must bring Christ's redemption to humankind, Di Francia concludes that Mary has always been and still is concerned with the apostles. In Fact, they are the continuers of her mission of co-redeemer; and as coredeemer, it is within her power to obtain the increase of the apostles.

Owing to these prerogatives, Di Francia gives the Madonna the title « Our Lady of Rogation. » And we invoke her as such together with him:

Mother, whom a thousand titles  
Proclaim Lady,  
Adorning thy sweet name  
With grace and splendor.  
Perhaps, it is not the last gem  
Decking with flowers your diadem  
If we are ready  
To call you « The mystical Harvest's owner »>  
(*Bulletin*, March-April 1966, page 216).

## Notes

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- (1) We point out two theses on the Father's Mariology:
  - a. Our Lady of Rogation, by Father John Cecca for his specialization at Marianum, Theological Faculty, Rome.
  - b. The Madonna in Hannibal Mary Di Francia's writing and works, by Louis Alessandra' for his doctorate in theology at the Pontifical University Saint thomas Aquinas, Rome.
- (2) Saint Bernardine expressed this opinion, saying that the Madonna asked her divine Son to take her to heaven on Ascension day. To Comfort her, Jesus answered, « My sweetest mother, the little flock of your children cannot be deprived of your company now. They have to win for me many peoples, who will be born of your charity. Therefore, mother, bear with patience your staying with them for some time... I leave you to the little flock of the beloved children as a consoling mother and teacher. Once more, I entrust you to them as a motherly Queen and Lady » (Pilla, *Saint Bernardine of Siena*, page 215 - Encyclopedia of the saints, Editrice Cantagalli, Siena, 1970). '
- (3) The Father took advantage of any occasion to honor the Madonna. One time, he was visiting a little church dedicated to Our Lady of Pillar, a devotion

from Spain. According to a pious tradition, when still living, the Madonna appeared on a pillar to Saint James the apostle, asking him to build a temple in the place of the apparition. The faithful had no prayers to invoke Our Lady under that title. Therefore, he quickly wrote a novena of prayers and verses, adding this note, « I wrote these prayers and verses in the sacristy of Our Lady of Pillar, Saint Pier Niceto, near the river, on May 9, 1904 » (Vol. 7, page 70). The building was destroyed by the 1908 earthquake.

- (4) At Saint Mary of the Angels, in Messina, there is a beautiful sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes with a replica of the Lourdes grotto, and is officiated by the Friars Minor. They claim that the introduction of this devotion in Messina is due to the renown Friar Minor Father Bernard of Jesus. He introduced the devotion in 1875 at Saint Mary of Porto Salvo. In 1898 such a devotion was introduced as Saint Mary of the Angels, where Father Bernard had prepared an artistic grotto with the statues of the Madonna and Saint Bernardette (*La Scintilla*, August 23, 1970, page 3).

Despite the above affirmation, the first public manifestation of the devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes promoted by the Franciscans occurred in 1898.

The Father stated that he was the first to introduce the devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes in Messina. When Father Silvester Di Bella gave him a manual of prayers for the devotees of Our Lady of Lourdes, which was published by the Friars Minor at Saint Mary of the Angels, the Father looked at it. Then he said: « They made a mistake in history. The devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes has been introduced in Saint Laurence parish in May, 1876. »

The point is: what does it mean introducing a devotion to the Madonna ?

Obviously, the first news of the Madonna's apparitions was not brought to Messina by Father Bernard in 1875. Such news spread all over the world earlier. The preachers of the Marian triduos and novenas surely spoke of it, as they do now for Our Lady of Fatima and Syracuse. Father Bernard probably spoke and preached it before 1875. The Father was spreading this devotion when he was fifteen years old.

The columnist binds the beginning of the devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes in Messina to Father Bernard, when he came back from a pilgrimage to Lourdes. But, he gives no proofs to substantiate his assertion. On the contrary, the proofs abound in favor of our Father and Saint Laurence's, as we see from the following:

a. In 1876, as a subdeacon, the Father preached the whole month of May in Saint Laurence parish. He related and explained the 18 apparitions of Our Lady at Lourdes.

b. At the end of May, he erected the Pious Association of the Madonna under the title of Lourdes, which was soon associated with the primary archbrotherhood in Rome.

c. In July of the same year, the Father published a booklet for the association, giving an account of the apparitions and adding prayers and verses, which soon became very popular. Writes Father Vitale, « Our Father wrote verses in devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes which were and still are sung in the churches of the diocese. The words are sung in the churches and even sometimes in the streets by pious little girls:

Shout with joy louder than the bell  
Praised be the Virgin of Massabielle ! »  
(*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 31).

In this booklet the Father states: « This dear devotion today is practiced in our city. It originated from the preaching on the apparitions of Lourdes in Saint Laurence parish, in 1876.

d. Institution of the Saturdays in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes. On every Saturday of the year, June to April, a special liturgy was performed with prayers, songs, and preaching on Our Lady of Lourdes. For three years in succession, beginning from 1876, the preacher was the Father. Outlines of more than a hundred sermons by the Father on the Madonna end by recalling the apparitions of Our Lady at Lourdes, or a miracle of her over there.

e. On December 2, 1876, Saturday, the Father points out the increase of this devotion in the city. « Born as by magic in the Marian month, it is just seven months since this devotion has been introduced, and now it has spread all over the city. Contrary to other devotions which needed much time to develop, this one, as soon as it appeared, spread quickly in the city, winning the hearts of all. By benignly choosing this parish, Our Lady of Lourdes is calling the inhabitants of opposite quarters to come over here at her feet. Many of them have joined the Congregation of Immaculate Conception of Lourdes, which number 4000 associates, who are paying the monthly sum of five soldos. The amount of money helps to maintain the devotion by celebrating the monthly Saturdays, by adorning the altar, by celebrating the yearly feast, and the preaching of the Marian month. It also gives additional advantages, such as the funerals, etc. Therefore, we conclude that the devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes is already established in Messina, and it is improving quickly » (Vol. 17, page 26).

f The faithful established to celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes in Saint Laurence's on the second Sunday of June. *The Catholic Word* of June 12, 1878, reports that in 1878 « Father Francis Pulito preached the triduo, and Father Hannibal Di Francia said the panegyric in the presence of Archbishop Guarino. »

g. In the early days of the devotion, the faithful prayed before an oil painting of the Madonna, but the Father suggested to buy a statue. Joseph Prinzi, a valiant artist who had won the competition for sculpturing the statue of Saint William (it is now in Saint Peter's among the holy founders), was entrusted with this sculpturing. His very beautiful statue was inaugurated on December 29, 1877, Saturday, by a speech of the Father.

h. We add another proof. *The Catholic Word* was the only Catholic periodical of the city in those times, and it never touches upon the devotion of Our Lady of Lourdes outside Saint Laurence's, even though it reports the liturgies performed in the other churches. *The Catholic Word* of July 18, 1883, reporting the 25th anniversary of the apparitions, says, « The 25th anniversary of the apparitions of the most holy Virgin at Lourdes was celebrated solemnly in Saint Laurence parish. The triduo by eminent preachers was on twelve, thirteen, and fourteen. On Sunday fifteen, eve of the last apparition, the solemn mass with preaching was crowded by the faithful who communicated the bread of angels. The solemn canonical mass was at 10:30, and the panegyric by Canon Di Francia, in the evening. The great devout concourse of people was satisfying, and the high altar was adorned with good taste. » We find no mention of similar liturgies in other churches in Messina.

On April 18, 1892, to foster the enthusiasm of the associates of the Pious Union, which was growing feeble, « as it happens to human weakness which

does not keep the original fervor, » the Father preached again in Saint Laurence's (Vol. 19, page 169). In such exhortation there is no mention of similar devotion in other churches. The Pious Union collected itself and kept active until the 1908 earthquake. After the catastrophe, the Carmelite Fathers who were entrusted with Saint Laurence's enhanced the devotion to Our Lady of Carmel, and the devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes remained in the hands of the Friars Minor.

- (5) The fact has been described in detail by the historian Father Samperi, S.J., in his *Iconologia Mariana*, L. V. ch. 3.
- (6) See our *Bulletin*, May-August 1931, pages 43-48, as well as the booklet with historical news, prayers, and verses by Father Santoro.



# 12.

## "OUR DEAREST ANGELS AND SAINTS"

1. All of us form one family
2. Everything from Jesus' love
3. Devotion to the angels
4. Saint Joseph
5. Saint Anthony of Padua
6. Saint Louis Gonzaga
7. Saint Alphonsus Mary Liguori
8. Saint Veronica Giuliani
9. Saint Camillus de Lellis
10. Saint Francis of Sales
11. Blessed Eustochio
12. Celestial Rogationists and  
Celestial Daughters of Divine Zeal
13. Notes

# 1. All of us form one family

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The Second Vatican Council has reduced the number and the rite of several feasts of saints.

"Lest the feasts of the saints should take precedence over the feasts which commemorate the very mysteries of salvation, many of them should be left to be celebrated by a particular Church, or nation, or family of religious. Only those should be extended to the universal Church which commemorate saints who are truly of universal importance" (S.C. no. III). (1)

This reduction was wrongly interpreted by quite a few persons as a retraction or indirect condemnation of the veneration toward the saints.

Complaining for the faithful's almost general indifference to the celebration of the saints, Don Barsotti writes,

"If they really believe in the love for neighbor, why don't they feel the communion of the saints? Why does love for the saints seem to fail in today's Church? If they are bound to love their neighbor, who is more neighbor than the saints in heaven? People cannot say that the saints upset our union with God. Because we live as in a family, why should the presence of the saints upset us? We live and breathe the same atmosphere of light, serenity, joy, and love. We are with them, and they with us."

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This issue, however, has been solved by the Council.

"Let the faithful be taught that our communion with these (the saints) in heaven, provided that it is understood in the full light of faith, in no way diminishes the worship of adoration given to God the Father... it greatly enriches it" (L.G. 51). Don Barsotti reports the example of Saint Theresa. "We could think of this great mystic as living enraptured in God and oblivious of the saints. On the contrary, perhaps no saint in the Church was so devout to Saint Joseph, the Apostles Peter and Paul, and other saints, (2) as Theresa. Thus, she lived a life of love, feeling herself a sister to all."

Recalling a personal episode tied to Saint Tolentino's feast, Don Barsotti writes, "Who was this saint I had to honor, who was willing to enter my life? Who was this unknown saint, who loved me and showed up in the whole Church that day, for me?" But the saint made himself felt. "At the end of my meditation on this saint, who was as fallen down from heaven, I realized that I had his picture in my hand, as in confirmation of his knowledge, care, and love for me, even though I did not know him" (Divo Barsotti, *Nella Comunione dei Santi, Vita e Pensiero, Introduzione, passim*).

A thought of Celina, a sister of Saint Theresa of the child Jesus, comes in handy. "As a sponge soaked with water communicates its liquid when it is handled, so a saint shares the divine grace when he is approached by people. For this reason the saints are very beneficial to the Church" (Piat, *Celina* - Editrice Ancora, page 69).

Let us quote again the Council about the feasts of the saints which "proclaim the wonderful works of Christ in his servants and offer to the faithful fitting examples for their imitation" (S.C. III). Lumen Gentium devotes the number 49, 50, and 51 to the veneration of the saints, vindicating its legitimacy, defining its nature, and specifying its advantages. The Council "accepts loyally...and proposes again the decrees of the Second Council of Nicea, of the Council of Florence, and of the Council of Trent" on "the living communion which exists between us and our brothers who are in the glory of heaven;... urges all concerned to remove or correct any abuses, excesses or defects which may have crept in here and there," and teaches the authentic cult of the saints (51). The saints "do not cease to intercede with the Father for us...so by their brotherly concern is our weakness greatly helped" (49). By looking on the life of the saints, "we are taught to know a most safe path by which, despite the vicissitudes of the world, and in keeping with the state of life and condition proper to each of us, we will be able to arrive at perfect union with Christ, that is, holiness. God shows to men, in a vivid way, his presence and his face in the lives of those companions of ours;...He speaks to us in them...Our community with the saints joins us to Christ... It is most fitting, therefore, that we love those friends and co-heirs of Jesus Christ who are also our brothers and outstanding benefactors, and that we give due thanks to God for them, humbly invoking them, and having recourse to their prayers, their aid and help in obtaining from God...the benefits we need" (50). Let us remember that "all of us are sons of God and form one family in Christ" (51).

Living this sublime teaching in faith, we should remember enthusiastically and fervently All Saints' preface, "Today we keep the festival of your holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, our mother. Around your throne the saints, our brothers and sisters, sing your praise for ever. Their glory fills us with joy, and their communion with us in your Church gives inspiration and strength, as we hasten on our pilgrimage of faith, eager to meet them."

## 2. Everything from Jesus' love

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What has been said above explains marvelously the Father's very vivid devotion to the angels and the saints. He wrote, "The saints live in the Church's children's hearts, affections, and thoughts. They live in the faith, expectation, and love of those who feel themselves needy of an everlasting happiness (Vol. 45, page 561).

This is the Father's spirit. He lived the communion of the saints, holding them as friends and brothers, saying, "I have a few friends on earth, but many in heaven."

Such devotion sprang from love of Jesus. "In Jesus and through his divine love, we have to nourish all holy loves in our hearts, such as: love for the most holy Virgin Mary... the Patriarch Saint Joseph...the dearest angels and saints of God, and the choice spirits whose company we hope to enjoy for ever" (Vol. 3, page 166).

Since his early youth, "the Father delighted in reading the lives of the saints" (Vol. 45, page 552), imitating their examples and invoking them for himself and for his institutions. He loved all saints, and wrote so many prayer pamphlets with piety and unction, with hymns to Jesus, the Madonna, and the saints. You can hardly find a church in the city of Messina, or in its villages, having no booklet of prayers, or special, or traditional devotions written by him. People appealed to him, because he was endowed with the gift of understanding the feast and the soul of the faithful.

For the Rogationist he wrote,

"The Rogationists will foster devotion to the saints, giving the preference to the ones who are nearest to our Lord Jesus Christ and the most holy Virgin. Because the Rogationist institute's aim is obedience to the command of Jesus, '**Pray, therefore...**', the congregants will be particularly devout to the apostle saints, especially Peter, Paul, and the evangelist John, saying a specific prayer to each of them on their feast" (Vol. 3, page 18).

His personal devotion to the saints was Catholic, that is to say, universal. Father Palumbo, who has been a teacher for a few years in our schools in Oria, defined our Father very concisely and aptly, "The Father never left out a saint without a prayer, as he never left out a beggar without a help>" Even though he had priorities and limits in his devotions, he never denied his respect to a saint when the opportunity occurred. For this reason he wrote so many verses to the saints either spontaneously or by request, even when the saints were almost unknown. Several times, his verses implement a prayer book or petitions of his own.

Let us quote his work on the saints, without chronological order: Saint Leonard, abbot; Saint Marina, Saint Pancras, Saint Ignatius martyr, Saint Bernard, Saint Barsanuphius, Saint Peter of Alcantara, Saint Fara, Saint Lucy, Saint Francis of Paola, Saint Camillus de Lellis, Saint Gertrude, Saint Julia, Saint Liberatus, Saint Margaret Alacoque, Saint Rita, Saint Orsola, Saint Laurence, Saint Pantaleon, Saint Stanislaus Kostka, Saint Louis Gonzaga, Saint Bonaventure, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Theresa, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Francis of Sales, Saint Euplius deacon and martyr, Saint Vincent of Paul, Saint Anna, Saint Alphius, Saint Philadelphus, Saint Cyril, Saint Dorothy, Saint Louis M. Grignon of Monfort, Saint Melanie Jr., Saint Lydwina, Saint Dominica, Saint Hugh, abbot; Saint Vincent Ferreri, Saint John Bosco... all the angels and the saints... Wonderful is the end of his hymn to all saints. Paradise is the full triumph of the divine love.

Like stars vying  
With one another for beauty,  
The angels shine  
Along with the saints.  
In the midst of the glory  
Of so much purity  
One and manifold  
Love gains!

Let us make some remarks.

Saint Francis of Paola was the saint of Di Francia family. For that reason our founder's father was given the name of Francis Paul. His last son, born after his death, was also given the same name. He became a priest.

Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Joseph Benedict Labre enraptured the Father with their evangelical poverty. There was a time when the Father had the idea of making the sisters of his institute Franciscan tertiary. In fact, he exhorts the first novices to nourish the devotion to "the glorious Saint Francis of Assisi, model of evangelical poverty, in the hope of becoming tertiaries" (Vol. 2, page 31). But we have already seen that love for Our Lady of Carmel and the urgency to keep the Rogate independent prevailed over this idea.

In 1915, the Father wrote a private novena and a petition to Saint Teresa, who still was a Servant of God, proclaiming her "special patron and sister of the least community of the Daughters of Divine Zeal" (Vol. 8, page 50). One night in his last sickness, a couple of months before his demise, he sent for me. He was weary> He told me, "Pick up Saint Teresa's picture." I took it from his study room and held it before his eyes. He prayed, "My dear little sister, give me one of your roses." He asked the grace of sleeping for half an hour. He had just said the last word, when he fell asleep calm for about an hour. The little saint had granted his request.

Let us now go into the details of his devotion to the angels and the saints.

### **3. Devotion to the angels**

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As to the Father's devotion to the angels, we point out that he perhaps wrote no prayer without mentioning them, at least Saint Michael the archangel. He exhorted us to be devout to the angels of the different spheres, and to those who take care of the place where our communities dwell.

The pictures we draw by lot at the beginning of the year which indicate the virtue and the penance we have to practice have the name of an angel, or more than one, or a choir of them. They are meant to be the particular patrons of the persons who draw the pictures.

The names of the angels are very few: three. However, we know their choirs and the angels mentioned by the Scripture, such as the angel who comforted Jesus in the garden, the one who freed Peter from jail, the one who stopped Abraham's hand, etc. When other angels were needed in the drawing of the pictures, we resorted to the guardian angel of Saint Joseph, or Saint Anthony of Padua, or Saint Louis, etc.

Saint Michael was the patron of our communities. The Father wanted our communities to have his statue, and in each evening of May they had a reading about the glorious archangel.

The Father proclaimed Saint Michael patron of the institute, and interpreted a simple episode as the confirmation that our Lord had welcomed such a proclamation. The episode is the following:

The Father told us that while he was remembering God's promise to the people of Israel, "See, I am sending an angel before you, to guard you on the way and bring you to the place I have prepared" (Ex. 23, 20), he himself wished to have an angel as guardian and guide of the institute. Therefore he made a petition to the Lord. In the simplicity of his faith, he thought that the Lord had granted him the favor, even though he perceived no external signal. A few days after, a letter by Msgr. Gatti, director of Mount Saint Angel, was delivered. Msgr. Gatti informed the Father that he was adhering to the Sacred Alliance and exhorted the founder to put his institute under the protection of the great archangel, who would guide and make it prosper. "Here is the answer from heaven" Exclaimed the Father. "The angel of the institute is Saint Michael the archangel, no less. The Lord entrusts us to his protection"

He began fostering the devotion to Saint Michael in the institute by dedicating an altar to him in the sanctuary of Messina, and by ordering two novenas with his verses for the feasts on May 8 and September 29. On September 30, 1910, he pilgrimage with Father Palma to Mount Saint Angel, where he presented a petition to the archangel for his communities' needs.

As an exception, he joined Saint Michael to our Lord and Our Lady through a particular title in July 1917. After giving Jesus in the Sacrament the title "Very tender companion of our

exile," and Our Lady "Everlasting helper of all," he continues, "My dear children, you are expecting to give an analogous title to the Patriarch Saint Joseph. But, because the great Patriarch Saint Joseph loves to be hidden, as he always did from early Christian times, this year he makes over his rights to Saint Michael. The great archangel is our great and very special patron. Rather, he is the delegate of our Lord Jesus Christ, and protects the Church. How many times he showed his powerful protection to us Therefore, we proclaim him "The great deputy of human protection." And under this title he wrote the hymn to Saint Michael.

The guardian angel follows Saint Michael. To foster our devotion and to give us a visible sign of the guardian angel's protection, the Father placed his statue in a corridor in our houses. I remember the Father's continuous exhortations to be devout to the guardian angel, to which we say a special prayer every Tuesday. The Father wrote a booklet on the guardian angels, gave us some pendant medals, and exhorted each of us to honor our own guardian angel as the witness of our actions.

In chapter 1 and 2, we have reported that the Father implored with wails his conversion and holiness from his angel. In a personal note, he begs his guardian angel, "Make me aware of the divine presence in order to pray, praise, know, obey, and to be an associate of your actions. While you stay in the vision, let me be in faith" (Vol. 44, page 97).

He asked his guardian angel to recommend him to the guardian angels of the persons who had to meet him.

Recommending this devotion to the youth, he exhorted them to be fully aware of the guardian angel's presence, to follow his inspirations, and often to say the prayer "Angel of God"; especially when they were in danger of body and soul, in the calamitous times, and the times of divine punishments. We read in the rules of the first novices, "As a sign of respect to the guardian angel, they will invite him to pass first through the narrow places, and will kiss twice the ground in the night, as though they were kissing the angel's feet" (Vol. 2, page 31).

During the 1887 cholera, the Father experienced the holy angels' particular assistance, and promised to write a booklet of considerations and prayers to the guardian angels. The first edition was published in 1908; the second, in 1910. The title is,



"The preservation from divine punishments and the invocation of the holy guardian angels as patrons in time of public calamities."

We also recall a private prayer of the Father to Saint Raphael, "physician of God," to obtain the healing of the spirit (Ch. 1, no. 2).

The Father recommended so much a particular devotion. "He wanted us to be specially devout to the seven angels who are always in the presence of God, above all to Saint Michael the archangel, Saint Gabriel, and Saint Raphael." He said, "In ch. 12, v. 15 of Tobit we read that the Archangel Raphael revealed himself to Saint Tobit and his son by saying, "I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who enter and serve before the Glory of the Lord." According to this revelation, seven angels in heaven are in the presence of God more immediately than the other ones. They contemplate, enjoy, and are ready to do God's will. The seven angels have more knowledge of God's presence, are the chosen ones to carry out the orders of his divine majesty, and transmit the messages to angels and men. Scripture reports the sublime and expressive names of the first three angels; the other four names came to our knowledge through a private revelation of a Servant of God in a convent, in ancient times. The seven names are mysterious, having particular and admirable meanings.(3)

Great is the power of these seven angels, very effective is their intercession, and most beneficial their protection. It is very useful to invoke all of them in the circumstances of life, but especially in the hour of our death. It is also beneficial to invoke their protection in the time of divine punishments in order to be liberated." To achieve this goal, the Father adds a particular prayer (Vol. 9, page 82).

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## **4. Saint Joseph**

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During the first world war the Father added three "Glory to bes" to the prayers before and after meal, respectfully to Saint Joseph, Saint Michael, and Saint Anthony of Padua. I once invoked first Saint Michael, second Saint Joseph. He told me, "The question whether Saint

Joseph is greater or not than Saint Michael is useless. I place Saint Joseph soon after the most holy Virgin. Since Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were always united on earth, they must be together in heaven. The glorious Saint Michael should not take offense."

Saint Joseph followed Jesus and Mary immediately, because he is the Father of providence, the patron of the Church, the model of interior life, and the patron of the institute. As he nourished and defended the child Jesus, so he had to protect the least institution of the Evangelical Rogation along with the orphanages.

Di Francia family was very devout to Saint Joseph and had a pretty wooden bust of the saint, before which the whole family renewed its consecration to the saint, every year. We have many formulas written and signed by the family members, beginning with 1876. When the Father's mother died, the bust was transferred to Avignone.

To improve his interior life, the Father entrusted himself to Saint Joseph.

O glorious Saint Joseph, I appeal to you, the distributor of divine treasures. I wish to become a saint to belong totally to Jesus, to serve him in this institute as he wants" (Vol. 4, page 18). He addresses him, imploring that the devil and nature cheat him in no way while treating his affairs. "O glorious Patriarch, concern yourself with it so that the affair may be according to the divine will, for the greater consolation of the most holy Heart of Jesus ... O powerful saint, see to it that my trust in you and my appeal to your powerful protection have good results! I am expecting from you the divine graces which do not gratify my selfishness and passions, but please the most holy Heart of Jesus and the wishes of his soul (Vol. 6, page 12).

Since the beginning, the Father puts his institution under the protection of Saint Joseph, invoking him with an ardent prayer.

O sublime, powerful, compassionate saint, all of us are kneeling at your feet... Deign to look mercifully and benignly at these places of extreme misery, affliction, and disorder. This is the kingdom of ignorance, nausea, dreariness, abandon, and sin, where the hellish enemy torments the bodies and ruins the souls. We implore you with raised hands. Come, see, and protect these places, putting this quarter along with its dwellers under your powerful protection. Shelter the dwellers and their slums under your mantle; enlighten so many darkened minds with your

grace and wisdom... have mercy on the unsafe little virgins, the feeble, abandoned poor, and the dispersed children who are growing in stench and abandon. Deign to protect the works of charity started in this place, helping them grow as buds of the most holy Heart of Jesus. Make new works of charity rise in order to shelter the abandoned children and to keep the souls away from ignorance and sin (Vol. 8, page 12).

He called the little house of the first four sisters, *Little Retreat of Saint Joseph*, and entrusted the seed of the nascent congregation to the saint.

"I entrust these four souls to your fatherly charity; deign to sanctify and make them apt to fulfill the divine plan... O glorious saint, I beseech you to make their will sincere, their purpose firm, their intention wise, their wish fervent, their behavior holy, and their devotion perseverant." Then, he concludes, "If some of these persons are not called to the religious state, you see to it that only those whom God deigned to call to the religious profession dwell in this Little Retreat, consecrated to you" (Vol. 4, page 23).

The sisters took the garb and the vows on March 19. When the male community began taking the garb and the vows, they also were under the protection of the saint. But to have the Father available (he was busy with the sisters on March 19), their liturgy was set on the saint's patronage feast, which was celebrated on the third Wednesday or Sunday after Easter.

The feast of the saint was preceded by a devotion on seven Wednesdays and a solemn novena. Before renewing their vows, the Rogationists said the novena of the saint's patronage, prayers to the most holy Heart of Jesus, to the most holy Virgin Immaculate, and to the saint. Then the community listened to the preaching, or meditated on the religious state. Usually, the Father commented enthusiastically some passage from *Paradise on earth*, by Father Natale, S. J., making practical applications. Today the book is out of fashion, but it confirmed many vocations in the old days.

To implore the saint's help on the institute and its members, the Father wrote seven strophes, which the orphans sang, one a day, while working. We quote one of them:

Buy this place  
And grant us the virtue.  
Drive away the devil,  
Keeping us sound and safe.  
O saint, please implant  
This little plant.

As to the interior life of the community, the Father counted on the saint, to whom he wrote a prayer (Vol. 4, page 8). The community said it every day in March. He also appealed to the saint for holy vocations, lighted the vocation lamp before his statue, and often mentioned it in the hymns to Saint Joseph, beginning with July first 1905.(4)

O saint, see the little flame

Before you by night and by day,  
Burning and praying in its frame  
The elect and the saint to display (1905).

If the lamp burning around  
Begs the elect for our ground,  
Co-founder, hear our case,  
And grant us your grace! (1906)

The burning light  
Shining day and night,  
Isn't the aerial bell  
Calling others to its dwell?

.....  
From cities, and unknown villages  
Call the children God privileges,  
Innocent, pure, and sincere  
As should be those of our sphere... (1914)

In the institute's early days, when Saint Anthony's bread devotion was not yet born, the celestial purveyor was Saint Joseph, to whom the Father appealed in his needs. We recall an episode of those times. The baker had sued the Father for arrears. When the judge asked the Father who was his lawyer, he pulled a picture of Saint Joseph out of his pocket, and said, "This is my lawyer. What can I do? I have, and I will pay when Saint Joseph gives me the means. I beg my creditor to take things with a good deal of patience..." At these words, the creditor, whose name was Present, came out saying, "Once again you say 'I have, and I will pay; be patient.' And once again I will be patient..." The hearing was closed.

In 1911, an apostolic visitor came to our institute. Inaugurating a statue of Saint Joseph at Taormina, the Father

proclaimed the saint 'Visitor':

We exult with great joy,  
Sisters and Daughters of the Sacred Heart;  
We hear the echo of a pious decoy:  
Joseph the Visitor has come to our hearth...

The petitions he addressed to Saint Joseph in any circumstance were continuous. Let us read a report, "The saint's bust in the chapel seemed to be a post-man, full as it was with envelopes and keys. Every time the Father bought the Avignone slums, he entrusted the saint with the houses' keys, as a sign of the saint's ownership." Unfortunately, in 1919, the church took fire and the statue was lost along with the petitions. They were a good piece of the institute's story!

The Father sums up Saint Joseph's work in the institute:

The holy Patriarch held it since its beginning as though it was entrusted to him by the most holy Heart of Jesus and by his divine spouse Mary. The little plant was entrusted to Saint Joseph, who protected it lovingly amidst the clouds and the storms. When the soil around was dry, he laid on it the morning dew. When the sun was about to wither it, he covered the plant with his mantle. When a passenger was trampling on, or rooting it out, he defended it. When animals threatened with devouring it, he drove them away into the abyss. When the torrents rushed headlong down the plant, he built up embankments. He made it grow according to Jesus' and Mary's wish by strengthening its roots, stretching out its branches, and bringing its fruits to maturity. Finally, he said to the angel of Padua, "Anthony, I appoint you as a distributor of my providence to this pious institution for the interests of Jesus' Heart! (S.C. Vol. 3, page 270).

Somewhere else the Father touches again upon the same subject. "We are intimately convinced that Saint Joseph won for us Saint Anthony's protection. Rather, we think that Saint Joseph himself, as the universal patron of the Church, gave the devotion of Saint Anthony's bread to the peoples of these last times to console any class of persons" (Ibid. page 249).

The Daughters of the Sacred Side testify beautifully, "He was so fond of Saint Joseph! He wrote to us to put our communities under the protection of the saint. He celebrated, and made people celebrate his feast with a novena and a dinner for the poor, where it was feasible." "He instilled this devotion to us, who were needing the Father's help and were in the condition to better appreciate his precious trust in the holy Patriarch." Mother Quaranta bears the following witness, "I still have to say of his

great devotion and trust in Saint Joseph. He exhorted us to have a tender, simple, ingenuous devotion to the holy Patriarch. According to his way of thinking, when in need, we should pray to the saint heartily and insistently, even by threatening him with taking away the child Jesus, or covering him with paper, until he helps us. The Servant of God wanted us to eat bread of wheat (it was around 1913); wheat came in. He also wanted us to eat fruit every day, and even though we had no money to buy it, fruit never failed. Sometimes, oil for Saint Joseph's lamp was lacking. Prayed or threatened, Saint Joseph helped us."

Mother Quaranta related the above evidences many times to me in detail, and I quote them.

The Father saw the sisters eating uneatable bread, and said, "Daughters, bread is to be of pure wheat, otherwise you are unable to work."

"Who gives us such bread?"

"Ask Saint Joseph for it; rather, you place an empty open sack under Saint Joseph's picture, and he will provide you."

We did so. Because the building was poor, and one room served as a parlor, laboratory, and refectory, whoever came in saw the empty open sack under Saint Joseph's picture. In those days, the doctor happened to pass by, and smiled at the singular expedient. The fact is that a rich man left a big gold coin, "such as, said Mother Quaranta, we ever saw. As the rich man went out, a lady came in to offer some wheat!" Thus, Saint Joseph answered the Father's trust, and the doctor felt himself drawn to a greater devotion to the saint, when he knew these happenings.

## **5. Saint Anthony of Padua**

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After Saint Joseph, Saint Anthony.

Listen to the Father speaking of his own devout, thankful heart toward Saint Anthony. In 1918, after announcing the new titles of July first, "The great treasure hidden in the Church's field" for our Lord, and "Always

open revenue of the divine treasures" for the most holy Virgin, he addresses "the glorious Thaumaturge Saint Anthony of Padua, our very singular and untiring benefactor, and benefactor of those who appeal to our humble prayers." And he gives the motivation:

Dearest children, I see your joy for the homage that our communities will pay to a saint who is a dearest and beloved comforter of all. He is **a saint of the world**, but for us, he is something more. I am unable to express it, because the existence of our institute and its liberation from the troubles which involved it in a labyrinth, are due to his merits and his powerful intercession near the most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and the great Patriarch Saint Joseph. When we didn't think of him, he put us out to sea, always improving the institute by giving spiritual and temporal help, great and unexpected graces, and lasting stability to our houses.

Dearest children, because I endured the burden of exceptional want and fruitless labors for many years, I feel greatly thankful to our beloved and sweetest saint. You too ought to feel it. Therefore, this year we are drawn to pay our homage to him by proclaiming the sublime Saint Anthony of Padua "Great Universal Benefactor." By so doing, we do our duty, and please the most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary, the Patriarch Saint Joseph, as well as the angels and the saints our patrons (Vol. 34, page 133).

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Saint Anthony entered the institute's history as a celestial benefactor. The devotion to Saint Anthony of Padua was unknown to Di Francia family. Saint Francis of Paola instead stood out in Messina for his unforgettable crossing of the strait and his landing at Ringo.

Saint Anthony was chiefly invoked by people for recovering lost things. The Father did so the first time he invoked the saint. He recovered his shoes' silver buckles and a precious manuscript of prayers. In both cases the saint's intervention seemed prodigious to the Father, who made the report to the periodical of Padua *The Saint of the Miracles*. His report was in the issue of April 1, 1890 (S.C. Vol. 1, page 65). Because the Father calls Saint Anthony "my glorious saint," we think that Saint Anthony was already a patron of the Father.

Another episode dates back to the beginning of the institution, when the Father was in need of a thousand liras. He went to pray to the Immaculate's church, in Saint Anthony's room. Out of the church, he met Canon Ardoino, who asked the Father, "What's the matter, Canon? You seem worried."

"I have an urgent need of a thousand liras!"

"Here they are!"

The saint's predilection for the institute showed up in the 1887 cholera. The Father himself narrates the event.

"As the cholera raged in Messina in 1887, the widow Susanna Consiglio Miceli, a pious, wealthy woman, vowed to Saint Anthony that she would give sixty liras for bread for the male orphans of Saint Anthony of Padua. She pledged her donation in honor of the saint, providing he spared her and her family from the disease...

After the cholera had ceased, a young man - her Servant Letterio Curro' of Torre Faro - came to me...and gave me "sixty liras to buy bread for the orphans of Saint Anthony of Padua." (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 95).

The devotion to Saint Anthony's bread for the poor started in Tolone three years later, in 1890. The Father was interested in remarking the precedence as a predilection of the saint for the pious institute. Therefore, he appealed to the chancery office to get done a document proving the historical truth of this devotion. The document was made in 1906.

The Father began placing little boxes in churches, shops, and in stores of the city and the county specifying the purpose of Saint Anthony's bread for the orphans, who were called "Anthonian." In these years, Brother Joseph Anthony Meli distinguished himself in the zeal for spreading the devotion.

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Through Saint Anthony's bread, the institute began growing far and wide. On June 13, 1901, the Father proclaimed Saint Anthony, "great benefactor of our institutes" as a sign of his gratitude. "O glorious saint, please accept this devout proclamation, constituting yourself our 'great benefactor' in the spiritual and temporal order. Obtain from the most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary effective means of sanctification, formation, and improvement of these institutes. May they fulfill their good wishes, for the greater consolation of Jesus' Heart" (Vol. 8, page 70).

The saint's protection on the institute grew along with the spreading of the devotion by the press. First, through the booklet *The Miraculous Secret*; from 1908 on, through the monthly periodical *God and Neighbor*. The monthly printing of this periodical reached 300,000 copies at the end of the Father's life. Later, 700,000. Father Pantaleone Palma was the valiant cooperator in spreading this devotion, as well as the organizer of the Anthonian Secretariats.



Our founder preached widely the holy thaumaturge's glories with triduos, novenas, and devotion of thirteen days. He preached almost every year in our churches, or oratories. Besides the feast on June 13, he wanted us to commemorate the translation of the saint's relics, as well as the feast of the "Sacred Tongue" on February 15. The saint's tongue remains uncorrupted after seven centuries from his death. The Father sang its praise with prayers and verses. The center of the Anthonian worship is in Messina, in the church of the Evangelical Rogation, which is also a sanctuary of Saint Anthony.

The Father seized all opportunities to spread this devotion, whose value is substantiated by singular episodes. I report the following narration of Francis Stracuzzi from Furci Siculo, a citrus fruits dealer.

In 1901, his business was not good. One day, traveling by train third class, he sat down near a priest unknown to him. While chatting, Stracuzzi said, "I have to earn a thousand liras to settle my affairs, but I do not know how in these times. The priest near me said: 'It is easy. It is enough to give a lira to Saint Anthony.' He said so with such a certainty that I was amazed and curious, so I asked him: I would be ready to give 10 liras; in such a case, would I gain 10,000 liras? 'No, he said, only one lira.' When I asked to whom should I give one lira, he told me, 'I am Canon Di Francia, you can give a lira to me.'

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Even though skeptically, I gave him a lira. The following day I went to Messina. As soon as I was out of the railway station, someone known to me by sight as a dealer, approached me and said, 'If you give me your parcel of oranges in Adriano, I give you a thousand liras of profit.' Immediately, I thought of Canon Di Francia, his promise of a thousand liras, and I dealt with the business. From then on, I became an admirer and a benefactor of his institute."

However, in the presence of deviations the Father stated clearly the meaning of the devotion to Saint Anthony, writing in *The Miraculous Secret* an "Important notice to those who are waiting for a grace." "Usually, we obtain from Saint Anthony the graces we humbly ask with faith. Some people obtain them quickly; others, later; some others, more later. A few ones, however, do not obtain them after much time. We exhort them to confide, to persevere in the prayer, purifying their lives. If the saint grants favors to sinners, to souls far off from God, and even to non Catholic persons, he does so to guide them on the way of God. The chief aim of those who expect graces from Saint Anthony should be their spiritual good for eternal salvation;

otherwise, any devotion becomes superstition" (Page 105, 14 Edition).

The Father insisted on making people consider the devotion to Saint Anthony as a help to souls, who are drawn to God by the saint; not as a mere help to their needs, which is also good. "The continuous miracles the saint has been working the world over, since eight centuries, have won for him the title of "Thaumaturge" and a worldly devotion. But the miracle of the miracles is his continuous rescuing of souls everywhere. He began doing so effectively and widely in his few years of human life; now he is continuing more effectively and widely in the Christian and in the faithless regions, from heaven" (S.C. Vol. 3, page 279). In 1924, the Father associated again Saint Anthony to the feast of July first. After greeting Jesus in the Sacrament "tender and compassionate friend of sinners," and the most holy Virgin "reconciler of sinners," he greeted Saint Anthony "perennial conqueror of souls" (Vol. 30, page 146).

## 6. Saint Louis Gonzaga

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An institution aiming at forming the youth cannot help seeking inspiration in Saint Louis Gonzaga's examples. The Father proposed him to our youth as a model and a patron. He dedicated to him an altar in our church of Messina, and formed the "Pious Union of the Luigini Children of Immaculate Mary," whose admissions and promotions occurred on the saint's feast, after a solemn triduo of preparation.

We recall two extraordinary feasts of the saint: the centenary of his death, in 1891, and the centenary of his canonization, in 1926.

In 1891, the Father said his panegyric in the Jesuits' church, and published a beautiful psalm on *Il Corriere Peloritano*. The title is Lily and Angel. We quote it:

A lily sprouted in the vineyard of Engaddi; its leaves absorbed the morning dew.

The laborers in the field turned to look at it; the sunrise dressed it with its bright rays.

Solomon was not so beautiful in his royal robes when Queen Shaba looked at him ecstatically.

The zephyrs from the mountains put on the perfume of its leaves.

How gentle is the lily of Engaddi's vineyard! The angels of the Lord kissed it tenderly, and the celestial beings rejoiced around it.

It will become a brother to the angels. Look how the lily of the fertile valley grows luxuriantly.

The profaners stretched out their hands, the world formed a vortex to swallow it, and the storms plumped down over it.

The winds broke out wildly, and a thorn fence clasped it to rent it. All said, "How beautiful will the lily of Engaddi be among us?" But, the angels made it a brother of theirs.

Where is the lily ornament of the field? Those of the highest spheres were 9 times 9,000; those of the supernal regions, nine times 9,000; and those of the sublime heavens, nine times 9,000.

When they appeared before the Most High, one more angel was in their midst.

The firmament sang his praise, saying, "The ray of wisdom penetrated him, and love pierced his heart."

He melted like wax before fire, inebriating himself with the wine of charity.

He hid under the tree of the cross, fell prey to delirium, and the pure love fever penetrated his innermost spirit.

He exclaimed, "Who will give me the wings of a dove to escape and lift up above the earth, beyond the endless space, to rest in God?"

The Son of man tied him with a gold band and hugged him.

The blond Nazarene transformed him with his love.

And the Virgin Mother of the Nazarene lulled him in the gentle charismas of her Immaculate Heart.

There is the little enraptured Benjamin, who made the holy hero of Loyola cry with joy.

Exult, exult, plantation of elect, family of the just.

The lily of the vineyard of Engaddi was transplanted into your gardens; then in the gardens of paradise. It has been transformed into an angel.

Incomprehensible is his glory, and he untiringly raises his beseeching hands to the Most High.

That the vineyard of Engaddi may bloom with lilies, and children may raise wings. He repeats together with the angels the everlasting hymn, "Holy, holy, holy God of infinite power." You confound the mighty, but exalt the humble.

For glory and honor are yours for ever (S. C. Vol. 2, page 243).

The Catholic Mother, a monthly periodical of Brescia, published the whole psalm, giving the following judgment: "It is a too beautiful and highly inspired canticle... even in the shape of prose, it is pure, divinely inspired poetry, in no way inferior to Solomon's canticles."

In 1926, the city celebrated the saint's centenary in our church, ending with the grandiose procession headed by the archbishop, chapter, clergy, and all the brotherhood of the city. The Father ordered our communities to celebrate the centenary with a solemn novena, spiritual reading on the saint's life, and procession in the house. A petition was addressed to the saint "so that purity of soul and life reign in our communities, being the mind pure; the heart and the affections, immaculate" (Vol. 34, page 214).

Saint Stanislaus Kostka was just such another Saint Louis: also for him the Father ordered a solemn novena and the same practices of piety. On his feast day, we made a procession in the house and a petition "so that the saint be a protector of our houses, make Jesus and Mary reign, and instill purity, morals, and perfect observance of religious virtues."

The strophes pertinent to the prayers, as well as the hymn to Saint Stanislaus were the last work of the Father. He stopped playing his zither.

## **7. Saint Alphonsus Mary Liguori**

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The Way of Salvation, The Great means of Prayer, Practice of Loving Jesus Christ, Preparation to Death, and Glories of Mary are works by Saint Alphonsus M. Liguori. The Father began delighting in them since he was a layman, becoming enamored of the saint. It was perhaps to bear in mind his examples of charity, zeal, and virtues, that

the Father summed up the saint's life in a booklet. It was published after the Father's death. We have already seen (ch. 1, no. 3) That the Father wrote seven prayers to the saint (Vol. 6, pages 13 and 123) to achieve his own conversion; and another one to Jesus Christ "to take advantage of the prayers that the saint promised to those who would have prayed for him." He concludes saying, "My glorious Saint Alphonsus, pray to Jesus and Mary for me, obtaining the conversion of my sinner soul to God, a tender devotion to the most holy Virgin Mary, and the perseverance in the prayer. Amen. Amen" (Vol. 6, page 120).

He distributed to his communities the life of Saint Alphonsus in two volume by Father Berthe for the reading in the refectory. I report an unforgettable episode. The writer said that the saint and his followers were so poor at Deliceto that the saint sometimes was obliged to send his religious to bed to warm themselves during the day.

"Oh, poor them," said the Father. "Poor Saint Alphonsus! Children, if we had been in those times, wouldn't we have helped them? We do so now for then, sending something to the Redemptorist Fathers in Rome, with the intention of helping the saint's needs of those times!" And he did so.

Father Salvatore Di Coste, the superior of the Redemptorists of Francavilla Fontana (Brindisi), relates how he knew the Father and how he was greatly impressed. When the Redemptorists were expelled by the 1866 law, the fraternity of Immaculate Mary took the statue of Saint Alphonsus from the Redemptorist church. At the coming back of the Fathers, the fraternity planned to transfer the statue from the Immaculate church to the Redemptorists', in 1924. How all this came to the knowledge of the Father, who was in Oria, we don't know. "The fact is, says Father Di Coste, that when I arrived to Immaculate church to organize the procession, I saw a priest kneeling in attitude of fervent prayer, who struck me... and when the statue was transferred to its old dwelling, Canon Di Francia got up to accompany it to our church." This was the beginning of the relation between Father Di Coste and our founder, who was preserving the saint's skull-cap. He deprived himself of it and gave it back to the Redemptorists of Francavilla Fontana.

We let the readers know what the Father did when the city of Messina made atonement for the blasphemous insults against Saint Alphonsus.

Around the end of the XIX century, Albert Grassman, a Lutheran of Stettino (Germany), decided to discredit the ministry

of confession. He began censuring the moral teaching of Saint Alphonsus, quoting incomplete, or distorted passages. He did so to demonstrate that Saint Alphonsus was a spreader of false doctrine, a killer of souls! The same Lutherans judged that libel so defamatory that they sued Grassman at the Norimberga tribunal, and the judge condemned him, prohibiting the sale of the libel.

This book, however, was introduced in Italy. Instead of being prohibited, it was advertised by Codrescu in his newspaper *The Donkey*. Writes the Father, "Under the auspices of such noble a beast, the enemies of the Church began pouring forth asinities against Saint Alphonsus" (S.C. Vol. 9, page 119). "In the presence of the blasphemous brayings against the saint, the Catholic faithful raised up, reacting firmly everywhere! The name of Saint Alphonsus resounded on the lips of the Catholics with enthusiasm in solemn feasts, in warm protests, in crowded processions. A thousand sacred preachers sang the praise of the singular virtue and the great doctrine of this saint, giant for talent and virtue..." (Ibid. page 120).(4)

Atonement was made everywhere. The diocesan committee of Messina, of which the Father was a member, exalted Saint Alphonsus' merits and virtues and appealed to the faithful, inviting them to a public atonement.

A solemn triduo with prayers, songs, and preaching by Father Francis Bruno was held on September 12, 13, and 14, 1901. On September 15, 85th anniversary of the saint's beatification, Archbishop D'Arrigo said the pontifical mass, and Father Bruno, the panegyric.

The liturgy was performed in the Sacred Heart's church, built by D'Arrigo family in 1891. Canon Letterio consecrated an altar to Saint Alphonsus with the following dedication by the Father. "So that Messina - city sacred to the Mother of God - pay honor and worship - to the propagator of Mary's glories - Saint Alphonsus Mary Liguori - this first altar - is consecrated to him" (S.C. Vol. 9, page 155).

## 8. Saint Veronica Giuliani

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Because the devotion to Saint Veronica was unknown in Messina, we do not know how it was born in the Father's heart. We suppose it happened from the reading of her marvelous life. The Father narrated to us that when he was a boy, he saw a companion of his having a medal of Saint Alphonsus and Saint Veronica. He succeeded to exchange it with many of his medals, amazing his companion.

Said the Father smiling, "He could not understand my joy. Saint Alphonsus and Saint Veronica were canonized together, and I was fond of both. I still wear that medal."

In 1874, he published a booklet of prayers and verses to Saint Veronica, writing in the preface, "So I have fulfilled the vow I made for a grace that the saint has granted me benignly."

Evidence of his devotion to this saint is the prayer to her to obtain "a true conversion, a confession like the one she made before the Lord, the most holy Virgin, and the saints; as well as to become a priest according to her way of thinking." We have already talked about it in chapter one, no. 3.

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In 1875, the Father started his correspondence with the Capuchin sisters of Citta' di Castello, who hold the saint's body. He was invited to preach the novena for her feast, but despite the permission of the two respective ordinaries, he was unable to accomplish it owing to an unexpected sickness.

The Father's name is tied to the publication of the saint's marvelous writings. Even though he did not bring them to an end, he still made the Italians know the "Hidden Treasure." So he named the writings.

The saint's manuscripts were buried in the archives of the Capuchins of Citta' di Castello. In 1880, Francis Dause of Grenoble, more than eighty years old, began publishing them, but he died shortly after. "The work was incomplete, and it was for better, because Dause was publishing the saint's journal just as it was with endless spelling mistakes and lack of punctuation-marks. Only a Job would have read it" (Cioni, Saint Veronica Giuliani, page 113).

Our founder was the Job. But he did not pretend the Job's patience from his readers; so he corrected misspelling and punctuation

marks, maintaining words and style, which is simple, beautiful, and inspired.

The first volume was published in 1891 by "Prem. Tip. dell' Avvenire Giuseppe Crupi, Messina." The Father prefaces the saint's writings with a biographical outline. She was endowed with extraordinary gifts by the Lord since her early years.

We quote some passages.

More than one author said that God gathered in the life of Saint Veronica Giuliani a good part of the gifts of divine love, which we find in several great saints. This opinion is a remarkable praise. The readers of the prodigious and mysterious life of this predestined creature will find such an opinion correct, because her life is not admired enough.

And yet, Saint Veronica Giuliani is a glory of humankind, is a wonder of God's power, is decorum and splendor of the holy Church, is a spectacle to the world, the angels, and men. She could say of herself in a reduced meaning, 'God who is mighty has done great things for me'."

Saint Veronica is the saint of the suffering. Martyr's calendar points out that she is "famous for her strong desire of suffering." The Father remarks,

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"She was given the name Veronica not by chance, but according to her predestination. Jesus crucified was so impressed in the soul and body of this beloved and faithful Veronica that she had really impressed in her heart the tools of the Passion, such as nails, cross, thorns, lance, column, and even the seven swords of Mary in sorrow. These superhuman signs were found in the saint's heart, after her death."

The Father recalled how the Lord kept the saint in a state of interior pains for the conversion of sinners, making her share purgatory's and, somehow, hell's pains. The saint described in detail these pains in her journal, whose reading excites a deep, beneficial impression. Hence, a witness relates that the Father "recommended the devotion to Saint Veronica to achieve the holy fear of God."

Sickness and additional commitments prevented the Father from continuing the publication of the saint's writings. The Jesuit Father Pizzicaria endeavored to do it, but he stopped at Vol. 7, in 1905. The Father went on, hoping that he would publish the



remnant volumes. During the 1918 European war, he bought the paper and stored it in the "Typography of the Orphans by the Sacred Heart," in Citta' di Castello. But, he saw the completion of such a work from heaven, because the monastery of the saint brought the publication to an end.

Writing to the abbess of the monastery of the saint in 1895, the Father expounds the reasons which moved him to undertake the work. "Thanks to the most holy Heart of Jesus, I never aspired to be in evidence on the publishing of our beloved patroness' writings. The only ambition I had was to draw her protection, to render a service to her, and to please our Lord, arousing his mercy on me, a sinner! ... Likewise, I feel obliged to tell you that any thought of gain was far off from my mind. I spent a thousand liras, and I consider them lost, because I am selling the volumes at the price of half a lira! (The cover price was 2.50). May everything be for the greater consolation of Jesus' Heart?" (Vol. 38, page 1).

The sisters let the Father know that they were sorry because someone else was substituting him in his enterprise. The Father instead heartens them by saying,

I don't know why you should be sorry if me, or someone else, or hundred persons would undertake the Lord's works, which are worthy to be revealed, as Scripture says. Shouldn't we be happy for that, on condition that we only seek God's glory? Isn't it true that by emulating better charismas we increase God's glory and the salvation of souls? When the spreading of good is at stake, there should be no restriction, but generous spirit and fondness of each other's good. For this reason, the apostle wrote to the Philippians, "What of it? All that matters is that in any and every way, whether from specious motives or genuine ones, Christ is being proclaimed> That is what brings me joy" (Phil. 1, 18). (Ibid.)

More than once the sisters invited the Father to their convent. Finally, the Father's dream came true in 1918, when he stayed at Citta' di Castello two days, May 16 and 17. He was beside himself with joy. Praying before the blessed body and seeing the place sanctified by the presence of the great saint excited a big fire of love for God in his heart! On May 19, Pentecost, he writes to Sister Mary Nazarena from Rome, "I was at Citta' di Castello at the feet of my Saint Veronica! What celestial things? I entered the very observant monastery, said the mass in the saint's room, and was given a few pretty relics, among which the hand-warmer, where the saint put fire in winter time. I brought you all to Saint Veronica" (Vol. 35, page 212).

The same year, he was again in Citta' di Castello on the feast of the saint, and on July 9 he wired to Messina, "I am attending Saint Veronica's feast, uniting all of you spiritually" (Vol. 34, page 251). Our houses' chronicles speak out of the Father's enthusiasm while relating his spiritual pilgrimage to Saint Veronica, as well as the fervor of that community. There, the presence of the saint is almost felt. After many years, the Father's recollection of that monastery was still alive. In 1925, Abbess Sister M. Francesca wrote to him, "We always remember your very pleasant visit of many years ago. We hope that you will give us the satisfaction of listening to you again on the centenary feast."

The Father celebrated the centenary feast on July 9, 1927, in heaven, together with the saint!

Before receiving the hand-warmer, the Father had been given several relics, such as the wax mask reproducing the saint's features transhumanized by her intimate union with God.

## **9. Saint Camillus De Lellis**

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For the novena of the third centenary of Saint Camillus' death, in 1914, the Camillian Fathers of Messina commissioned 9 preachers from the diocesan and regular clergy. The Father spoke the first day and called the citizens' attention on how Messina was indebted to the great saint for having established a religious community in the city.

The community of Camillian Fathers lasted three centuries, until 1866, when the suppression law abolished the religious orders in Italy. How many times, during their staying in Messina, Saint Camillus' priests worked among the people in the midst of pestilence, cholera, epidemics, and earthquake, giving up their lives while attending the sick and the dying. I was a boy at the time of the suppression law, but I perceived that in that circumstance almost all the city was apathetic to the religious communities, but to the Camillian Fathers. It was a common regret. The people could not understand why the Fathers had to go away, when they

were practicing the works of charity with the sick and the dying (Vol. 45, page 380).

But, besides Rome, two Italian cities have a better ground to sing the praise of this great saint: Naples and Messina. The reason is: Saint Camillus' heart, which was endowed with the charity, love, and compassion of the most holy Heart of Jesus, and consumed itself in helping the poor, the humble, the sick, and the dying, was extracted from the corpse of Saint Camillus and divided into two parts. One half was given to Messina, the other one to Naples. Oh, this is also a sign of Our Lady of Letter's predilection! That heart seems to be saying, "Citizens of Messina, I love you, and I am staying in the midst of you to sympathize with your sorrows and sickness. I always bear them in my mind, and for this reason I gave you back my Religious" (Ibid. page 381).

Father Ernest Fochesado, superior of the Camillian Fathers, asked the Father to make a report about Saint Camillus' heart. According to this report the heart of the saint remained in Messina because of the Father's zeal (S.C. Vol. 9, pages 137-142).

We give a summary of the report.

First of all, we bring to the readers' knowledge that Father Califano, superior of the Camillian house in Messina, witnessed Saint Camillus' death in Rome, on July 14, 1614. He was given a piece of the saint's heart as a relic for the Messina community (Mario Vanti, *San Camillus de Lellis*, page 647). Since then, Messina held the remarkable relic along with others and the silverware of the church. These were held by Father Sollima, a former Camillian, who kept them until his death.

When the Messina Camillian community died out, Father Pandolfini, the superior provincial who had restored the community in Palermo, agreed upon with Father Sollima's heirs to transfer the Camillians' belongings from Messina to Palermo; they had also established the day and the formalities.

Writes the Father,

I was shocked at this unexpected turn much more than an amateur would be shocked to see a famous painting taken from the city it belongs to. I thought to myself: if a precious old treasure is taken away from a country, its people oppose the move by being agitated. But when a precious relic of a saint is about to be removed from Messina, the city it's belonged to for centuries, no one says a word in protest. Can Messina be deprived of this spiritual treasure and perhaps of the saint's protection?

I was inconsolable! I went to sleep... At dawn...an unrepressible impulse pushed me from inside; I could no longer lie down. I got up, dressed, left my dwellings, and walked aimlessly along Garibaldi Avenue

Even though the streets were empty because it was early morning, I ran into Father Cucinotta, a former Camellian. When I explained everything to him, our feelings became one...

Suddenly, Father Cucinotta had an idea: "Let's tell Father Sferruzza's nephews about this. Father Sferruzza, who died in Messina, was a superior of the Camellians." He went alone... and told them that the Camellians' silverware was about to be taken to Palermo...

Three or four of the family members, motivated to move quickly by what they had heard, went to the Sollima house, where they waited at the door. When the messenger came to transport the silver, they stepped forward, warned him, and ordered that he leave... (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, pages 115-116). Thus, Saint Camillus' heart remained in Messina (S.C. Vol. 9, pages 137 and following).

In 1890, the Father wrote a fervent petition to the most holy Heart of Jesus to have the Camellian Fathers back to Messina; he also wrote a prayer and a hymn to the saint (Vol. 4, page 47). Our communities said this prayer on the 18th of each month before the saint's heart, which was picked up from the cathedral every time for such a devotion. Later, fearing that the relic could be harmed in the transfer, our community stopped doing it, but said the prayer until the Camillians came back to Messina, in 1905.

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Let us conclude with a precious episode of simplicity. Saint Camillus and Saint Anthony give the Father the occasion to manifest the childish candor of his faith in the Blessed Sacrament.

"To replace the images of Saint Alphonsus and Saint Camillus after the fire at the wooden church, he bought two pictures in Naples for the temporary chapel. The sacristan happened to place the pictures in such a way that they were turning their backs to the tabernacle. When the Father entered the chapel, he immediately noticed their posture and said: 'Blessed son, don't you see that the saints are turning their backs to the altar? They do not like that!'" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 278).

## 10. Saint Francis De Sales

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Since his early youth, the Father delighted in reading Saint Francis of Sales and Saint Alphonsus. He prayed to the former to achieve meekness, and spoke of him to the community before the mass on his feast. He praised his meekness and humility; but, we have no prayer to the saint written by the Father.

It is in the last decade of the Father's life that we see his devotion to the saint blazing forth. It is due to the ideal he reached in 1920, with the Lord's grace (Vol. 28, page 12): "the spiritual union" of the Daughters of Divine Zeal with the Visitation Daughters of Mary, or Salesians, founded by Saint Francis of Sales. The Father longed for such a union. The Lord had entrusted Saint Margaret M. Alacoque, one of the Salesians, with spreading the devotion to the Sacred Heart. Through the spiritual union, the Father aimed at drawing the Sacred Heart's particular predilection on the Daughters of Divine Zeal.

The spiritual union involved the two communities to spiritually share their prayers, observance, practices of piety, and religious virtues. The Father remarks, "Due to the Daughters of Divine Zeal's spiritual poverty, the sharing is inadequate; but long live Jesus! The Daughters of Divine Zeal can offer to the Salesians the "Rogate" on behalf of the beloved Heart, giving them a good opportunity to become always more pleasant to Jesus' Heart. They can raise their effective and fervent prayers to obtain the mercy of the mercies from the divine Heart: numerous and holy priests for all the world" (Vol. 38, page 13). Far from being afraid of doing something inconsistent with their vocation, the Salesians are reminded by the Father of Leo XIII's words, "From the Salesians we expect the triumph of the holy Church. They have to pray the owner of the mystical harvest to send out workers to his harvest" (Vol. 38, page 21). The Father adds, "Saint Francis of Sales named his daughters "Daughters of the clergy." With the spreading of this spirit of prayer, they will become "Mothers of the future clergy" (Ibid. page 22).

When the Salesians of Rome made the first adhesion, the Father informed the communities about it on July 2, 1920. He ordered a special thanksgiving for a month, and exhorted them to fervor.

"Owing to this spiritual union, the present and future Daughters of Divine Zeal may humbly hope that the adorable Heart of Jesus and Mary will love them more. On condition that they answer this special grace with perfect observance, with the increase of divine love for the most holy Heart of Jesus and Mary, with the practice of the religious virtues, and with the zeal for the interest of Jesus' Heart" (Vol. 34, page 158).

At the approaching of the third centenary of the death of Saint Francis of Sales, the Daughters of Divine Zeal "had somehow become adopted daughters of the saint because of their affiliation. Therefore, it was also right to celebrate his centenary." So wrote the Father in the inscription for this feast.

The saint died in 1622.

The Father sent to his communities the saint's life in three volumes for the reading in the refectory, that year. Due to the previous Christmas feasts and because the anniversary of the saint's death fell on Dec. 28, the preparation was performed only with a solemn triduo. After officiating the liturgy, the Father printed a newsletter, informing the faithful of the feast at the Holy Spirit: mass and preaching in the morning, vespers in the evening, procession and petition to the saint to ratify the spiritual union with his daughters. "Because we are closer to this religious family, may Jesus and Immaculate Mary watch and accept us with new clemency, piety, and mercy. O great saint, grant us this favor from the endlessly loving Heart of Jesus. May all of us present and future, go deeply into the intimate knowledge and fervor of the very tender love of the divine Heart and be entirely consumed!"

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The liturgy ended at 8:00 p. m., singing *Te Deum*, "to praise the Most High for the very happy death of his most faithful servant 300 years before at 8:00 p.m." Such a liturgy was performed in all of our communities.

When the Father started the Rogationist seminary in Oria, in 1923, he dedicated it to Saint Francis of Sales with a prayer for vocations. Our community said this prayer on the 29th of each month, also invoking the patron saints of the town and of the convent: Saint Barsanuphius, Saint Charles Borromeo, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Peter of Alcantara, and Saint Maurus abbot. We said one Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory to be to each of them (Vol. 8, page 60).

## 11. Blessed Eustochio

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Blessed Eustochio (1434-1485) of the Kalefati Colonna family was a soul endowed with very ardent charity and mystical experiences as Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Teresa of Jesus, and Saint Veronica Giuliani. The Father was proud of her as a glory of Messina, and said, "These are the great treasures, in which the Christian people should glory. These are the real glories, of which a Catholic city should be proud." He himself nourished a great devotion to the Blessed, whose biography he published in installments in 1889 on *The Light*, a weekly Catholic periodical of the city. Later, he published the installments in a booklet together with prayers and verses. Besides preaching her novena and saying her panegyric several times, the Father spread the devotion to the Blessed among the faithful, leading them to appeal to her intercession in order to achieve the miracles required by her canonization.

The Father kept in touch with the postulator general of the Friars Minor (S.C. Vol. 5, page 285), and organized a grandiose pilgrimage to the Blessed's cradle at Annunziata village on August 22, 1920. Archbishop D'Arrigo headed the inhabitants of the city. That morning, the Father said mass in the small barn where the Blessed was born. It was the first time after so many centuries; the barn was transformed into a chapel. The pilgrimage ended with a fervent speech of the Father in the open.

He was glad to pay a particular homage to the Blessed in the town of Oria. The 1613, Bishop Lucio Fornari had 10 busts of saints sculptured, gilded, and bearing the relics of the saints. Each of them was in its own niche, in a chapel. The bust of our Blessed was among them. Around the end of the 1700, this bust was restored by Bishop Alexander Maria Kalefati, of the same family of the Blessed. The Latin inscription at its base reads, "Blessed Eustochio, virgin from Messina, of the Kalefati Colonna noble family, famous founder of Montevergine cloister in Messina. Lucio Ferrari, bishop of Oria, had her sculptured in 1613. His unworthy successor Alexander Maria Kalefati restored it for the worship in 1783."

When the tottering cathedral of Oria was destroyed in 1750 in order to build up a new one, the chapel of the relics was eliminated, and the busts were set aside. Bishop Kalefati restored them and disposed that they should be adorned with flowers and

candles and exposed along with the relics on the communion rail in special circumstances. When, still a cleric, the Father went to Oria, he venerated his fellow-citizen's relics.

However, the busts on the communion rail impeded the view of the altar and the liturgy, so Bishop Di Tommaso gathered the relics in a special niche, and the busts got dispersed. The bust of our Blessed along with a few others happened to be placed in the cathedral's penthouse, exposed to the winds, spiders, and chickens.

As soon as the Father knew it, he went to the owner Canon Cosimo Ferretti. Generously benefited by the Father, he willingly gave the Blessed's bust to him. The bust was cleaned and taken to our orphanage for boys on October 17, 1923. The Father along with his community welcomed the arrival of the bust, saying one Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory to be. Then, they made a procession up to the sacristy, where the Father narrated the Blessed's marvelous life and said some prayers from his booklet.

A few days later, the bust was transferred definitively to the orphanage for girls. A special reception was prepared for the Blessed... The community was told that a great lady was going to visit the institute, and when all of them were waiting in file, dressed festively to welcome the lady... the bust of the Blessed, the spouse of the king of kings, the Kalefati family's daughter was brought among them... Restored properly, it was exposed in the oratory of that community for the veneration.

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Mysterious signals to her community, or to other persons, such as strokes on the furniture, sound of bells, apparitions, unusual noise in the corridors, etc. are characteristic of the Blessed.

The Father himself told us how he had experienced her signals. One year, he had pledged to say the panegyric of the Blessed, but later he forgot it. Three days before the feast, while staying in his room, he heard three big strokes on the desks as they were made by fists. His mind immediately thought of the Blessed, and of the panegyric.

Something more impressing happened on January 20, 1925.

In December 1924 the Father came back from Rome so seriously sick as to worry the communities. Inappetence, insomnia, breathlessness, and lack of strength almost drew him to receive the last sacraments.



On January 20, 1925, the orphans and the sisters of the Holy Spirit were invited to sing the mass at the new provisory chapel in the monastery's garden, where the Blessed's body had been transferred from the parlor. The Father had given a generous contribution for that. Before leaving, the mother general, Sister M. Nazzarena Maione, exhorted the youth to pray to the Blessed for the Father's healing.

At the gospel, Msgr. Bruno climbed the pulpit for the panegyric. It was about 11:30 a. m. The preacher exhorted the faithful to pray for the healing of Canon Di Francia, who was a great devotee of the Blessed and a benefactor of her monastery.

All this went unknown to the Father, who around the same time called Brother Mary Anthony Scolaro. He told him with great effort and with a feeble voice, "Today is the Blessed's feast, let us say one Our Father."

They were just starting to say the prayer when three blows resounded. It was like if a hammer had struck on the metal rain pipe in front of the bed. They were not recovered from amazement, when the three blows resounded again. With mingled feelings of astonishment, surprise, and fright the brother rushed to call the mother superior. As soon as she enters the room, the three blows resound again at the same place. They seek for the cause, but no one is working around. Touched, the mother superior concludes, "Father, it is the Blessed." The Father's quick recovery proved the mother superior's assertion. After some time, he resumed his activity and his traveling to Apulia and Rome for the needs of the houses.

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## **L2. Celestial Rogationists and Celestial Daughters of Divine Zeal**

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A witness relates, "The Father venerated many saints, and made us venerate them through preaching, speeches, and practices of piety. It seemed to us that they were venerated for the first time." We could prolong the above list of the saints by adding the centenary of Saint Louis M.

Grignion in 1916, Saint Vincent Ferreri, and the canonization of Saint Francis of Paola in 1919; as well as the feast for the canonization of Saint Margaret M. Alacoque, for which we had prayed so much. At the proper place, we'll talk of the devotion to Saint Gertrude.

We conclude this chapter by recalling the Celestial Rogationists and the Celestial Daughters of Divine Zeal. It is one of the Father's "spiritual industries," and a manifestation of his simple, pure faith.

To make the Rogate triumph in the world, the Father strove to seek vocations for his two orders. In his search, he thought that the saints in heaven are more concerned in achieving such a goal than we are. Therefore, they should protect the congregations which are consecrated to the Rogate by giving them numerous vocations and by obtaining workers to the Church. For this reason, they are, no more no less, Rogationists and Daughters of Divine Zeal in heaven, or in other words, "Celestial Rogationists or Celestial Daughters of Divine Zeal."

Then, he began proclaiming several saints as such (about 200), choosing those who had the same spirit of the institute. First, the Father proclaimed Saint Francis of Sales Celestial Rogationist on January 31. However, due to an error of postal delivery, the dates of their proclamations were reversed.(5)

A letter addressed to Father Vitale on January 27, 1916, reports some details:

I think that you have received and performed the proclamation of the lovely, glorious Saint Francis of Sales as celestial Rogationist after explaining the ceremony to these children, inspiring them with fervor and lifting them up to heaven on the strong winds of faith> I am mailing four more proclamations reminding you that the ceremony is private. If you are going to accomplish it before mass and the people are in the church, you can do it even in the choir.

The proclamation papers are to be preserved in a dossier, which must be glued or sewed after recording them in a register so that they may be read in the refectory every year the day before their anniversary in order to offer the mass to the Celestial Rogationists, or to the Celestial Daughters of Divine Zeal.

We proclaim Celestial Rogationists or Daughters of Divine Zeal those male and female saints we honor, love, admire, and invoke, believing that they would like to become Rogationists or Daughters of Divine Zeal. By this proclamation they become our celestial vocations!

In the course of time, the celestial vocations will increase.

The Rogationists *proclaim* the male saints; the Daughters of Divine Zeal, the female saints; but the sisters also *acclaim* the male ones. The Father specifies, "You ask, 'Why doesn't the male community proclaim the female saints?' I think it is not convenient. Besides, the sisters make the proclamation together with me, which is valid for them and for us."

Since this proclamation was private, the ecclesiastical approval was not required. The Father, however, saw the approval in a curious incident. Listen to him:

One day I went to our beloved archbishop, having the manuscript of the proclamation in my pocket. When I put some papers on the desk, I also put the secret manuscript, but I did not retake it. When I left, because of natural, right, and legitimate curiosity, the bishop must have read it to find out the contents of my handwriting... The fact is that he called Canon Ciccolo (a member of the chapter!) and told him to deliver the paper to me! The most Rev. Canon Ciccolo did so. Thus, the ecclesiastical approval was complete and formal. The mysterious disposition of divine providence liked to approve the celestial vocations this way, and the bishop led us on the way of improvement!

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This was the Father's way of thinking! But he himself understood that such a mind was not understood by everyone. Therefore, he added, "Unless they thought that I was mad."

And concludes thinking of supernatural.

"While human events reduce our ranks and impede vocations, through such proclamations we are becoming an army or a community so numerous as to outdo whatever else before long! What a grace of the Lord! We will be a crowded religion in the midst of an uncrowded religion on condition that holy, pure, and candid faith be of assistance to us, in the simplicity of heart. Amen" (Vol. 31, page 76).

## Notes

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(1) A similar reduction was made after the Council of Trent. The missal published by Saint Pius V counterbalanced the ferial days and the feasts of the saints. But, in the long

run and with the new canonizations, the feasts of the

saints increased in number (See Catholic Encyclopedia: calendar of the universal Church).

(2) We remember Saint Mary Magdalene, King David, Saint Andrew apostle, Saint Hilarion, Saint Catherine, Saint Albert, etc.

(3) Here they are: Michael, God's zeal. Gabriel, God's strength. Raphael, God's physician. Uriel, God's fire. Saaltiel, God's prayer. Geudiele, God's praise. Baradiel, God's blessing.

Commenting on the Book of Revelation, Alapide reports these names from the private revelation of Blessed Amodeo of Sylva, from Portugal. The Blessed lived in Rome under Pius Sixtus IV (1471-1484), and was his confessor. But even before, these names were known in several Italian cities. When in 1516 Anthony Lo Duca opened in Palermo the church of Saint Angel, several centuries old, near the cathedral, he found seven angels with their names painted on the walls; and he renewed the devotion in Sicily. Lo Duca built a convent near the church, but both the church and the convent were destroyed by fire. The square, however, is still named "The seven angels." Lo Duca spread the devotion in Rome, and obtained by Pius IV that Michelangelo build the basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels, which before was dedicated to "Saint Mary of the Seven Angels." As a matter of fact, the picture painted in Venice in 1543, on behalf of Lo Duca, represents the most holy Virgin with the child surrounded by seven angels. (V.C. Bernardi Salvetti, S. Maria degli Angeli alle Terme e Antonio Lo Duca, Desclee & C. Editori Pontifici).

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(4) We have a hymn by the Father to Saint Joseph for the crowning of his statue at Caudino of Arcevia (Ancona). In that time the crowning was performed by decree of the Congregation of Rites and only for the pictures of Our Lord and Our Lady. They made an exception for Saint Joseph's statue at Caudino. The solemn crowning happened on July 26, 1904. It seems that the Father wrote the hymn by invitation of his friend Father Biaschelli, superior general of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood. He was interested in achieving the decree by the sacred congregation.

(5) Perhaps, on that occasion, the Father added the prayer for spreading the devotion to Saint Alphonsus Mary to the list of his personal prayers (Vol. 4, page 97).

(6) The writings of the Father have the proclamation of Saint Gerard Maiella on October 16, 1915, as the first one. Perhaps it was performed in Messina only.

(7) According to Malachi prophesies, this was the symbolic name of Benedict XV. But, this assonance is not a happy one, because it does not express well the idea. As a matter of fact, both the Latin verbs *depopulo* and *populo* mean destroy. The Father gave to the word *populata* the Italian meaning of increased.

# 13.

## A MAN OF PRAYER

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# 1. Liturgical and private prayer

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Depreciation of prayer is a very bitter consequence of the secularization process.

*Con Gesu' nel deserto*, by Father Voillaume, clears the current situation of the revolt against prayer in meditation no. 6. "We are facing a psychological transformation of human mind with respect to prayer. All forms of prayer are under attack from critique. The community prayer is perhaps excluded, even though in certain cases we could ask if it is prayer or rather a community's expression."

Today, people push to the extremes the valuation of what they call "liturgical and biblical religiousness," systematically undervaluing any other expression of religiousness. They are convinced that the liturgical celebrations are enough to substitute any practice of piety. But this judgment is incomplete, because if *Sacrosanctum Concilium* at no. 10 states that "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed and the fount from which all her power flows," the same document at no. 9 says that "the sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire activity of the Church." As a matter of fact, also Jesus points to a personal prayer. "Whenever you pray, go to your room, close your door, and pray to your Father in private" (Mt. 6, 6). And the Council reminds us of this gospel's passage (S.C. 12).

"People fool themselves when they consider the liturgical prayer enough for their Christian life, because the true liturgical prayer requires the prayer of the heart, besides the gestures of the body. Only the personal prayer enkindles and nourishes the flames of the heart, and only this prayer makes the people delight in liturgy, keeping them far from formalism and routine" (*Civiltà Cattolica*, June 6, 1970, page 523).

Personal piety prepares and accompanies liturgy, because through personal piety each member of the community cooperates in forming the psychological environment of faith, charity, and recollection

which ward off the idea of a gathering for magic. If one is not personally prepared, no liturgical gathering can transform the gathering into prayer. The personal share of the community's members in liturgy has its own value in connection with the personal relation to God, who is over the community's circle. If the personal union with God is absent because of lack of private piety, one's staying with hundred thousands of people performing the same liturgical action is useless" (L.M. Carli, *Nova et Vetera, Istituto Editor. Mediterraneo, Rome, pages 165-166*).

This is Paul VI's teaching: decrease of personal prayer "threatens liturgy with interior impoverishment, external rite, and formal practice" (May 22, 1970).

## 2. Do people pray today?

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Given the great confusion of ideas about the principles of prayer, the Holy Father is concerned with calling the faithful to sound doctrine. We feel obliged to quote some of his thoughts.

The Pope reproves the behavior of "those who feel themselves satisfied with charity for neighbor, but hold charity for God useless. Everyone knows the negative effects of such a spiritual attitude. It holds that only action, not prayer makes up a true Christian life. The social sense replaces the religious one" (August 21, 1969). The Holy Father reminds "the faithful to return to personal prayer. We say *return*, because it's our opinion that even the good, the faithful, the consecrated to the Lord pray less... Do people pray today? Does the modern man know how to pray? Does he feel obliged to? Does he feel in need of prayer? Does the Christian have the gift, or taste, or engagement for prayer?" The Pope recalls the rosary, the way of the cross, etc., above all the meditation, the adoration of the Eucharist, the examination of conscience, and the spiritual reading. "Even though the Church has never declared these prayers as liturgical, it always taught and recommended them" (August 13, 1969). Later, he continues insisting: "Today more than ever we have to nourish a spirit and a practice of personal prayer... Our understanding of things and events, the mysterious,

necessary help of grace are lowering, or are failing for lack of prayer." He touches upon the painful crisis we are witnessing these years. "We think that many of the spiritual and moral crisis of learned persons inserted in the ecclesiastical body are due to weakness, or lack of a regular and intense life of prayer, which was sustained by wise external customs before. Once these customs were abandoned, the prayer died out along with faithfulness and joy" (August 20, 1969).

Let us meet the Pope's sad, paternal invitation to consecrated souls. "Dear Religious, how could you fail desiring to better know the One you love and want to manifest to men? It is prayer that joins you to him! If you had lost its taste, you would feel desiring it, praying humbly again" (*Evangelica testificatio*, no. 42).

### 3. Sentiment and sentimentalism

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The cry of rebellion against vocal, private prayer wants to safeguard itself by the pretext that such a prayer may stifle the fit of internal enthusiasm, becoming sentimentalism. These miseries, however, are due to weakness of human nature, whatever the method and the form of prayer may be. For instance, we have already seen how Father Voillaume complained about the community's prayer.

Besides, we should avoid confusing sentiment with sentimentalism. The first requires a vivid, deep talk with God in the innermost of the heart, which fosters divine union. Sentimentalism instead is the sentiment's degeneration, or nebulous evanescence, which fosters no virtue, rather deceives souls. Unless we want to turn prayer into sound of words, sentiment is necessary. Someone wrote that geniuses need sentiment in art; heroes, in battle; and saints, in religion.

Saint Alphonsus was an apostle and a doctor of this kind of prayer; and this kind of prayer has formed the saints in the last centuries.



We quote two prayers by the Father, rich with sentiments, but lacking sentimentalism.

From the thanksgiving for the most holy Communion:

"The patriarchs and the prophets called Jesus Christ with ardent sighs, but they did not see him. O my soul, you instead were worthy to receive him in your chest! ... Lucky is my mouth that opened to receive him! ... Lucky is my tongue that welcomed him... Lucky is my breast that lodged him!..."

Let us come to the point:

"For your sake I want to suffer set-backs, to obey my superiors, to be humble with everyone, to love everyone as myself in your charity. For your sake I will observe silence, I will respond with anger to none of those who offend me, and will find no excuse when they reproach me..." (Vol. 2, page 16).

A prayer to the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the sanctification of the clerics says,

O purest Immaculate Heart of Mary, I recommend all the clerics to you: receive them under your particular protection... Holy Mother, here is the beautiful, golden harvest of the Church's fields, hope of the mystical spouse of Jesus. Holy Mother, assemble it in your Immaculate Heart and bring it up for Jesus. For the sake of Jesus, we beseech you to detach the clerics from earthly affection. Since they are committed to the divine service, see to it that nothing tie them to this shabby world, nor to any creature. Please clear out their young hearts of any earthly thing and fill them with divine love. Mother of the beautiful love, make these souls longing for the priesthood enamored of Jesus: fill their hearts, their thoughts, and all the powers of their spirit with Jesus. Starting from now, may they know and love fervently Jesus so that they may lead the people to know and love him... O purest, immaculate Mother, make the candidates for the priesthood immaculate so that they walk on the road of perfection with purity of heart and conscience, grow humble and obedient, meek and pious, practicing prayer and attending the holy sacraments (Vol. 7, page 14).

Away with sentimentalism! The Father wrote for the first novices, "The piety and devotion of the novices be simple, sincere, fervent, free of artificiality, scruples, and illusions. They will mind the substance not the form of piety" (Vol. 2, page 31).

## 4. Evidences

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Before proceeding further, we resort to evidences. In the previous chapters, talking about the Father's love for our Lord, the most holy Virgin, the angels, and the saints, we have quoted some of them; now, we quote other ones which related to prayer.

First, we begin with generic evidences.

The Father was a man of an intense, interior life, who prayed and meditated with a great spirit of faith. He was always absorbed in God; it appeared from his behavior. Says Father Vitale,

Men of God are men of prayer. We cannot find any of them without this characteristic. Some of them lack science, or great works, or the gift of miracles, or other virtues, but never the spirit of prayer which joins them to God and draws his divine graces. Those who lived far from the Father, or had no strict connection with him can understand his spirit of prayer from the many he wrote in the various circumstances.

His living faith, the feelings of his soul, and his great trust in God were the ground of his confidence that he would have obtained everything through prayer. What a great sweetness and unction he transfused in his prayers. His loving, tender, effective expressions addressed to our Lord in the private or common needs penetrate into the heart as odorous balm. We say many of these prayers every now and then in our communities, but they seem to us always new, pretty, and inspired; not tiring, nor boring... Due to this spirit, the Father used to spend a long time in prayer even when he was prostrated by his work for the institute.

When he thought that a grace was late to come, he exclaimed, "Oh, let us say an effective, powerful novena..." And he sometimes said, "The Lord grants me everything!..." Lucky him, who deserved it!

Now and then he gathered the community in the church, saying long prayers without taking care of the affairs, nor tiredness... because those were times we had to avoid an overhanging danger, or to seek enlightenments from God, or to face urgent needs... His private speeches regarding the institution's or the poor's needs, or the salvation of souls, ended with

these words, "Let us pray, let us pray!" These words were pronounced with such a feeling that they penetrated the spirit of the Father's listeners as a celestial voice, according to the witnesses' assertion (*Bulletin* 1929, pages 155-157).

The Father was exceptionally fond of vocal prayers, and spent a long time in saying them. He used to do so even with his listeners at the end of his preaching. As to his meditation, he spent more than half an hour on the Passion before saying mass, using the book by Blessed Thomas of Jesus. His afternoon's meditation was on God's benefits, reading Blessed Sarnelli; or on the eternal truths, reading Saint Alphonsus de Liguori. He ordered his communities to do the same, and recommended nightly prayer in the chapel. Perhaps to help his imagination, he used to look at many sacred pictures in his room. His speeches and conversations were permeated by his union with the Lord.

As to his custom of meditating before sacred pictures, such practice is recommended by Saint Theresa, but we do not know whether the Father learned it from her. "A good means to be in the presence of the Lord is having a picture or painting of his, inspiring devotion; by looking at it, it helps us enlarge our conversation with him" (*Cammino di perfezione*, ch. 26, no. 9).

"The Father was continuously in prayer. I saw him many times kneeling before the bed, doing the morning meditation prescribed by the rule, while looking at many sacred pictures displayed. As long as health allowed him, he also practiced nightly prayer. I slept so long in an adjacent room; therefore I realized when he got up to pray. Above all, it happened when he had to repair inconveniences of our communities. When I was still a cleric, he recommended to me nightly prayer with a great simplicity, because he thought that it was easy even for a young student. He said plenty of vocal prayers, and most of the many he printed were of his own. His mental prayer was lengthier, especially before and after mass. His morning and afternoon meditation according to our rule was about the Passion and the intimate sorrows of Jesus. To avoid tiredness, he meditated partly kneeling and standing; in the morning, however, mostly kneeling. To help his meditation, he used to display many sacred, inspiring pictures. He was always recollected in God, and his conversations had an odor of God's presence."

"He got up before 5:00 a. m., and meditated for an hour. After the mass, he said the thanksgiving prayer. Now and then during the day, he passed by the church to pray, always kneeling. He exhorted us always to say a prayer before any action for the

success of it and for the glory of the Lord. A sister remembers, "One day, thinking that the Father was out, I entered his room to put things in order. He was kneeling with raised hands and eyes toward the sky. He did not realize my presence, and the noise I made in the ante-room. Afraid, I went out." He prayed the vocal prayers with raised hands, in the shape of the cross, and exhorted us to imitate him. If someone of the orphans forgot it, the Father reminded him by a clap of his hands. He often meditated on the mysteries of the Passion, and exhorted us to do the same. After the mass, he went to his room to continue his morning meditation, which he had begun before we entered the chapel. In fact, the light of his room was on before our reveille.

"When he was with us, he said the vocal prayers together. I even saw him weeping. I also saw him in his room several times, in Oria, in attitude of prayer, almost never leaning. I think he meditated every day for at least an hour. If someone went to his room in the morning, he found the Father in meditation. When I was in Oria, if someone asked the Father for something before the mass, he used to say, 'Sorry, I am preparing myself for mass.' But he was available for works of charity, or confession. In the evening, he used to meditate on the divine benefits, using the book by Sarnelli, which he recommended to us."

In his last sickness, the Father was helped for about fifteen days by Father Carmel, who remembers, "He always said vocal prayers, and sometimes reprimanded me, who wandered because of tiredness."

He wrote several times how to say vocal prayers in common. "Prayer must be in unison, with feeble and contrite voice. To avoid errors, rehearsal shall be done." Sometimes, he himself presided over the rehearsal, signaling the pauses with a little bell. We conclude with an episode narrated by sisters. Once, while walking with the Father in a muddy road, the bell rang Angelus. The Father knelt, and we followed his example. If we had been alone, we wouldn't have done so." Usually, Angelus ended with the ejaculatory prayer, "Send, O Lord, holy apostles to your harvest." And we added, "Therefore, also in this one." After so many years, Father Spina remembered how "the Father accompanied the word *therefore*, with his hand's and head's gesture."

## 5. The spirit of prayer

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Let us recall a disposition of the Second Vatican Council: "Members of institutes should assiduously cultivate the spirit of prayer and prayer itself" (P.C. no. 6).

When a person often prays with fervor, we say that he/she has the spirit of prayer. In fact, due to their interdependence, love for prayer and spirit of prayer strengthens each other. Strictly speaking, however, prayer and spirit of prayer are not the same.

The spirit of prayer is the habitual disposition of a person to be in touch with God by praying according to the Lord's teaching, "He told them a parable on the necessity of praying always and not losing heart" (Lk. 18, 1). Saint Paul also wrote, "Never cease praying" (Thes. 5, 17). People do that in the way it is possible, transforming their actions into prayer, without leaving out their duties.

Is it possible such a transformation? The Father suggests, "Before any action we have to lift up our mind to God, with the intention to pray and thank him in any moment. This intention is called *virtual*, and makes up for human weakness, which is unable always to stay in actual prayer. In his kindness, our Lord welcomes any loving intention to do what human weakness or other conditions cannot" (Vol. 1, page 74).

This is the teaching of the masters of the spirit. The intention of praying in any moment, however, could remain.... a simple intention. Therefore, one of the authors of *Perfectae caritatis*, by experience writes, "The Council Fathers had only written 'the spirit of prayer,' but to be actual and positive they added 'the prayer itself,' because both of them are needed. It should be obvious that the spirit of prayer be joined with prayer, but the Council took its wise precautions by saying, 'Members of institutes should assiduously cultivate the spirit of prayer and prayer itself'" (Father Anastasio del SS. Rosario, *La vita religiosa nella Chiesa alla luce del Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II*, page 189).

How much should the religious pray?

Rules and tradition mark the least indispensable to keep the spirit of prayer alive in the Religious, according to their vocation. A faulty lack of attention in the practices of piety has negative influence on the spirit of prayer. Hence the Father's care that all of us be very faithful to the established practices of piety.

The ambient of recollection in the religious house helps the spirit of prayer, and the rules are very concerned with it. Paul VI emphasizes this point. "The spiritual man perceives the times of silence as required by divine love, and needs a certain solitude to feel God, who speaks to his heart" (*Evangelica testificatio*, no. 46).

Let us recall that the Father held silence as an indispensable factor of recollection and interior life. He was very jealous of it, and wished that even while opening or closing the doors one should avoid noise. If someone talked aloud, he signaled to him with the gesture and a feeble voice to be moderate, often adding a proper saying, such as the one of Isaiah which is applied to Jesus, "Not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street" (Is. 42, 2).

Once, while staying at La Guardia, he noticed that the peace of the ambient was disturbed by thirteen guinea hens cheekily cackling. He had them killed for food of the communities; the remnant were sent to the community of the Holy Spirit with this note, "The were killed because they did not observe silence."

## 6. Asking the spirit of prayer

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Both prayer and knowledge of how to pray is a gift from God. Scripture is decisive on this point. "The Spirit too helps in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groaning that cannot be expressed in speech" (Rom. 8, 26). For this reason, God gives the Church the spirit of prayer. "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants a spirit of grace and petition" (Zech. 12, 10).

The Father asked the spirit of prayer insistently. "Dear Jesus, divine teacher, you ordered prayer as a necessary means of salvation, give me a spirit of fervent prayer for the interests of your divine Heart" (Vol. 6, page 99).

When the Father became a Carmelite tertiary, he was called John of the Cross from Saint John of the Cross, a mystical doctor

and a great teacher of prayer, who became his special patron and to whom he appealed for the gift of prayer. We quote:

My glorious Saint John of the Cross, I kneel trustfully at your feet, invoking your powerful intercession. I am exceedingly miserable and ignorant of holy prayer. For this reason my soul is as barren of virtues as a sterile land, rather it bears thorns of bad inclinations and sins! I long for applying myself to holy prayer, even though it is too late because I have spent so many years in vain through my fault. I beg you to accept me as the last of your disciples. Be my teacher of holy prayer. Give me your merciful, helping hand to enter the way of salvation and to improve in it. You were so endowed with the treasures of celestial wisdom that you reached the top of the divine contemplation. You were so prepared with the perfect mortification of the senses; as well as experienced in the nightly darkness of faith, perfectly detached from everything, and humbly guided by the movements of grace and the operations of the Holy Spirit. For the sake of divine kindness, which made you a great contemplative saint, I humbly beg you to grant me from the most holy Heart of Jesus an effective grace so that I may deny any satisfaction of the senses, mortify my passions, subdue my selfishness, and make my spirit die to the world. So, I will be free and ready for holy prayer, as the Lord wants. My glorious saint, see to it that love and humility be always joined in my prayer, and my spirit be always applied in it. So, and through a perfect conformity, I can achieve divine union with the divine will. You were a great teacher of souls, show me the way I have to run along, put me in guard against the snares of selfishness, my bad nature, demon, or any deceiving direction. Keep me far from spiritual vanities and illusions of fantasy; make me run along the way of holy oration with pure faith, only seeking God. Take care of my poor soul, which is starving for being unable to pick up the manna and draw water! When my cold, dry, careless, and oppressed spirit recoils from holy prayer, you, my sweetest teacher, lead me strongly and gently with the same zeal as you did with souls during your life.. For the sake of your zeal, I beseech you to obtain this gift to me. If am unworthy of it because of my faults, or natural defects, you submit your merit to Jesus. For the sake of his most holy wounds, impetrate forgiveness of my sins, creating a new heart and an upright spirit in me. How many times I became unworthy of this great gift because of my sins and my unfaithfulness to grace! I made myself for ever unworthy of such a sublime gift! Since mine it's a serious case and my cause is lost, I appeal to you who are a great, zealous teacher of holy prayer. Be my lawyer near the throne of divine mercy, and give me back what I have lost. My dear Saint John, you know in God my miseries, the needs of my soul, my nature and sins, the bad inclinations and wishes. You know the way I have to run according to the will of God, and how short my life is to make me better... Therefore, I surrender myself into your hands. I do not ask for high contemplations; not at all, but the grace to run along the way of holy prayer. I hope to achieve it through you, for the sake of Jesus, Mary, Saint Joseph, Saint Theresa, and the holy cross. Please hear me, hear me quickly (Vol. 6, page 131).

## 7. The pale flame

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The Father does not aim at rapture, or mystical heights of Saint John of the Cross, as they are excellently described by the saint in the Alive Flame. Rather, he finds himself so far from them that he writes four strophes antithetic to the four strophes of Alive Flame. (1) The Father applies to himself "the pitiable state of a soul who is far from divine union, and is full with himself and creatures.

O very pale flame  
That freeze and waste  
The heart in its inner darkness,  
Whether you triumph or hiss  
Squeaking, you show  
How different you are from what I know!

Flame drawing from the eyes  
Bitter tears,  
Deeply wounding by twice hitting,  
Flame of horrid hell,  
By changing life into death  
You make people always pay.

Flash of horrid fire,  
Whose gloomy glare  
Wraps the inner caves of my chest,  
You freeze and darken the good  
To me, who was blind and bare?  
With the torpor I detest.

How full with worries  
You awake in my chest,  
Where you unfortunately dwell!  
Your spasmodic breast  
Full with pest  
How poorly and deeply on me fell!



He adds, "O great Saint, John of the Cross, who were devoured by the *Alive Flame*, can you be merciless to me? Have mercy! Have mercy! Have mercy!" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 20). Writes Father Vitale,

We do not know if he experienced infused gifts from the celestial patrons because he denied it. But it is sure that he talked of all kinds of supernatural prayers, beginning with quiet ones up to the mystic nuptials, with clearness, lucidity, and exactitude as if he had experienced them. He was acquainted with the works of Saint John of the Cross, Saint Teresa, and Saint John Climaco. Dark night, mystical stairs, ascensions of Theresa were no problem for him to understand. He solved these puzzles without any objection or doubt; in fact he seemed somewhat expert at understanding such complicated things (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 291).

Father Vitale also wrote,

When I was a youth, but not yet a priest, a spiritual learned man for fear that I could deceive myself by prayer warned me, "Mind not to read Saint John of the Cross." I informed the Father, who answered, "That holy man did not read it." When I happened to read Saint John of the Cross, I realized that the holy man had read it, but he had not understood certain ascensions of mystic states, as myself. They cannot be understood, unless people experience them. What about the Father? However it may be, holiness does not consist in the infused prayer, which rather may be dangerous. Therefore, it is enough for us to know that the Father was a man of a great spirit of prayer, and we should imitate him. Living together with him, we accompanied him in the streets, houses, churches, rooms, and heard some invocations at low voice, sighs, and wails which slipped out of his mouth. We deem that all these were ejaculatory prayers, because the Father always aimed at being in touch with heaven through constant prayer (*Bulletin*, 1929, page 157).

The Father often said that the Lord "gave our institute the spirit of prayer"; but we point out that the founder conveyed it. In the preface to the prayer book of the community, the Father points out,

Prayer is the sure, infallible means that the infinite kindness of the most holy Heart of Jesus gave us to obtain any grace, as well as eternal life for us and for others.

This least institute passed through so many events and vicissitudes. Since its beginning, it was nourished by prayers and practices of piety, and pushed forth by ingenious, sacred industries. Prayer and piety formed the aspiration and the respiration of this least creature of the Lord. All of us are witnesses of the singular and sometimes prodigious graces that we have

obtained through these divine means over so many years. We have seen this pious institution along with its religious houses, its orphanages, and its unexpected celestial means rising from nothing (S.C. Vol. 9, page 2).

We have said that the spirit of the institute reflects the spirit of the founder, who made prayer the soul of his life.

Writing to a spiritual daughter, he says, "Do everything with prayer" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 257). A sister reports a graceful episode. A door of the house of Trani was stuck, and the sisters were unable to open it, their efforts notwithstanding. While they were maneuvering again to open it, the Father passed by and asked if they had prayed. At the negative answer, he added seriously, "How do you dare start an action without praying before?" He said a Hail Mary together with the sisters. Shortly after, a sister gave a push, and the door opened easily. He wrote, "The prayer is necessary to everything" (Vol. 39, page 35). "Do everything with prayer." Even though absorbed by the daily activity and the worries of his institute, he held prayer first, as the engine of his activity. According to Saint Bonaventure, quoted by the Father (S.C. Vol. 10, page 33), "The time we spend praying is rewarded by God with his blessing upon our works."

Prayer is the secret of the work's success:

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It is the fire, which produces the energy, and the driving power which moves all things. Ah! without the interior fire, which we call spiritual life, neither prayer nor penance, nor any relationship between creature and Creator, nor a loving union of the soul with God may be achieved. No redeeming word can be said to conquer the hearts, no truly useful, lasting beneficence can be accomplished. Without this fire, any struggle can be summed up in this statement of the apostle, "**I have become like one beating the air, like an instrument, whose sound makes a vanishing noise**" (I Cor. 13...)

Interior life, union with God, zeal, charity, and thirst for souls give the people of God a great weapon to perform great things for the Lord and for souls, not through their personal work, sacrifices, money, and talent, but through the invisible, or better yet, the visible help of the divine power. This weapon, which helps us prevail over everything, this golden key, which opens the treasure of divine grace, is prayer. A Servant of God (Father Cusmano) said this impressive, unforgettable sentence in his preaching, "God is omnipotent, but prayer is the most omnipotent!"(sic). (Vol. 45, pages 155-157).

## 8. His teaching

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We glean from the Father's teaching, explaining first the nomenclature. The authors distinguish between mental prayer and vocal prayer. The Father follows the classical term "prayer," used by Saint Theresa and Saint John of the Cross, and subdivides it into 'prayer' and 'meditation.'

Discussing both of them, he writes these unforgettable words,

For the Christian and religious life, prayer is indispensable; it is made of prayer and meditation.

Our Lord grants his grace through prayer. He said, "Pray, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." The theologians teach that prayer is *absolutely necessary* for our eternal salvation, because none can be saved without prayer. To stimulate us to pray, our Lord pledged his word, assuring us of the infallible efficacy of prayer, i.e., we'll obtain from his divine Heart what is necessary for us to live and die saintly.

Indispensable and effective as it is, prayer depends on meditation. That the prayer's efficacy depends on meditation is a truth to be taken into serious consideration. Meditation makes a person understand the necessity of grace and compels her to ask for it; it makes one understand how much God deserves worship and love, urging the person to stay in the divine presence in order to implore love, forgiveness, and graces; it makes the person understand her own nothingness and human failings, drawing her to implore mercy and salvation. The meditation on Jesus Christ's mysteries inflames the soul with holy wishes of seeking, loving, pleasing, and owing Jesus (Vol. 1, page 25).

Elsewhere the Father insists,

Based on the word of God, on the teaching of the Fathers and of the Church, as well as on experience, the holy writers always held prayer so necessary to progress in holy perfection as to conclude that no one neglecting prayer may achieve any solid virtue.

Prayer draws enlightenments to the spirit for the understanding and disliking of one's own miseries; infuses the holy fear of God; enlightens the soul about the eternal truths; makes her communicate with God; fosters faith, hope, and draws the heart to divine love. A person who does not pray is like a barren, cursed land. On the contrary, a person fond of prayer is like a land watered by the dew of grace (S.C. Vol. 10, page 185).

The Father exhorts her daughters to meditation, submitting three reasons to them. "I heartily exhort the Daughters of Divine Zeal to be fond of meditation, because it is the main preparation to receive Communion worthily, and because it nurtures the spirit of effective prayer to win any grace from God; furthermore, meditation prompts the soul to reach the highest perfection" (Vol. 1, page 27).

We do not dwell at length on the Father's meditation method, which is Saint Alphonsus': preparation, consideration, affections, prayers, and resolves. Rather, we recall his remarks on distractions during the meditation, especially the involuntary ones.

However, the people must know that they may be responsible for the distractions that enter. No one can say, 'I am not responsible.' In fact, distractions mainly come in because we are not mortified or dead to ourselves.

It is worse when distractions arise because of our previous dissipation, which originates from talking vainly, having attachments, and the like. Usually the chief cause of distractions during meditation is attachment, because the object or the people to whom we are attached come to our mind. If opposed and rejected, these distractions are involuntary in act, but voluntary in cause, but dispelling them is harder, however, because of their voluntary cause. A mortified, diligent person seldom undergoes distractions during meditation, and when it does happen she dispels them easily.

Hence, everyone will deduce how much she must humiliate herself before God because of the distractions which interfere with meditation; even though there is no sin in act when she regrets, retracts, and condemns the causes, still she must plead guilty before God. Retracting the cause of distractions is truly sincere when the soul amends her attachments and the daily dissipation as well as devotes herself to mortification and exercise of holy humility (Vol. 1, page 34).

Here there are additional remarks by the Father.

If we often meditated on the truths of faith, if we were often in the divine presence, if we were fond of prayer, if we prayed for hours, if we were fully aware of the mysteries of faith in our actions all day long, what mutations would happen in us! Bit by bit, a ray of God's infinite splendor would enter us, our mind would be filled with divine light, and darkness would be driven away. Through divine light we would know how to abhor evil, how to embrace well, while a celestial fire would inflame our heart and move our will effectively. If we persevered in the exercise of meditation, we would become holy. On the contrary, if we are cool and attached to many things, if our passions are alive, if our mind is dull, if we are lacking virtues,

all this is due to our lack of meditation. We do not nurture our spirit, and it becomes exhausted; we deny ourselves the bread of life, and it always remains as faint as dying; the spirit's eyes are blind, its ears are deaf, its palate does not savor the taste of the celestial things any longer. Thus, while the starving spirit declines, the body boldly takes over. In short, if we do not become spiritual, it is because of our lack of meditation" (Vol. 24, page 126).

About the use of health reason as a pretext to leave out meditation, the Father recommends,

No one will leave out the morning meditation without having a reason approved by the authority. The health reason excuses from doing the meditation only when it implies a danger or a serious inconvenience. For the sake of interests, people in the world sometimes work even when they are sick or feverish, at their own risk. And God helps them because they are parents earning the bread for their children, or employees doing their duties, or laborers working for their masters. If by obedience we spare ourselves when we are sick or feverish, at least let us take care of never leaving out meditation for cheap excuses, which can be considered serious by suggestion of the devil or by our bad nature (S.C. Vol. 10, page 180).

## 9. Necessity and efficacy of prayer

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Speaking of prayer, the Father insists on its necessity.

"Prayer is *necessary* because our Lord grants no grace without prayer. The sacred writers say that prayer is as much necessary for spiritual life as breath is for natural life because prayer is the breath of the soul" (Vol. L, page 58). He calls upon the saints' examples: "The saints were wisest in profiting by this great means. To be saved, to improve heroic virtues, to conquer and throw down any inordinate passion, overcome any difficulty, prevail over hell, sanctify and save innumerable souls, and work striking wonders, the saints prayed continuously. They cooperated by hard work and sacrifices. Work and sacrifices, however, would have been of no value without fervent and continuous prayer. Both the uselessness of our efforts and the necessity of prayer for our sanctification are pointed out by these words of our Lord Jesus Christ, '**You can do nothing without me**' (Jan. 15,

5). It is obvious that we can do no good for ourselves and others without the help and the enlightenment of our Lord, but we can obtain this help and enlightenment by praying" (Vol. 1, page 58).

"Prayer is also as *necessary* as it is *effective*.

This is a consoling truth, because if we pray with faith, fervor, and due dispositions our prayer reaches God, obtaining what we ask for.

This certainty is based on this promise of our Lord Jesus Christ, '**Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you**' (Mt. 7, 7). He also narrated the parable of the friend knocking at a friend's door and asking for three loaves (Lk. all, 5-8) as well as the parable of the widow who got justice from an unjust judge who was reluctant to do so (Lk. 18, 1-8). On another occasion he said, 'Would any of you who are Fathers give your son a snake when he asks for fish? Or would you give him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, the Father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him' (Lk. all, 11-13)!

Besides, he solemnly said, 'I tell you the truth: the Father will give you whatever you ask of Him in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name; ask and you will receive, so that your happiness may be complete' (Jan. 16, 23-24). 'If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it' (Jan. 14, 14). Given all these solemn promises, who can doubt about the prayer's divine efficacy? Who can doubt that the Lord hears us? Is there any excuse for those who get no graces for lack of prayer?" (Vol. 1, page 59).

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## 10. Absolute trust in prayer

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The Father lived these truths so deeply as to bind himself by vow (ch. 6, no. 10) to believe that through prayer the Lord would hear him in spite of any difficulty or opposition.

He always exhorted people to resort to prayer. "Let us pray!"

Let us do some penance because the times are growing dark. May God protect and save us" (Vol. 31, page 58). "Let us trust in constant prayer with the purest intention" (Vol. 32, page 114). "Let us pray with firm trust that right, constant prayer never fails" (Vol. 35, page 71). "Let us pray, let us pray; prayer is omnipotent!" (Vol. 35, page 71). "Let us pray continuously. Constant, humble, trustful, and pure prayer is infallible" (Vol. 36, page 62). He wrote to a mother superior, "Consult in your prayer our Lord and the most holy Virgin, making up your mind" (Vol. 36, page 149). "If you want to become a saint, be fond of prayer, especially of meditation on the Passion of our Lord. Love so much Jesus, because love teaches and does everything" (Vol. 34, page 35). "Humble, devout, perseverant, right, trustful prayer with living interest penetrates heaven and obtains any grace. In spite of inevitable difficulties, God's help will prevail" (Vol. 39, page 6). Informing the communities of a chance to open a house in Padua, he wrote, "As we use in any enterprise, we premise proper prayers to avoid that our sins turn back the apparition of divine mercy. We ask the divine spirit and the most holy Virgin to enlighten and guide us, making us succeed for the greater glory of God, the good of souls, and the consolation of the most holy Heart of Jesus" (Vol. 34, page 94).

"Humble, constant, perseverant prayer along with good behavior, observance, and pure intention obtains everything from divine kindness" (Vol. 39, page 46). "The probationer must base on the spirit of prayer his hope of improving his love for Jesus. If the great means of prayer is well used, everything will go well; the lack of prayer instead makes the source of grace dry, while everything dies out. God forbid it!" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 166). "He wrote very many prayers and poems to the Madonna, Jesus, and the saints. As soon as a saint was canonized, he wrote prayers and hymns for him. Every time his communities were in need, he wrote plenty of warm prayers which flowed from his ardent heart, and the communities said them. In these writings, his profound faith and total surrender in God stand out. Remembering the troubles which threatened the institution with death, the Father recalled that in such cases, the only resort was prayer. "My son, in those circumstances we had to appeal to our Lord through prayer; there was no other means." "The only way to reach our Lord and to be united with him is deep humility, pure faith, mortification, and the spirit of prayer."

Generic prayers from the books were not enough for the Father; he liked specific ones. For instance, when the Morning Star Sisters were searching for a fitting house, he exhorted them "to say

*special prayers* to our Lord. I say *special*, meaning prayers fitting to your case, because those from devotional books aren't. I followed this system for over forty years to form my pious institution, and divine kindness blessed it. I wrote *special prayers* for each circumstance, following the divine inspiration" (Vol. 39, page 30). And he insists, "We obtained the graces by dint of prayers and novenas *written on purpose*. Your holy founder (Sister M. Luisa) once wrote to me, "In any circumstance we have experienced the miracles of prayer, and I am a witness" (Vol.39, page 37).

The various circumstances, or needs, are the occasion of the Father's many prayers. For instance, he wrote them to achieve his own conversion, sanctification, and the virtues of humility, detachment, and zeal; the conversion of souls and the institute's progress; as well as to overcome difficulties, avoid dangers, and be freed from divine punishments; or for the needs of the Church and the world. Specifically, he wrote numerous, ardent prayers to win good workers to the most holy Church, and to make the *Rogate* triumph, which was his passion. We agree with Father Vitale, who writes, "Perhaps, it is not a great over-statement to say that he wrote a prayer every day... In the hardest times, he engaged the help of all paradise, so to speak"(2) (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 292).

A theologian remarks, "His prayers are original. Some of them are quite long and developed in a simple, personal style, which reflects the author's living, pious sentiments."

Prayers and practices of piety were established for each day of the week: on Sunday, for the most holy Trinity; on Monday, for the souls in purgatory; on Tuesday, for the guardian angel and Saint Anthony; on Wednesday, for Saint Joseph; on Thursday, for the Blessed Sacrament and Saint Louis; on Friday, for the Sacred Heart; on Saturday, for the most holy Virgin.

It was likewise for the months: January was dedicated to the Name of Jesus, and ended with a solemn novena and a petition. In February, we celebrated the feasts of Our Lady of Lourdes and the sacred tongue of Saint Anthony of Padua; in March, Saint Joseph; in April, the Sacred Face. May and June were respectively dedicated to the most holy Virgin and the Sacred Heart with preaching, mortifications, and offering of the hearts; July, to the most Precious Blood. In August, we had the feasts of Assumption and Saint Anthony's



birth; in September, the *Bambinella*, Our Lady in sorrow, Our Lady of La Salette, and Our Lady of Mercy; in October, the holy rosary and the guardian angels; in November, the souls in purgatory; in December, Immaculate Mary and Christmas. Now and then during the year, the communities had vigils on the eve of feasts to prepare themselves, or to impetrate God's mercy on the institute and the world.

## 11. Particular cases

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Besides the prayers by rule on holidays, the Father wrote quite a few ones for specific solemnities, or for particular cases. He wrote,

"The liturgical feasts are also acceptable times for prayer. Just as the kings of this world are more favorably disposed to grant favors on their saint's day or on the anniversary of their coronation and victories, so the adorable Lord Jesus Christ is more disposed to hear us in the days set to commemorate the mysteries and the triumphs of his divine love for human beings. The same happens to the most holy Virgin Mary, the angels, and the saints on the days of their feasts.

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Hence, we shall profit by these solemnities by appealing humbly and confidently with petitions and prayers in order to obtain what we need; these favorable opportunities cannot be missed" (Vol. L, page 75).

And the Father missed no one, as we see from his many petitions. He confidently appealed to the Lord, the Madonna, the angels, and the saints to be generous with graces and blessings for him, the institute, the Church, and the world on the days of their feasts.

For the Father, prayer was the universal remedy. He taught: "On every occasion, circumstance, peril, and need, we must resort to prayer, because it is the golden key opening the treasure of the divine graces and mercies." He also reminds the institute's members of the practice of the six novenas.

When we find ourselves in such circumstances, usually we resort to the following six novenas: to the most holy Heart of Jesus, the most holy Virgin under the most appropriate title, Saint Joseph, Saint Michael the archangel, Saint Anthony of Padua, and a special prayer to all souls.

If we say two or three novenas, it can take nine or eighteen or twenty seven days, depending on how many of them we say daily in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. For an urgent grace, we may say the novena in three days by reciting it three times a day. For a most urgent grace, we may complete the novena in a day by reciting it nine times in the same day (Vol. 1, page 78).

In connection with these prayers, the most holy Virgin was usually invoked as Immaculate, but the Father had also written specific novenas to her under the title of Our Lady of: "Perpetual Help," "Miracles," "Good Counsel," "Sacred Letter," and "Quick Hearer in urgent and desperate cases" (Vol. 7, pages 42, 130, 165, 151). The title was chosen according to the circumstance.

Privately, the Father often recommended having recourse to Our Lady of Good Counsel, especially to fulfill well one's own duty.

"When one finds herself in doubt or perplexity, besides calling upon Jesus' name she should resort to the Mother of Good Counsel, by saying for instance, '**Mother of Good Counsel**, for Jesus' sake, your beloved son, please enlighten me on how to behave, how to resolve,' or the like. The invocation to the Mother of Good Counsel has been always effective beyond belief because it opens even the dullest minds" (Vol. 1, page 124).

During the war, the Father pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Our Lady of Bread in Novoli (Lecce). At his coming back, he ordered the community to add a Hail Mary to the prayers before and after meal. He wished "each house to have a picture of her exposed in the kitchen so that bread never fails, due to her motherly kindness." This title was also a remembrance of Melanie, who dwelled several years in the province of Lecce, becoming fond of that title. "You should know that our dear Melanie had a special devotion to Our Lady of Bread. Before leaving, she left a picture in our mill so that Our Lady of Bread ever provides us with bread. As a matter of fact, thanks to divine providence, bread never failed us, even in the hard times" (Vol. 34, page 124).

## 12. The prayer of the heart

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The Father counted very much on the Church's following formulas of prayer, and recommended them warmly: Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory to be, Requiem, and the daily rosary, which our communities will never omit" (Vol. L, page 86); the prayers from Scripture, especially the psalms; the prayers from the missal, and the Litany of the Saints. But he insisted on the personal prayer, which is not bound to fixed formulas, rather it flows out of the heart enamored of God: the prayer of the heart.

The most effective prayer is the one coming from the heart. The person who is skilled in mental prayer, meditation, and mortification; the person feeling the love of Jesus along with his Heart's interests; the person zealous for knowing and loving Jesus, feeling compassion and ardent zeal for souls; this person who is dedicated to virtue and sacrifice, needs no formulas of prayer, because the Spirit, dwelling in her, makes her groan *inexpressibly* (Rom. 8, 26). To obtain divine graces for divine glory and salvation of all, she will pray with lively ardor and will annihilate herself before God and Jesus' divine presence, kissing his adorable feet and looking at the supreme goodness with most tender trust. Beautiful, wise, loving, convincing words will come from her heart longing for the Heart of Jesus' interests, winning the graces, which the world does not deserve. Tears will well up in your eyes, and sighs from the heart, as from a fountain. To better touch the Heart of her divine spouse and win graces for God's glory and salvation of souls, which would seem almost impossible to obtain, this person will combine her ardent prayers with her effusive and diffusive thanksgiving for the graces that the Lord has granted, is granting, and will grant to everyone. Kneeling down with hands raised to the sky or to the crucifix or to the holy tabernacle, she will be as the priest, between the vestibule and the altar, moistening the ground with tears, if necessary.

Her prayer will become one with our Lord Jesus Christ's divine prayer; the wails of her soul will be the wails of Jesus in solitude, in the caves, on the mountains; her sighs will be the sighs and the prayers of Jesus suffering in his Passion from the garden to the cross, up to the loud cry when he breathed his last; her prayers will be the divine petitions that God, the eternal pontiff hidden in the Holy Sacrament, repeats for us until the end of time.

When this person who is united with Jesus through meditation and the sacrifice of herself is obliged by obedience or common life to interrupt her prayer, with all her heart she will make her time and actions an actual or habitual prayer; the night will be also a suitable time for her to pray more ardently and passionately in union with Jesus, and even while sleeping she will pray

in union with Jesus, at least intentionally and by protestation and desire.

No one but God knows the graces this person wins from the adorable Heart of Jesus, in favor of the holy Church, the pilgrim souls, the souls who are in purgatory, and the whole world. No one but God knows how much her prayer pleases the most holy Heart of Jesus. It was to this praying person that the Holy Spirit spoke in the words of the celestial spouse, "The flowers appear on the earth... the cooing of the turtledove is heard in our land... Come then, my love, my lovely one, come. My dove, hiding in the clefts of the rock, in the coverts of the cleft of the rock let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet" (Songs 2, 12-14). "The voices coming from the heart, longing for my glory and for goodness of souls are **utterances of paradise.**"

Even when this person forgets herself in the prayer to the most holy Heart of Jesus' interests, she will leave her prayer in a holier state than before, sharing the good she has obtained for souls, the divine glory she has caused, and the celestial consolations she has given the beloved Heart of Jesus. I wish such souls were in all communities that are consecrated to Jesus> (Vol. 1, page 87).

### **L3. Examination of conscience and spiritual reading**

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Examination of conscience and spiritual reading are among the practices of piety particularly neglected today, much to Paul VI's regret. For the Father, they were indispensable and powerful means of sanctification.

If even the slightest sin is to be hated, examination of conscience is indispensable. The Father wants his children "to be aware of the slightest imperfection, mindful of the sayings of our Lord, 'You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt. 5, 48). 'I assure you, on judgment day people will be held accountable for every unguarded word they speak'" (Mt. 12, 36). Talking about the examination of conscience, the Father insists with practical examples on rooting out the faults and their habit:

Oh! if the Lord enlightened us to perceive and define our sins and our light imperfections as they really are, how many roots of hidden passions we would discover in ourselves! Hence the necessity of making a very accurate examination of conscience with recollection and divine enlightenment, instead of making it on the surface, as some do! (Vol. 1, page 16).

Since it is an important factor of sanctification, spiritual reading will be always in force in our houses. When the people listen to it in silence with interior and exterior quiet, they seem to be meditating. Spiritual reading may be public or private.

Successful spiritual reading is like a beneficial, gentle rain which irrigates the soul, penetrates the heart sweetly, and spreads wide inside the person to her great pleasure and profit. In the meditation one may not always be able or disposed to attract the stream of grace in a sensible way, or she has to make many efforts; in spiritual reading instead, the soul receives the sweet stream of grace passively and specifically. To profit by it, each one must be attentive, as if Jesus himself were speaking to her with the words of that book; in fact, any good spiritual reading is from God.

Treating of the private spiritual reading, the Father suggests, "If you happen to feel drawn to meditate on some specific passage while reading, please do it because it will be helpful." (Vol. 1, pages 90-91).

## 14. Exhortation

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At the closure of this very important chapter on prayer, we remind you of Paul VI's exhortation to the Religious. "Do not forget the experience of history: faithfulness to prayer is the religious life's vitality; lack of prayer, its decline" (*Evangelica testificatio*, no. 42).

This grave warning from the Pope is a beforehand comment on the Father's vibrant and sad exhortation, whose words should be engraved in each of his children's mind and heart. The Father's following trenchant introduction, "*The padre talks to his daughters in Jesus Christ*," calls our attention on the importance that the Father annexed to his following words:

You along with the future Daughters of Divine Zeal must know and keep in mind that this **Pious Institute of the Heart of Jesus'** interests, along

with the two religious communities, the orphanages and the institutions, originated, improved, and was formed through prayer; especially through the prayer and the yearly petition we presented to the eternal Father in the most holy name of Jesus in January, believing our Lord Jesus Christ's divine, ineffable promises. Through such petitions we asked the divine, infinite goodness for special graces of sanctification and formation in the Lord for this pious institute; we asked the kingdom of God along with its justice, basing our faith on our Lord Jesus Christ's merits of infinite value, on his divine word, and also on the most holy Virgin, the angels, and the saints' powerful intercession.

We point out that the prayers we have made in any time and circumstance, especially during the mass, the feasts, and embarrassing situations were accompanied by the conditions we have talked about in this detailed chapter. In the same time, we have endeavored to combine the works with prayer, avoiding even the least venial sin by deliberate assent. We have done our best to help our neighbor spiritually and corporeally for God's sake only, always imploring good workers for the holy Church in compliance with our special mission, besides practicing various spiritual industries. Thus, divine mercy bent down toward this small grain, blessed it, looked favorably at the poor of his divine Heart and said, "**Grow and multiply!**"

The community is bound in duty to keep in mind such things, knowing that when the untarnished faith in prayer, in the yearly petition, in the spiritual industries grows feeble, God forbid! When the vision of the pure, right intention grows dim, God forbid! When the spiritual industries are neglected, God forbid! When even the least deliberate defect does not matter, then the door is open to the devil, who will come in to ravage the sheepfold! Disgusted, God will withdraw his grace, will stop looking favorably at this pious institute, to which he has been so loving and giving so many benefits, holding it as his own no longer. On the contrary, he will become indignant at it, because the more he benefits and cherishes an institute or a community, the more he becomes indignant at it when it becomes unfaithful! Then, everything will go to ruin: what has been built for so long, even for centuries, will fall down decaying in a short while, as unluckily happened to so many institutes once holy and blooming in the holy Church.

The superiors, above all, will pay careful attention to avoid slackening in the communities by maintaining observance along with the exercise of holy virtues, by strongly opposing the least deliberate defect, and by dismissing the people who offer no hope. They will be also watchful in order to prevent false vocations from entering the community. Let us pray that the Lord give us the people of true vocation, whose hearts are with Jesus, whose thoughts are turned to Jesus, and whose minds understand the Heart of Jesus' interests, their own sanctification, and the salvation of others as well! (Vol. I, pages 88-90).

## Notes

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(1) The works by Saint John of the Cross expound his spiritual canticles and, unintentionally, manifest his mystical experiences. Alive Flame of Love interprets a poem of four strophes, "which is the shortest of his chief works, but the most overflowing with light and fire" (S. Giovanni Della Croce, Opera, Postulazione Generale dei Carmelitani Scalzi, Roma - Pref. page XII). It discusses the supreme mystical state that we can have on earth. The saint acknowledges, "These strophes contain intimate, spiritual things, for which the common language is inadequate. After experiencing some loath in manifesting them, now I take courage to write them because the Lord enlightened my intellect and infused fervor to me" (Ibid. page 785). Here are the strophes:

Living flame of love  
That sweetly wound  
The soul at its innermost center;  
Since you are not a shy dove  
Finish the work, make it crooned,  
And break the cloth with your encounter.  
O sweet fire! O strife  
Of pleasant wound! O gentle  
Hand! O delicate touch  
Smelling of eternal life  
And expiating any parcel!  
By killing death, you gave life so much.  
O lamps of pure splendor,  
In whose fire  
The inner caves of my recess,  
(I was blind and in error),  
Become warm and dyer  
Marvelously to excess.  
How sweet and loving  
You awaken into me,  
Where you dwell alone!  
Your tasty aspiring  
To goods and jubilee  
Sweetly within me has flown!

(2) During grave persecutions against the institute at Francavilla Fontana, the Father pledged to say the following prayers: "Novenas to find grace and mercy for me and my institutes near our Lord Jesus Christ and his most holy Mother. The novenas begin on April 20, 1910, Wednesday, feast of Saint Dismas. They are directed: to the most holy Heart of Jesus, the most holy Name of Jesus, the crucified Lord, Sacred Face, the Most Precious Blood, the child Jesus, the agonizing Jesus, Jesus Savior, the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus in the Sacrament under the titles of July first, the most holy Virgin Bambinella, Immaculate Mary, the most holy Virgin Mother of God, my Bambinella Empress, divine child Mary, Our Lady in sorrow, Our Lady at the Cana wedding, Our Lady in the grotto of Bethlehem, Our Lady of Assumption, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Victory, Immaculate Heart of Mary, Our Lady of Pompei, Our Lady of the

Choir in Agreda, Our Lady of La Salette, Our Lady of the Letter quick Hearer, Our Lady of the Fountain, Our Lady of Vena, Our Lady of the Well, Our Lady of Graces, Our Lady of Mercy, Our Lady Morning Star, Our Lady Help of the Christians, Our Lady of the Apparitions, Our Lady of all Titles, Our Lady of all Sanctuaries, Our Lady of Audience, Our Lady Desolate, Our Lady of Remedy, Our Lady under the Titles of July first, Saint Joseph (patronage), Saint Joseph under all Titles, Saint Joseph of Unknown Privileges, Saint Joseph Virgin Father of our Lord, Saint Joseph of Caudino, Saint Joseph of all Sanctuaries, Seven Sorrows and Seven Joys of Saint Joseph, Saint Michael Archangel, Saint Gabriel Archangel, Saint Raphael Archangel, Seven Angels of Divine Presence, my Guardian Angel. Choirs of the Angels: Seraphs, Cherubim, Thrones, Dominations, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Archangels. Thousand Angels of the most holy Mary, All the Angels, Saint John the Baptist, Saint Joachim and Saint Anna, Saint Apostles, Saint Hermits and Saint Penitents, Saint Benedict, Saint Gertrude, Saint Martyrs, Saint Dominic, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Francis of Paola, Saint Vincent Ferreri, Patron Saint of the Year, Saint Francis Saverio, Saint Alphonsus de Liguori, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Francis of Sales, Saint Nicholas Pilgrim, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Bernard, Saint Louis, Saint Placid & Companions, Blessed Eustochio, Saint Theresa, Saint Veronica Giuliani, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Filomena, Unknown Saints, All Souls, Blessed Thomas, Blessed D'Agreda. Recommendations: Morning Star Sisters, Father Losito, Father Cusmano, Sister Melanie, Sister M. Luisa of the Sacred Heart, Sister M. Consiglio, Mary Palma" (Vol. 9, page 26).



# 14.

## **ZEAL**

- 1. The flame of charity**
- 2. The generous offering**
- 3. In Avignone**
- 4. Away with the Jonahs**
- 5. For the conversion of sinners**
- 6. Apostolate of the family**
- 7. Return to the sheepfold**
- 8. Thomas Cannizzaro**
- 9. A letter to the friends**
- 10. With the priests lapsed**
- 11. Concerned with everything**
- 12. For two religious communities**
- 13. The beauty contest**
- 14. For the souls in purgatory**
- 15. Notes**

# 1. The flame of charity

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What is zeal all about? Saint Francis of Sales defined it, "The fervor of charity." What a beautiful definition. When charity burns, it cannot be contained in the heart, its fire breaks out, and its flames spread widely. Holy love for others cannot be idle, but needs to work in order to impede the people's ruin, to avoid dangers of persons, and to snatch the innocent out of idleness, dissipation, moral and civil ruin. Charity transforms itself into zeal" (Vol. 25, page 59). So says the Father, who also writes, "Love of God bursting and going beside itself is called zeal: zeal which desires to sacrifice itself for the glory of God and the salvation of souls" (Vol. 45, page 347). More in detail: "Charity produces in itself the fervor and the flame which rise up to God, and draw from God's love and glory the reasons to work more intensely on earth. Charity brings about zeal for God's glory and the souls' salvation; it substitutes the world's selfishness with altruism by involving the people in the work for the good of others. They work continuously for God, for the truth, for the good of their neighbor, and because they are unable to embrace the whole world with their action, they suffer for the evil which overflows in society" (Vol. 45, page 121).

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Such was the Father's life. As the prophet Elijah, he could say of himself, "I have been most zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts, but the Israelites have forsaken your covenant" (1 Kgs. 19, 10). For this reason, he commissioned for his church in Messina the painting of Elijah transferred by a car of fire. Also the final names of his congregations, which he chose after several years of prayer, reflect his blazing zeal. *Rogationists* is a word from *Rogate*. "If we consider these divine words, we see that they are a manifestation of the divine zeal of the heart of Jesus, who repeated them many times according to Saint Luke's phrase, "he used to say" (Lk. 10, 2). It is not "he said," but rather, "he used to say" indicating habitual action meaning that the divine

zeal never got tired of urging man to pray for this goal. Given all this, the Evangelical Rogation can be paraphrased as the command of the divine zeal in the heart of Jesus. Consequently, the sisters' house is called the "Institute of Divine Zeal" (S.C. Vol. 10, page III).

In the sisters' ancient regulations, the Father pointed out that the apostolic zeal of the institute chiefly resides in the zeal for *Rogate*.

Zeal is the virtue that seeks divine glory and sanctification of souls. Due to human failings, no one is able to encompass all the objects of a virtue on the same time, but we are obliged to apply the virtue to particular objects in order to practice it as completely as perfectly. In our case, which is the best object for the zeal of the Poor of the Holy Heart of Jesus, who takes the vow to foster divine glory and salvation of souls? The object will be: **winning good workers to the holy Church through prayer and cooperation**. This object summarizes the best of everything to foster divine glory and salvation of souls. The reason is that the power and the mission of glorifying God and saving souls has been entrusted by our Lord Jesus Christ to the good evangelical workers, who are the priests. He said to the apostles, "**As the Father has sent me, so I send you.**" Now, our Lord Jesus Christ's mission and his redemption aim at God's glory and our salvation, which form the mission and the aim of the Church's ministers. To fulfill this mission, God endows His priests with a particular power and grace: when they answer the Lord's call faithfully, no one is able to value the glory they give to God and the good they cause to souls. Who may value the beneficial effects of one faithful priest's ministry? These mysteries of grace will be valued at the judgment day only. Considering how much glory one divine mass gives to God and how much good it causes to so many souls is enough to somehow understand the importance of one priest who says mass every day. If we consider the whole ministry of a priest, we may conclude that a good priest is a glorifier of the Lord and a savior of souls: it is like Jesus Christ himself who gives the eternal Father what is due to his divine love by saving souls from eternal death

Hence we realize that the best, surest, and easiest means to seek God's glory and salvation of souls is winning good priests to the holy Church, because this is the shortest, surest way to reach God's glory and salvation of souls, which is the goal of the people who are enflamed by zeal (Vol. 3, page 82).

Writing for the Rogationists, he gives prominence to the necessity of combining cooperation with prayer.

While praying to God that he may fill the holy Church and the world with good evangelical workers, the congregants of our least institute

will strive with ardent zeal and sacrifice to be good evangelical workers themselves in the Lord's harvest. I see this duty as the immediate, legitimate consequence which derives from the appreciation, from the untiring culture, and from the meditation on the divine Rogate as well as from the limitless obedience and from the faithful execution of this command.

As a consequence of all this, I will never spare myself in the work for the Lord's glory and the souls' salvation, considering myself unfaithful, lazy, and indifferent when I am not thirsty for souls. Therefore, I will excite in myself hunger and thirst for souls through meditation, fervent prayer, work, and self-denial. But, whether I feel or whether I do not feel this hunger and thirst for souls, with God's help and my constant determination I will never stop working in the mystical harvest of souls.

To fruitfully work for the sanctification and the salvation of others, first I will endeavor to sanctify myself. Keeping in mind the saints' teaching that our Lord Jesus Christ loves one soul as much as all souls together, and that he would have endured his Passion even for one soul, I will esteem souls so much as to spend my life in suffering, in working, and sacrificing myself even for one soul (Vol. 3, page 22).

This was the Father's teaching; now let us see how he practiced it.

## **2. The generous offering**

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First, we quote the offer of his life to the Lord to win from his mercy an apostle who would regenerate Messina in the spirit and in the fervor of the Christian faith. It dates back to the early years of his priesthood: May 3, 1880.

### **OFFERING**

Eternal God, creator and Lord of all things, supreme owner of all creatures, I kneel down in the dust before you. I confess, praise, bless,

and exalt your infinite goodness and your divine qualities. My God, I would like to obliterate and to melt myself in the name of your glory, but why don't I know how to love you, why doesn't everyone love, serve, obey, and please you? Everyone has become corrupt and useless; not even one person is doing good.

Lord, make all people on earth confess and praise your divine name. In a special way I implore you for the sake of your Word to pay merciful attention to this city that could be called "Merciless." Because you've made nations curable, bless and cure this city; you that make your ministers burning fire, sanctify the city's priests. My Lord and God The salt of the earth has become apathetic. The light has been placed under a bushel The light of the world has left My God, I wish to practice my priestly ministry among these people as Saint Paul did in the nations where the Holy Spirit brought him.

First of all, kneeling before you in ashes, sackcloth, while fasting and in prayer, I wish crying would placate your anger and win your abundant mercies. I would like working by day and by night for your glory through study, preaching, confession, attendance to the sick, education of children, and any means to win all souls by converting sinners and sanctifying the just.

Alas My wishes are like the wishes that kill the lazy My God, what am I worthy of? I am a useless tool. Lord, send whom you will send. Since you were able to bring the children to Abraham even from the rocks, rouse in this city a faithful priest who views the world according to your heart From the treasure of your infinite goodness send Messina a true apostle full of your blessing: a pure, chaste, spotless, simple, meek, sober, just, prudent priest, full of Holy Spirit, mercy, strength, perseverance, and the science of the saints. Send us an apostle full of ecclesiastical and literary discipline so that he may fulfill his sublime ministry for your glory in the worthiest way.

My God, I am speaking as a fool and an ignorant man; still, rouse this holy and learned priest, order him to kill and eat as you did with Peter, or to root out and plant, destroy and build, as you did with Jeremiah.

Let him destroy Satan's kingdom and build your kingdom; make people know and love you, reform clergy, educate children, guide virgins, console the afflicted, pray for the souls in Purgatory. Shine as a sun through his example, work, and preaching, and throw a net so vast that all souls may be won to your love. My Jesus, I beg you, stir this priest, sanctify the other priests, always send out new, holy, learned priests to Messina, to other cities, to all the world.

What am I worthy of - me, a poor sinner? If you want my life in the place of the priest who works according to your heart, I give it up right now. As miserable as it is, I still offer my life. In order that this offering may be worthy before you, I join it with the sacrifice of infinite

value that your son made on earth and is renewed daily in the mass.

O very merciful Lord, accept this offering. Make me disappear from earth and make the desired apostle, the faithful priest according to your heart, replace me. Lord, send whom you will send.

Yes, my God, I implore you, accept this exchange of my useless life: I retire, come to nothing, and give my place to the new one who will please and glorify you better than I can.

Lord God, for the sake of your holy begotten son who is thirsty for souls, hear my prayer. Have mercy on His very loving heart that longs for holy priests. Hear not my prayer, but the prayer, vows, wishes of the divine heart that pleases you completely.

My God, if you hear me, I praise and thank you. Full of gratitude I say: you may let your servant go...

Omnipotent God, have mercy on the misery of your servant: I speak as a fool; forgive me. Do as you like with my offering. Praised be your will in which I want to be engulfed. My God, glorify your will and your mercy. Amen. Long live JESUS and MARY (Vol. 4, page 3).

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So, the Father offered his life to the Lord to win the apostle of Messina. Is there anything which hinders us from holding that the apostle of the Lord is the Father himself? If we search for a "pure, chaste, spotless, simple, meek, sober priest... who educates children, guides virgins, consoles the afflicted, prays for the souls in purgatory, shines as a sun through his example and works by day and by night for the glory of God; who seeks to win all the souls through all means, the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of the just, don't we find such an apostle in our Father since the early years of his priesthood?

And indeed, he was an apostle even before he became a priest. It comes from the Rogationist prayer which is a practice of zeal. The Father began saying such a prayer since he was a lay man. He wrote, "The first zeal of a consecrated person is for herself. through her zeal she will be strong enough to punish herself, seeking her sanctification with a will" (Vol. 1, page 206). Evidence of this will, is the Father's life. The following chapters will give additional evidence.(1)

### 3. In Avignone

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It was by zeal that the Father became a priest. He says of himself, "At the age of 17, he felt himself drawn to the priesthood in an extraordinary, or better yet, not usual way. He committed himself to devotion, aiming at belonging totally to Jesus and at winning souls for him" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 240).

Commenting the Father's encounter with Zancone, who begged an alms from him, Father Vitale remarks, "When Padre Di Francia met Zancone the first time, our padre asked him where he lived, adding: 'I will come to see you and the other poor people...' He meant, 'I want to save you and the others intoxicated by spiritual and material vice'" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 331).

So, the Father pledged to visit the Avignone Quarter to help those people, but he did not imagine the material and moral decay he had to face in that quarter having a shining, historic name. When he found himself in the midst of that hell, "he realized that there was no better place to practice *a bit of charity* of pure love for our Lord, who loves so much the poor and wants them saved" (*Preface to Adhesions*, 1919, page 5). It was not *a bit of charity*. Sure, what we do for our Lord is little or nothing, but our poor nature needs heroic virtues to face certain situations. This was the Father's case. He did not draw back in the presence of whatever difficulty, but succeeded to transform that place of vice into an oasis of virtue.

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Ordained a priest, the Father continued and widened the work he had started, pledging all his belongings. He longed for the salvation of souls, and having found in the slums of Avignone Quarter poor people, he had pity, took care, supported, and educated them religiously. Thus, he began his marvelous work of evangelization of the poor and the orphans, whom he supported with his own goods and the help of others.

The chief results of his zeal are the communities he founded and educated in the virtue and love of God. We have already touched upon his zeal for catechism; now we quote from a sister's report. "When the Father visited the communities, he seized any opportunity to preach the divine word twice or three times a day in order to foster the virtues. He spoke of paradise, the saints'

episodes, sacred history, very often of our Lord's life, the gospel, the most holy Communion, etc. I never heard the Father speaking uselessly, but always edifyingly."

We have volumes of the Father's outlines of his preaching, instructions, and retreats for our communities. But we'll discuss the Father's particular zeal for his children in particular chapters.

The zeal tormenting him went beyond the circle of his communities, because he displayed a very active oratory in Messina and its villages, above all when he was a youth. Zealous as he was for the glory of God and the spiritual good of people, the Father used to present himself to the pastors of the little towns, made people peal the bells, and preached to the faithful in the churches. His favorite theme was charity, and the faithful were very attentive to his preaching. A mission at Avignone Quarter after the 1894 earthquake is well remembered. "Wounded, dispersed, and perplexed, people went to Avignone Quarter by themselves or in procession. The Servant of God preached, comforted them, and said the litany of the saints. Even the indifferent and the atheists found guidance in his words." Terrified by the earthquake, the pilgrims went over there and expiated their sins after hearing the Servant of God's preaching with unction. Cardinal Guarino, who was paralyzed, from his palace blessed with his left hand the pilgrims coming from the Father's preaching.

Like his preaching, so his travels were for the glory of God and the good of souls. Either he sought vocations, or counsel, or comfort in the Servants of God, for whose conversation he was thirsty; either he traveled to approach benefactors, or to preach, or to do the works of charity, of which his heart was so fond; either he pilgrimaged to sanctuaries, or visited his communities, his aim was the glory of God and the good of souls. He assisted his communities with preaching, instructions, and industries of piety, in which he was so rich, always solving problems and comforting all. The more the houses increased, the more he had to travel. He visited the sanctuaries of Loreto, Our Lady of Good Counsel at Gennazzano, Our Lady of Pompei (where he enjoyed Bartolo Longo's intimate friendship), Our Lady Helper at Turin, the sacred mount at Orta (Novara), and the novitiate of Don Orione at Bra', where he preached.



## 4. Away with the Jonahs

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We quote from the Father's letter "to the institute's employees, workers, and the people who are helped by it." He exhorted all of them to practice Christian life and to avoid sin under penalty of expulsion. He uses a practical reasoning: if we do not live as good Christians, God will not give his providence to us, the sheltered will lack bread, and the employees won't be paid.

It is true that each one in his task, as myself in different ways, works to help things along, but everything will come to nothing without the help of divine providence, because God keeps an eye on the human fortunes ruling and directing them according to his supreme will. He makes the sun rise and the earth bloom, gives rain and provides all creatures with things. But if we forget God, God will forget us, and despite our working, toiling around, providence will not or hardly come.

This is why I feel myself obliged to ask you to observe the religious duties as well as any other Christian duty. On one hand, you want me to give work to you, paying you for it; on the other hand, I ask you not to hinder divine providence by forgetting God, because if he does not give me the means, I am unable to pay and reward you according to your need or work; if you do not comply with your duties toward God, with good reason I have fear of losing his means. This is my interest and yours.

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Besides, your religious duties are not intolerable burdens nor do I require of you great sacrifices, but religious acts that are very easy. My dearest in Jesus Christ, please consider that we are unable to stay in the grace of God, unless we fulfill our religious duties.

Living without confession, holy Communion, and study of the main elements of our holy religion; living without lifting up our eyes to heaven to pray and adore God as our Lord and Creator; living without considering our last end as well as the eternal destination, this is not a Christian living, a living of God's creatures, but a living of ungrateful beings, of fools who run the risk of getting lost for ever. By forgetting God and our religious duties it becomes unavoidable for us to fall into many sins

This is both the rub of my worries and our common prejudice My dearest, I assure you that I fear nothing, and nothing disheartens me in the proceeding of these charitable institutes, but sin. Want, difficulties, persecutions, etc. everything seems like nothing, because I hope and trust in the Lord, who is a provident and loving Father. But, if sin dwells among the people who live in the institutes, then I see everything lost

My dearest brothers and sisters, such a truth the Holy Spirit manifested in these words, **“Virtue makes a nation great; by sin whole races are disgraced”** (Prov. 14, 34). Do you know why misery is reigning in the families, the families are fading, means are failing, bankruptcies are common, and misfortunes are increasing? Because of sin. On one hand, the people live far off from God, disregarding the religious duties and adhering to nothing but interest; on the other hand, God does not bless their business, industries, fields, and work. On one hand, we make plans, on the other hand, God makes them useless; we collect money, but God makes it disappear with no profit. In short, without the blessing of God, nothing goes on well; with the blessing of God, everything flourishes.

God does not bless the people who disregard the religious duties such as confession, holy Communion, preaching, religious education, spiritual reading, and prayer in the morning and night. The persons who live oblivious of God are too feeble to overcome temptations, internal and external sins, bad thoughts, bad words, and bad actions. They reach such a degree as to even justify their sins by calling themselves the best Christians.

But I think otherwise. I do not like such people to share in my institutes, because such a sharing is to the prejudice of both of us. One Jonah was more than enough in a ship to make a storm rise, threatening the ship with sinking. Only when Jonah was thrown overboard did the storm die down. If I permit the sharing in my institute by the people who have no fear of God, who disregard the religious duties, who are defiled by transgressions of divine law I have good reason to fear that God and divine providence will cut the help, letting the storm sink us. But I am determined to expel the Jonahs for our common interest. To save the others, I have to cut the corrupted member who attracts divine punishments. If I do not behave this way, I will render an account to the Lord, who will punish me.

My dearest brothers and sisters:

Even though I am an unworthy minister of the Lord, I feel confident that you will receive my words as a beneficial warning from our Lord Jesus Christ, who wants to drive you on a better way of living. Your being observant of the Christian law attracts the divine blessings on you during this life, making you worthy of eternal salvation (Vol. 3, page 133).

Then, he adds some rules about how to attend the mass, the sacraments, and religious instructions.

## 5. For the conversion of sinners

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Because the conversion of souls is a work of God, the Father wanted his institution of Avignone to be a center of prayer to implore the conversion of sinners from divine mercy. He set up the "Fraternity of Immaculate Heart of Mary for the Conversion of Sinners" with practices of piety and prayers. Additional prayers were said to the most holy Heart of Jesus (Vol. 4, page 9). The Father inscribed the institute's members to the "Pious Union of Prayers and Penance" which aims at the conversion of sinners, the destruction of the bad press, and the exaltation of the Holy See. The Father also added the prayer for the good workers and the conversion of France (Vol. 6, page 39).

In the early times three prayers were said to the most holy Heart of Jesus for the following intentions very dear to the Father: for the souls who slackened in the divine service; for those who once were loving the sacred Heart, but cooled down and were running the risk of getting lost; and for those who did not answer the call of the sacred Heart.

We find a singular prayer in the Father's writings. "For that child who is running the risk of receiving a bad education, but would become holier than others (at the same conditions), if he/she receives Christian education" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 22).

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When the Father was called to assist a dying rebel, or he had to deal with desperate cases, he prayed and made people pray more.

So many times people heard him saying that he was willing to die for the salvation of one soul.

He often celebrated for the conversion of sinners, and when he heard of a dying impenitent, he gathered the community in the church for special prayers, exhorting to do penance, fasting, and vigils, as he himself did.

When other priests did not succeed to approach persons who were publicly against religion, they resorted to the Father. Before offering his priestly ministry, he used to gather his community in prayer.

Writes Father Vitale,

"By my own experience, the grace of God almost always triumphed. I myself willingly resorted to him several times even in the night, and he ran to assist the dying. Sometimes he found such great resistance as to draw back. Once, a dying person gave him a long sullen look, then he spit in his face. As always, the Father kept calm considering himself a tool in the Lord's hands."

The following episode ended differently.

A worker of ours relates the conversion of Magazzu', a big blasphemer who did not even want to hear of the Father. The Camellian Father Ernest had already baptized his children upon agreement with their mother.

Meanwhile the Father prayed, trying to approach him, but in vain. One evening, a worker of ours happened to meet the man near Magazzu's house. He was so discouraged. The worker asked him what the matter was. After entering the house, Magazzu' burst into tears and remembered how much evil he had done against God, the saints, and also against our Servant of God.

Our worker heartened and took him to the Father. Says the witness, "The encounter reminded me of the father hugging the prodigal son."

The following day Magazzu' received Holy Communion from the Father, who helped him generously until his death.

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## **6. Apostolate of the family**

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By entering Avignone Quarter, the Father received from the Lord the mission to put order in that swarm of human beings who had gone as low as to reach brutalization. They did not know bonds of family, nor did they respect rights or duties of blood. All marriages were illegitimate. Educating those blinded minds by making them understand the dignity of marriage was a hard work. But, by invoking the Lord with prayer and sacrifice, the Father succeeded to remedy that

disorder step by step. Obviously, everything happened at his own expenses, beginning with decent clothes, up to the rent of the houses, where those people could have a nest.

The last apostolate the Father did among the dwellers of Avignone was the marriage of Lucy, a few decades later. She was the former orphan girl who adhered to the Father's cassock, crying, "Do not go to Naples, and do not go"

Poor child, she perhaps had a presentiment that the Father's leave would be the beginning of her ruin. As a matter of fact, whether unconsciously or perversely, her mother took her away from the institute during the Father's absence, and abandoned her to a bad destiny. The poor Lucy cohabited with a man 40 years, becoming a mother of 10 children. Finally, the prayer of the Father and of so many good souls, to whom he had appealed, triumphed, and the Father himself blessed the wedding of his former orphan.

Many consecrated souls answered the Father's call. We remember the Daughters of Blessed Sister Mary of Jesus and the Sisters of Morning Star, in Naples. Reading the funeral oration of the venerable Sister Mary Lucy of the Sacred Heart, in Naples, in November 1907, the Father reveals, "One day I was called in Messina to religiously validate the marriage of a man who was cohabiting for so many years with a woman. He was suffering a heart disease, and I unusually felt that I should validate it quickly. I confessed the spouses, blessed their marriage, and gave them the Holy Communion. The following night the husband breathed his last. His salvation was a wonder. I was still amazed, when Sister Mary Lucy wrote to me informing that while she was before the Blessed Sacrament exposed, she felt that her beloved asked her, 'Tell me what you want.' She answered, 'My Jesus, save the souls, especially those of Messina'" (Vol. 45, page 139).

The Father was particularly zealous for this kind of priestly ministry, and he recommended it to his Religious. "The Rogationists will take care of validating illegal marriage unions with the sacrament of marriage" (Vol. 3, page 29). A sister reports: "Following the Father's suggestion, we prudently asked the workers and the beggars about their relation with God. According to their situations, we prepared them for the first Communion, or a better attendance of the sacraments, or for the sacrament of marriage."

The Father was concerned not only with workers and beggars. For instance, Lawyer Guardavaglia of Taormina was not married in the church. After praying so much, the Father succeeded in

validating his marriage, and the lawyer turned to be so devoted to him that he resumed the practices of Christian life, and became an assiduous, strong defender of the Father's institute.

This institute was operating in the first floor of the Capuchins' former convent, whose main floor was used as a district prison. The jailer was Don Pancras Incorvaia. But his title *Don* had nothing to do with religious dignity; on the contrary, he was a quarrelsome, concubinary man, and a blasphemer. The mother superior of that house remembers, "I asked the Father how we should deal with this man who lived on the next floor and made endless noise with his behavior. He answered, 'My daughter, it is since twenty years that I am praying with the host in my hands for his conversion, you instead would like to reach his conversion all of a sudden. Let us pray and treat him with meekness. The people marveled and smiled when the Father sometimes embraced and kissed Don Pancras, giving him some gifts; and Don Pancras reacted rudely sometimes. When his woman was about to give birth, I informed the Father that I would like to be her godparent. Before giving birth, however, the Servant of God succeeded to validate their marriage with confession, Communion, and wedding. Don Pancras changed completely. He left out blasphemies and bad examples, and attended the church and sacraments until his holy death, to great amazement of the people.'" The Father received their daughter gratis in the institute, and when Incorvaia retired, the Servant of God bought the field Incorvaia was working as a share cropper, letting him continue his work and giving him all the produce. The Father took care of Incorvaia's spiritual life by also providing him with sacred books, which he devoured with great profit.

Dr. Salvatore Cacciola's case seems a marvel. The Father was very thankful to him. As a mayor, he had helped the Father to found the orphanage at Taormina. But he was an atheist, and after his wife's death he cohabited with his housekeeper. The Father prayed continuously for him, paid visits now and then, and waited for the time of mercy. Once, he made a performance in the institute in his honor, sent to him a copy of his *Letter to the Friends*, which he read and commented with his wife. Finally, Cacciola promised to go to confession and to validate his union. But, one day people informed the Father that the man was on the verge of dying. He hastened from Messina to pay a visit to him; the man was in a coma with a concussion of the brain.

I happen to know some details from the Father, but, before relating them, I premise that he knew the Abbot Kneip's healing system by personal experience.

As soon as the Father entered the dying man's room, he made everyone leave. He ordered a pail of cool water, a pail of warm water, and two towels. He began applying warm poultices on the dying man's feet, and cool ones on his head. Cacciola opened his eyes, and recognized the Father. Our Founder heard the confession of Cacciola, validated the marriage, and gave the extreme unction. Reconciled with God, Cacciola breathed his last. The Servant of God was extremely joyous, and recalled the event with tears. Someone who knew of Cacciola's coma, spoke of a dead resurrected. But the Father praised Kneipp's system which helps human beings so much with its hydrotherapy.

## 7. Return to the sheepfold

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We are about to write of some conversions of protestants who returned to the church through the Father's ministry.

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One day the Father went to Taormina to baptize a protestant girl; another time he attended a retraction in Oria; several times he witnessed many retractions in Messina. We report the main ones.

On May 29, 1886, *The Light* relates the baptism and the validation of the marriage of Lady Catherine Oliva, maiden name Lendy, from Switzerland. She was the wife of Prof. Gaetano Oliva, continuer of Gallo's Chronicles of Messina. The rite was performed in the Avignone chapel in the presence of the orphans, who were "joyous and edified by the unexpected rite." The Father had prepared this conversion with his personal prayers and sacrifices, and also by directing the sacrifice of a young girl to this end.

Mr. and Mrs. Oliva had a daughter named Olga, a flower of courtesy and kindness. She was educated in the Catholic faith,

and was directed by the Father, as confessor. At the age of eighteen, she was struck by a sudden disease. The Father assisted and heartened her to suffer her pains with perfect resignation to God's will, offering them for her mother's conversion. In the last moments of her life, while hugging her mother, the young girl exhorted her to embrace the Catholic faith in order to be eternally united in heaven. The mother promised to do so. Olga died on April 21, 1885, and her mother made her retraction in the following May.

Ernest Crisafulli was a youth of a good family, but he was trapped by the protestants. The Father looked after him a long time, until grace triumphed over him. He retracted his errors and entrusted the Father to publish his retraction in the press. On January 18, 1890, the Father gave *The Light* the following wording, "The undersigned Ernest Crisafulli by the Lord's grace recognizes the protestant errors in which he had fallen, and declares that he has embraced again the Catholic faith, in which he was born. He hopes to persevere in it until death with the Lord's grace. Messina, January 11, 1890. Ernest Crisafulli."

Let us see a non-conversion. Mrs. Hill, a rich English protestant, was resident in Taormina for many years for health reasons. The Father prayed for her until her death. She was unshakable in her staunch ideas, but very compassionate for human miseries. He endeavored to make the Salesians come to Taormina, organized an embroidery school for the poor girls of the town, and was very generous in giving alms. The bishop of Gozzo (Malta) knew her very well and told the high priest of Taormina, "Let her in peace, she is in good faith."

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Being affectionate to the Father and his institution, she supported them by even sending her nurse in case of need. When the fire destroyed the sisters' wardrobe, she remedied everything.

She survived the Father and attended his funeral. She was the only one who had the privilege to place on his coffin a palm with a bunch of violets she had brought from Taormina. Her card read, "To the dear Saint Canon Di Francia."

But she remained firm in her religious ideas until her death. What about her? The Father said to the mother superior of Taormina, "Owing to her works of charity, she will save her soul better than me, you, and others..."

At the end of the Father's life, Knight Zuccaro was mayor at Taormina. His widowed mother was causing scandal and he



himself was living with a protestant woman without being married in the church. The Father exhorted the mayor's mother to Christian life by paying frequent visits to her. The conversion of the mayor's wife happened this way. In 1923, the Father preached the 13 days in honor of Saint Anthony. The mayor's wife attended his preaching and was so impressed by the Servant of God's behavior. When he asked her whether she was a Catholic, she answered in the negative, but that she would be happy if the Servant of God would succeed to convince her of her errors... His teaching lasted about a month, and her retraction, confession, Communion, and confirmation crowned the Father's apostolate.

The protestant declared that after the Servant of the Lord asked her whether she was a Catholic, her conscience remained anxious until her conversion. As to Mrs. Zuccaro, who fell into the errors of theosophy, the Father wrote a long letter calling her back to the sound doctrine of obedience to the Church (Ch. 3, no. 12).

Often, the Father combined the validation of the people's marriage with the baptism of their children. If they were poor, he helped them financially. "He was concerned with validating marriages and baptizing children, also giving them financial help." A sister speaks of baptism of youths "from aberrant families. The Father taught them religion... It made a favorable impression on the relatives Cardile and Vinci. Two of the Cardile families were baptized; one was thirteen years old, the other eighteen. Their sister, who was already a teacher, received first Communion. The boy of the Vinci family was baptized at the age of ten; the girl received first Communion at fourteen.""

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The case of Congressman Fulci, a teacher at the university and a great figure of Messina freemasonry, is worth remembering. Today freemasonry likes to present itself as cooled down and sweetened, but in those times it declared open war against the clergy, the Church, and religion. Also by Don Orione's help, then vicar general of Messina, the Father succeeded to have Fulci married in the church. But for the baptism of his child, Fulci had planned the rite with champagne on a ship. Both the archbishop and good people looked quite dismayed at the news. The Father went to Fulci asking humbly and simply to be the minister of the religious baptism. Fulci was disconcerted, but immediately complied with the Father's wish, and the sacrament was performed in the near parish. The attempted scandal was eliminated. Fulci remained much attached to our founder, openly calling him "My godparent" in any circumstance. He seems to have said to the Servant of God, "Only you can stay in my house, no other priest" The Father held Fulci with gifts, visits, etc., but Fulci remained stubborn. A sign of repentance was noticed later.

Someone even said that he had made a hint of greeting while passing in front of Saint Clement's church. After the validation of his marriage, he let his wife light a lamp before the picture of the sacred Heart in his bedroom. The grace of the Lord is always effective. Father Vitale says that the professor asked the Father to assist him in case of death. Our founder, however, died before and Fulci openly cried saying, "We have lost the padre" He attended the funeral carrying a cordon. In his last sickness, Fulci welcomed Father Vitale, who was eager to hear his confession. Fulci, however, worsened quickly and people had no time to call the priest. We like thinking that the Father's prayer granted him mercy. As a matter of fact, the evening before his death, while leaving, Father Vitale exhorted him to recommend himself to God, and Fulci added "and to the Madonna." Didn't she intervene to save him?

The son of Fulci was prepared for the first Communion by the Father, who stayed near him to suggest how to receive and thank the Lord. Father Vitale performed the liturgy.

## **8. Thomas Cannizzaro**

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As soon as the Father heard of a person, especially of prominence, being far from the Church, he did his best to approach him. At great grief of his heart, freemasonry prevailed in Messina in those days. But quite a few masons surrendered to the careful attention of the Father, and received the sacraments much to the satisfaction of the Father.

Usually, he found a way to introduce himself to them through the sisters. They went to the sick with a gift, gave the Father's greeting, and opened the way for a personal contact.

Among the famous men far from faith whom the Father guided to God at the point of death, Chemist Cananzi and criminal lawyer Francis Faranda who was also a politician, are well remembered.

The Father had strict and longer relations with Thomas Cannizzaro (1838-1921). He was an outstanding poet, a patriot, a polyglot, and an author of many verses in Italian, Sicilian, and French, as well as a translator from ancient and modern languages.(2) The light of faith, however, shone in his eyes only in the last moments of his life. Under the pretext of poetry, the Father cultivated friendly relations with him, usually going to his house with Father Vitale. This relates, "The religious conversations were on literary topics; they read each other their poems." A year after Cannizzaro's death, Messina held a solemn commemoration of its poet and patriot man, and the Father deemed to intervene with an article on the *Scintilla* (September 6, 1922), giving the citizens a more exact knowledge of the man, due to his personal relations with the poet.

Thomas Cannizzaro, a versatile writer in prose and verses, was an outstanding figure of our city for his extensive learning. An expert of several languages, he wrote French verses as easily, tastefully, and elegantly as in the native language. He was in correspondence with several writers, Victor Hugo included, whom he visited in France and had the honor to be a guest of his for three days. Well known and admired in Italy for his various works, several newspapers sang his praise at the news of his death. A few days ago, Messina commemorated the first anniversary of his death, and our very friend Dr. Leopold Nicotra had a moving speech.

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Now let us get some things straight. Cannizzaro was not a Catholic writer. But, even though he had queer aberrations about principles, in practical life he was very kind, natural, upright, and unable to offend anyone. His daughters educated in Catholic faith are an evidence of their Father's respect for freedom of conscience.

He had great-uncles canons that left to him a piece of property with a little church for the celebration of the mass on holidays. To tell the truth in honor of his lamented memory, Cannizzaro never left out this duty until the earthquake destroyed the church; and if people had rebuilt it, he would have had the mass said.

Owing to the good dispositions of his spirit, God's eyes bent mercifully to him.

It is quite a few years since a priest of ours visited him as an admirer of his genius, qualities, and verses. A close friendship was born between them, and Cannizzaro was amused at listening to that priest's verses on sacred topics. Loving hints of personal, eternal salvation through faith in Jesus' divinity and the Catholic religion were submitted to Cannizzaro, in order to look after his own salvation. He once read a poem of his own to the most holy Virgin. He had written it by commission, but he infused in it loving sentiments for the Mother of God.

Here there are some verses of the Father which answer those

by Cannizzaro. They follow the same meter and rhyme. With admirable modesty, Cannizzaro had written to the Father:

Human knowledge is like dust of the earth,  
Which the wind lifts up and takes away in a moment,  
Like a glow that dies out at its birth.

If my conscience can say something,  
It will only express this lament:  
I only know that I know nothing.

The Father answered:

I desire that like blustering wind of the earth  
The eternal breath hit you, and in a moment  
Guide you to the faith's light's rebirth!

Oh, I only like to say the following:  
I love you, and my heart is content  
If you know Jesus. The remnant is nothing!

Another sonnet ends thus:

Before Jesus, sublime Highnesses bent  
As to God who breaks any pride:  
Who forgives the faults to any penitent.

My lord, join me in your humble loss,  
And your eyes that shed tears may abide  
In the splendor of his cross

Cannizzaro writes three octaves talking nonsense about faith, but the Father corrects and states more exactly. We quote one of the Father's octaves.

Divine faith is blind and yet clairvoyant,  
Is dark, but shining to the reason;  
Human faith instead does daunt,  
Fooling itself in a vain illusion.  
Who lacks divine faith, does flaunt  
Believing in the error imposed on.  
But when the black veil of the error is fought,  
The holy faith becomes the star of the thought.

The Father ended a sonnet by exhorting Cannizzaro to believe in the divinity of Jesus:

Oh, my lord, I wonder why the thought  
That Jesus Christ is God  
Does not enkindle your heart, making it overwrought

The poet answers that he appreciates that Jesus is "the sublime son of Mary." The Father takes that occasion to write a beautiful letter about the divinity of Jesus Christ.

I thank you for your wonderful, easy sonnets. But I love you and desire that you love Jesus Christ not only as the sublime son of Mary, but also as the eternal Son of God and as true God To believe in him as a man, to admire him as a sublime man, is the same as to disbelieve him In fact, if I said, "I esteem Mr. Cannizzaro as an honest citizen, but I think that he is an idiot," I would be mistaken, falling into lack of respect So, we cannot deprive Jesus Christ of his divinity without wronging him I ask you: "How do you know that Jesus Christ is a sublime man; who expelled the Pharisees from the temple; who consoled the afflicted, etc.?" We know from the gospel. Well, then, the gospels are full of accounts of the divinity of Jesus Christ. And he expatiates on demonstrating the humanity and divinity of Jesus through the episodes of the gospel (Vol. 5, page 118).

We continue the Father's report.

His priest friend sometimes reminded him of Victor Hugo's words that **"among the miseries of this world there is a great hope of an everlasting happiness smiling at us and shining through the darkness of this life"**

That priest was not in Messina when Cannizzaro fell in his last illness. However, a ray of the divine light illuminated his mind. He said, "I want to die comforted by the sacraments of the holy Church: I myself take the initiative.' Even though his kind daughter was on his side, he himself sent for a Dominican priest friend who was living at Giostra. After confessing, receiving holy Viaticum, and Extreme Unction he retracted his errors against the Catholic religion and signed his retraction willingly.

Thus, we think that God's great mercy received that prodigal soul in eternal forgiveness.

Obviously, the Italian newspapers contrary or at least indifferent to our holy religion praised Cannizzaro, but they will not report this article. We instead publish it to help the Catholics, or at least those of good disposition, understand that living according to the Catholic faith is the science of sciences. As a matter of fact, in point of death no one repented for being a Catholic; on the contrary, many a person felt themselves in need to embrace it. This is one of the best evidences of our Catholic religion's divinity (S.C. Vol. 1, page 97).(3)

## 9. A letter to the friends

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To call the attention of unchurched magistrates, professors, and intellectuals to the supreme interest of the salvation of their soul, the Father published a theological-moral-pastoral booklet in his last years. The title given to this work seems academic, but it is a living manifestation of the Father's heart: "Canon H. M. Di Francia's letter to the friends and lords he loves like himself and whose well being and happiness he longs for as he would for himself."

In a simple, plain style he treats the topics of God, Jesus Christ, and the Church; as well as our duties toward God, the importance of eternal salvation, and the means to achieve it. The means are prayer, good reading, and devotion to Our Lady. He lays the blame on "the great reserve," that is to say, the human respect. Speaking of humility, which opens the door of grace, he recalls our great men who prevailed over human respect: Dante, Giotto, Colombo, Michelangelo, Volta, Pellico, Manzoni, Augustus Conti, and his own teacher Bisazza. He quotes choice evidence of them, and concludes with the whole, famous speech of John Prati to the senate. We only relate the following statement: "I am a believer, and I am proud to declare so from this seat. The old shepherds of my Alps will say, "He is the same we have known from his childhood; he confessed God in our cottages, now he confesses him in the senate of Italy!" I will not get upset for quite a few free-thinkers, stormy and incautious spirits that would like veiling the figure of the Most High because of their immoderate idolatry to science and freedom"

Explains the Father,

"I have designed this letter for those who, according to my personal knowledge, reference, or fame, have admirable gifts of mind and heart and seem like they would be favorably disposed to receive my pure expressions of friendship with the pure impartiality of reason." The reason urging the Father to write such a letter is the following: "Since I have devoted my life to the sacred

ministry, as a priest of Jesus Christ I feel a loving affection and a longing for the welfare and happiness of others just as I do for myself. I think of myself as being joined by the link of friendship with all people on earth, rich or poor, lords or workers, humble or aristocratic. I have seen a brother and a lord in everyone and what I have longed for me in this and in the after life, I have longed for others in the same way." He wrote so in a printed page accompanying the booklet (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 336).

We like quoting the conclusion. After explaining how easy it is to observe God's law and how bitter is the road leading to perdition, he states, "We have more difficulty, suffering more when we run the road leading to perdition than when we run the road leading to salvation." The Father asks himself, "What else can I add?"

He answers,

I have exhausted my loving, insinuating persuasions to lead you into the saving hands of God, your creator and redeemer; to call your attention on the great importance of being saved eternally with your relatives; and to submit to you the easy means to achieve the final aim of life I have another thing left to do, and I will heartily: I will pray daily, my dearest...., especially in the celebration of the holy mass, when I hold Jesus in my hands.

I have prayed and I will until the last breath of my life for your eternal salvation. When breathlessness announcing death tires me, I will make my panting supplication to the Lord so that his grace enlighten, touch, and win you. May these words cross your mind, awaken the most living interest in your salvation along with that of yours, and make you take the necessary, easy means I have suggested, despite the false world deceiver.

This, however, is not enough. As I firmly hope, when I will be in heaven in the bosom of my creator and redeemer, I will continue praying face to face to my adorable Lord, the most holy Virgin Mary, the saint of your name, and your guardian angel. I will do so for your eternal salvation and that of yours, seeking your cooperation. May you be my companion in the eternal happiness

This protestation and hope closes the letter that Father Vitale defines the Father's "last will, his soul's last cry in the midst of the society in which he lived. It was as though he said, 'I am thirsty'" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 336).

The Father wanted this letter printed in a big format. Says the printer, "When I raised objections of typographic aesthetics, he reacted, 'No, no; most of them are old men of poor sight; to read, they need block letters'." The booklet was mailed personally

to the people he called friends, but unfortunately known for their incredulity. To know their names and to reach them, Lady Schiro' remembers that our founder appealed to her Father Hercules Bonetti. The address the Servant of God wrote on the envelope by his own handwriting impressed some of the receivers. When the Father happened to come across some of them, he asked first whether they had received his letter and what were the results of their reading. In his simplicity and zeal, he almost expected their conversion and the practice of Christian life.

## 10. With the priests lapsed

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When God's honor was at stake, the Father cried and even proposed the removal of the priest oblivious of his duty.

Writes Father Vitale,

"More than once in his life, he had to suffer with bitter tears for the fate of some flock entrusted to unworthy shepherds. Dressed like lambs, these leaders cheated their superiors.

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He never stopped working at any cost, risking even his own life, to help the authority save the sheep in jeopardy. His work was relentless until he reached his goal.

How many blessings later came to the padre (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 334).

He was full of charity and zeal toward the priests lapsed or apostates. Every time the bishops asked him to meet them (and some of the cases were very delicate), he showed himself as loving Father, full of charity and caution. Many of the priests were driven back to Christ and the Church; several suspended a divinis were sheltered by the Servant of God upon agreement with the bishop until their redemption. Someone cites the names. "I remember the good he did to the apostate priest Natoli by sheltering him at Avignone. When the chancery office was about to qualify him again, he died by tuberculosis. Upon agreement with the archbishop, he also sheltered Father Meli because of his



drunkenness. As to Mr. Chinigo', a former priest of O. M., who was laicized after 1860, cohabited with a woman, and had children; he was given a careful, gentle, and cautious attention by the Father, who made him repent. He died in the 1908 earthquake. Father Carbone was at war with the archbishop. The Servant of God drove him on the right road. He preached in our house the retreat to the Priest Carbone who was suspended *a divinis*, discussed the situation with the bishop, and obtained the restoration to the priestly ministry."

To earn his living, Father Carbone set up a little delicatessen shop. He himself sliced bologna and ham against the order of the chancery office, causing a scandal to the faithful. The Father made him consider the grave inconvenience and exhorted him to work in his church. Giving him a statue of Saint Rita, the Father foretold him that bread and work would never fail. This was the beginning of the devotion to Saint Rita in Saint Paulinus' church.

Father Carbone sang the praise of the Father untiringly. A Rogationist narrates: "Pointing to the Servant of God's tomb in the sanctuary, Father Carbone exclaimed, 'How much indebted I am with that great soul I am sure to get my salvation, because he promised that he would pray for me in paradise'"

Canon Ferretti, the high priest at the cathedral of Oria went so far in the war against the bishop that the Holy Office intervened and suspended him *a divinis*. The Father induced the priest to acknowledge his wrong through a retraction on the press, and obtained his restoration. The priest remembered the Father so thankfully all his life long.

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Canon Barsanofio writes, "The Servant of God was so sensitive to the needs of the clergy that many priests appealed to him, finding shelter and help in his house of Oria. Even in the presence of grave difficulty or failures, he never denied his work, above all when the matter was the restoration of a lapsed one."

The prayers for the poor apostates were continuous. In the Father's notes we read that he entrusted 5 apostates to the sacred wounds of our Lord. One of them, the former chaplain of the house in Giardini, was entrusted to the wound of the Heart of Jesus (S.C. Vol. 10, page 84).

Four of them died repented and reconciled with the Church. The former Capuchin of Francavilla Fontana fell lower, was declared *escomunicated vitando*, and died as such. Let us trust in the Lord's mercy

The Father said special prayers and gave careful attention to Father Perciabosco. Due to political reasons at the time of the revolution, he had come into contrast with the bishop, abandoned

priesthood, and retired to his property in the country of Pezzolo (Messina), living honestly. The Father wrote (S.C. Vol. 5, page 298), visited, and exhorted him, but he pretended not to know. On one occasion, the Father sent to him Father Franze' of the Friars Minor, inviting him to come down to Messina. The Father told Father Franze', "He is a priest who has suffered too much; now he lives in the mountains without saying mass since many years. If you succeed to have him down, it would be a holy work for his bad conditions." Perciabosco welcomed Father Franze', urged him to share his lunch, and spoke very well of the Father. Poor old man! He was really in bad conditions, and even though he was a learned man, he was becoming brutal by dint of living alone, far from society. Writes Father Franze', "I talked to him as a brother trying to induce him to leave from that existence and to retire near Father Di Francia, who would welcome and provide him with a decorous human life." In vain. When Father Di Francia knew the results, he blamed himself for the failure of that mission, and said, "We need to pray with much more fervor; but I have so little of it!" At the end, however, his prayers triumphed. After the Father's death, Perciabosco died reconciled with God (Bulletin 1947, no. 4, page 70).

## **11. Concerned with everything**

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Any work about God's glory held the Father's interest.

When the Jesuit Fathers succeeded to return to Messina after the suppression by the Bourbons in the eighteenth century, the masonic lodges began creating several troubles for them in order to make them retire. The good people, however, took sides with them. In 1891, the Father had the inaugural speech at the feast of the Jesuit Father Alphonsus Labso, the chairman. His students prepared the feast on occasion of his saint's name. The Father praised the merits of this "religious family that like very shining star is guiding the youth to salvation since over three centuries," despite the fights it faces continuously. Then he exhorts, "O youth, despise the world's

sneer, and openly say, 'We are disciple of a Jesuit'" (Vol. 45, page 435). Father Nalbone remembers, "When I was the rector in Messina, I invited him more than once to the college, and he always accepted edifying greatly the faithful. He was very dear to the Jesuit order that gave him the *figliuolanza*, i.e., the sharing in its merits and suffrages." We remember the novena and the panegyric to Our Lady of the Ladder, the panegyric to Saint Ignatius at the reviving of his feast, interrupted in 1773, and the panegyric to Saint Louis Gonzaga on the occasion of his centenary, in 1891.(4)

As we have said above, the Father prayed and made the faithful pray for the return of the Camellian Fathers to Messina.

In a petition to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Father recalled how blooming their order was in Messina, and implored, "We beg you for the sake of your infinite charity to make them return... to send these ministries to our sick. May they be true children of Saint Camillus, full of zeal, charity, humility, and have the virtues of their holy founder so that through their priestly ministry souls be saved and your divine heart be consoled" (Vol. 4, page 47). The eighteenth of each month special prayers were said for this intention.

Another fight came in against the Salesians and their institute "Saint Louis." The Father ordered his communities to pray so that the enemies do not prevail against Don Bosco's children. "O Lord Jesus, till when will the enemies of your works glory in their iniquity?" He offers to the Sacred Heart "the masses celebrated all over the world, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary along with her virtues." Then he prays, "Make this right cause triumph, keep this holy school and the institute where the youth learn to believe, know, fear, love, and serve you" (Vol. 6, page 53).

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The "Lombardo" orphanage, built with money from Lombardia for the orphans of the earthquake, had no chapel. The Father endeavored to transform one of its greatest halls into a chapel, furnished it with altar, pews, sacred vestments, almost everything, and pledged the holiday mass and the religious instruction of the youth.

The students at San Placid Calonero's agricultural school had no religious service because the nearby pretty church was closed. The Father had it opened for the school and pledged the holiday mass. When he was free, he himself went over there; when busy, he provided the mass through others.

Says Father Vitale, "The Father provided most of the "Lombardo" orphanage's furniture. When it opened, the Father sent me and other priests along with the clerics to say mass and

teach religious education; we did the same at San Placid Calonero's agricultural school."

At Larderia, the people rose in rebellion because they did not want to accept the new chaplain appointed by the archbishop. Furthermore, they threatened with killing the priest who would dare to appear in their church. They had no mass for quite a few Sundays.

Upon agreement with the archbishop, the Father went over there. He had a cold reception; but it changed quickly into deference and devotion. He performed the priestly ministry for some time, saying the mass in each of the two hamlets with some sacrifice, because he was over 70 years old, and the Eucharistic fasting was strict. A sister remembers, "In that time, I along with another sister accompanied the Father to teach the Christian doctrine to the children of those "savages," as he called them, until the bishop provided with another priest. But the Father continued being concerned with the necessity of that village, because the knowledge of a spiritual need urged him to provide the faithful at any cost."

Any occasion was fitting to say a good word and to hearten the people. *The Beacon*, a weekly Catholic periodical of Messina, started a publication in serial form about the activity of a priest who becomes an apostle of his town. The Father seizes the opportunity to give his support to the author. "I happened to read the article "Examining..." in the issue no. 9 of *The Beacon*. With ostensible forms and opinions conform to truth, you prove the great, divine power of the Catholic priesthood in regenerating souls, countries, and nations through the gentleness of grace and the evangelical doctrine. The little article describes the young priest coming out educated, virtuous, and learned from the seminary and returning to his native town. He sees his town deteriorated and demoralized by previous bad examples, but he does not dishearten, he rather trusts in God and plans his behavior. Thus, he wins the faithful's favor. This article moved me to tears, because it shows what the evangelical workers can do in the name of God I found ground to meditate on it as if it were a spiritual reading. I would like that the clerics read and meditate upon it. Truly, the priest is the salt of the earth and the light of the world. When he performs his duty in a holy manner, he has an attractive, divine force upon the hearts.

It is of a great importance that we priests strive to become worthy of our divine ministry I warmly congratulate the author

upon this writing, whoever he is. I would like to hug him" (S.C. Vol. 1, page 80).

The Beacon's issue of March 14, 1902, comments on the Father's letter: "The great men's words are always a comfort, and Canon Di Francia's words to our modest work fill us with joy, relieving us from disenchantment and bitterness. We heartily thank him for his courteous expressions and for his strong support, which we count on."

The Father's sister wrote, "People in the village of Gesso were living far from the sacraments and oblivious of the religious practices. The Father sent at his own expenses a Jesuit Father for a fifteen day mission. The faithful's faith awakened again. Conversions and validations of marriages sealed the mission. An altar to the Sacred Heart was inaugurated in those days, and a fervent homonymous association was founded. The beautiful statue of the Sacred Heart, which is still venerated, was donated by the Father on the occasion of the mission."

In his last years, the Father happened to know that some persons of Taormina held seances, which were attended even by girls of the sisters' boarding school. Whatever may be the nature of particular phenomena, the spiritism's doctrine is inconsistent and impious (see "Spiritism," Catholic Encyclopedia). The Church orders the faithful to keep away from such practices.

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I remember how sad the Father became when a Salesian Father laughed at it in a meeting, giving no importance to the matter. The Father lectured him, "Are you laughing? You are supposed to cry"

The Father saw in it the devil's work. We can imagine, therefore, how zealously he preached against this grave superstition which chilled the faith and the religious practice. As usual, before beginning the new apostolate, he fostered prayer and printed some to the Sacred Heart, etc. He speaks of spiritism in the *Letter to the friends* (page 55). Thanks to God, the Father heard the confession of several spiritists, and they abandoned the seances.

## 12. For two religious communities

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Busy as he was with his communities, the Father still consented to help other communities on any occasion. We remember two institutes for which the Father was particularly zealous.

The first one regards the "Geltrudine" of the Sacred Heart in Naples. Started in 1902 as a house of work for female workers, later it was transformed into an orphanage. Then a religious institute came about. The founder was the lay-sister Benedictine D. Gertrude Gomez d' Anza, guided by Father Angel Padovano. Alike other works of God, the foundation passed through tribulations for several years. About 1910 the Father happened to hear about it, and began helping it in various ways. To help the aspirants in the beginning of the community of Saint Gertrude, for the Father wrote the rules, he sent a few Daughters of Divine Zeal to Naples, who dressed as Benedictines. To help the institution prosper financially, the Father published *The Saint of Graces*, in the pattern of our *Miraculous Secret*. It aimed at drawing the faithful's attention on the nascent institute, which is happily blooming in the Church (S.C. Vol. 6, pages 230-269).

To acknowledge the Father's merits, Father Padovano gave him the name co-founder in the special issue *Heroine of Mansfel*, which describes the institution's activities (Naples 1914).

Longer and harder was the Father's work for the two institutes of Father Eustachio Montemurro, a man of God from Gravina of Apulia. The institutes are: "Little Brothers of the Blessed Sacrament," which had only quite a few young candidates, but no Religious yet; and "Daughters of the Sacred Side." When Father Montemurro retired, a few bishops asked the Father to take over the direction, and he did so in the hope to give it back to Montemurro at his return. When the Father realized that Montemurro's return was impossible, he aggregated the few surviving Little Brothers to the Rogationists.

The Daughters of the Sacred Side were directed by the Father for a few years. Then they changed their name into "Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Side," happily blooming. I concerned myself with a specific publication<sup>(5)</sup> about this institute's events that happened when the Father was the director. Now I point out some episodes corresponding to the chapters of that work.

The mother superior of the house in Potenza abandoned her congregation, leaving after-effects among the girls who had made their parents angry against the institute. A revolution arose: assault on the sisters' house, stones at the bishopric's windows, and intervention of the police. Bishop Monterise was willing to fire the sisters, but the Father intervened writing, "The more a house is battled, the more it sinks its roots to give copious fruits at the right time. Besides, surrendering to an enemy gives no glory to the Lord. Why should you deprive Potenza of the good the sisters are doing? At least they are coping with so many little girls who are so worthy before God. Why should we concede a victory to the hellish enemy? Be sure, the institution will make its way and give more benefits to the people at the right time" (July 5, 1912). He also informed the mother superior of the congregation that he had written to the bishop "trying to reconcile him in favor of the sisters." Then he heartened them, "In any case, let us only trust in the Lord. Let us endeavor to please the most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary, fearing nothing. Because the pupils of Potenza had decreased, the Father pointed out, "It doesn't matter. One soul is worth as much as all souls. Let us take care of the little girls' instruction, and Jesus and Mary will bless us." Then he continued consoling them, "Cheer Be in a cheerful mood, trust in the most holy Heart of Jesus; any nascent institute must go through such troubles. We need perseverance, great trust in the Lord, and hope even against hope" (S.C. Vol. 8, pages 121, 123).

Writes Msgr. Farina, "I noticed the Servant of God's zeal for providing Spinazzola with a kindergarten and a laboratory for girls through the Daughters of the Sacred Side. They were dwelling in a rented house which was the center of their activities. When the owners made the decision to sell it, claiming a sentimental value, cash price, the nascent congregation had no means to buy it; nor the bishop of Venosa. The good bishop feared the suppression of that beneficial institution in that town, where the subversive propaganda was making rapid progress everywhere (it was in 1920). The socialist party was prevailing, taking over the civil administration. In spite of his institute's financial worries, Canon Di Francia pledged to raise the funds necessary to buy that house. He succeeded, and the sisters still have it, operating a developed institution."

## 13. The beauty contest

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The "Vara" is a heavy, several floor car full of little angels ascending and descending. At its top is Our Lady. It pulled with ropes by the faithful enthusiastically shouting, "Long live Mary," in the traditional procession on August 15, in Messina.

In 1923, the committee organized the beauty contest for the first time. The Father burned with holy indignation at the news, and published a protest on the *Scintilla*, signing it, "Sacerdotium lux mundi." He points out the inconvenience of such a contest for the girls' education and formation.

After touching upon the traditional custom of the "Vara," he writes ironically,

Today, however, we are in full evolution of civilization That procession with all its belongings is an old fashion feast of our granpas Today we need something else: bare-naked women, white night-shirt dresses, like ballerinas. We still need more. We have to celebrate Our Lady by making the poor girls believe that being born pretty is a merit worth of honors, praise, admiration, and prizes; being born not pretty instead is worth of disapprobation and ostracism It's just fate that monkeying is a special privilege in Italy That's done with the French press, the custom of beyond the Alps, the Americanism

The beauty contest The poor girl who needs modesty as a [precious pearl of her age must be examined, looked, admired and re-admired carefully by a triumvirate of arbiters... They will examine how many centimeters long is her nose, whether her mouth is narrow or large, white or black her teeth, anemic or colored her cheeks. About twenty, or thirty, or forty young girls will undergo this important examination. The five girls who appear the most beautiful to the arbiters' superfine taste will be chosen; the others, discarded. The former go into rapture, thinking that being beautiful is good, virtuous, or wise. The defeated think that they are worthy of reprobation and punishment So, the way of thinking is upset in that tender age The defeated think: of what avail is it to be virtuous or wise Do they have undergone the examination of their virtue and wisdom?...



The winners will have pageboys Won't they? Doesn't she have the right to have servitude, the one who holds the beauty diploma? And the pageboys of about seven years of age will contemplate with open eyes their little masters, they too beginning to understand something... Truly, this is a noble school preparing the precocious to fall in love, and so many elopements... which give troubles and lunacy to the families since the girl's dowry is the illusion of beauty. Not to speak of so many bad results, which reach the terrible phenomenon of tragic suicides in the blooming age

Honest and civil families are not supposed to submit their innocent children to such a principle of demoralization. In the presence of such a craziness causing great damages to the children of our people, we speak out complaining, shouting our deep anguish for so a great disastrous initiative, which never began in Messina. Should it come on the day sacred to Mary?

We reprove of this first attempt so importunate and perilous that seduces the sincere conscience of the teen-agers, and comes down to profanation of the Assumption's solemn feast."

The Father insists on the profanation of the feast, which particularly calls the youth to contemplate the glory of Mary. He writes, "Mary holds in herself the beauty of heaven and earth and has made the greatest geniuses of the art and literature enamored of herself." He warns the members of the committee about their responsibility before God.

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Gentlemen of the mid-August feast committee, by writing this article we do not mean to offend you; rather we are considering the impropriety in itself in order to avoid damage to the simple, candid souls as well as to those who border the wrong paths and could be influenced by the art of the beautiful temptress

Objectively, however, we pity you as the ones who live unaware in a lost world, in a rotten society, among people who do not want to know God, who think of everything but the mysteries of faith, the after life, and the account we have to submit to God at the end of our lives. God said that it is better to throw oneself overboard wearing a stone that to scandalize the innocent We remind you that after this life will be a happy eternity for those who observe divine law and practice the holy religion of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, there will be a unhappy eternity for those who live far from God and religious duties.

We have sincere pity on you, and for the sake of divine charity as well as for the salvation of your souls, we urge you to give up your project!

If you persist in your project after we have called your attention on the gravity of your responsibility, of which you were not thinking, you will find no mercy before God and the society of the honest! Rather, if we truly desire the moral and the civil good of your young girls, we should teach them the saying of the Holy Spirit, "Beauty is vain; the woman fearing the Lord will be praised" (S.C. Vol. 1, page 100).

## 14. For the souls in purgatory

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The zeal for the glory of God goes beyond the boundaries of earthly life. "Charity comes from love of God, and bases itself on faith. When it goes beyond the boundaries of time, it seeks to relieve miseries outside this earth of exile, in the eternal regions" (Vol. 45, page 98). Purgatory has endless souls eager to transfer to heaven and praise God for ever. Meanwhile they wail ineffably in the midst of indescribable torments!

How fervently the Father spoke of them! Lawyer Romano remembers, "Once I listened to him preaching on the souls in purgatory, and I was moved. If I am devout to the holy souls, it is due to that preaching." When the Father described the purgatory's pains, he couldn't help shedding tears; above all when he spoke of their being far from God, which is the most painful sorrow for the souls in purgatory.

God! We do not know him in this world! We are like the blind by birth who do not long for light, because they do not know it! On the contrary, the souls in purgatory long for God with an intimate, inexpressible desire because they saw him when they were introduced at his presence. They saw his infinite beauty, the beauty enrapturing for ever the myriads of the elected; but the vision lasted an instant: on and off! And yet, what deep impressions the vision of God left inside them! All flames in purgatory are not enough to make the souls divert their mind from that lovely attention. They think of God, loving him, longing for him, being eager for him, and desiring him. Like doves that taken into custody, they flutter their wings over and over the subject of their longing, but in vain. They cannot take off to God before satisfying his justice.

Oh, what a pain this is! How painful is this state for the souls! They are always on the point of taking off to God, but they cannot. They love God, but do not see his face; they are queens of paradise, but are taken into custody in purgatory; exile is over, but they do not enter their homeland! At least, could they lift up their petitions to God so that their

pains might be shortened by prayers! In vain! The souls in purgatory are unable to pray for themselves. They are plunged into their bitter suffering without being able to help themselves! (Vol. 45, page 403).

Hence, we can easily imagine the Father's devotion to the souls in purgatory. He wrote, "I have learned that this institute nurtures a particular compassion and devotion toward the souls who are in purgatory; I will foster such a devotion by often praying for them" (Vol. 44, page 113).

The Father had a very singular devotion to the souls in purgatory, leaving to us many prayers for them. He often celebrated, gave alms, fasted, made penances, and preached the seven days for the souls in purgatory, as for sinners. He used to say, "Let us pray for them, and they will pray for us!" To help the souls in purgatory, he recommended to say the prayers having indulgences. When he asked for graces, he always invoked their intercession; and often gave copious alms to say masses for them. Before starting the mass to the community, he used to expose the various intentions of the celebration, and he never failed to mention the souls in purgatory, especially the most abandoned ones.

The priestly souls were his favorite, for whom he often said seven masses; the last ones he celebrated were for them, and he thanked the Lord for having been able to say all of them.

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Let us remember some particular practices of piety he left to the institute: a special prayer on Monday, the Gregorian prayers before the mass in the Lord's and Our Lady's chief mysteries so that all souls may leave purgatory on their feasts: the requiem before and after the acts in common. The Father also thanked the Lord because the institute felt compassion toward the holy souls in purgatory. We quote from the rules, "Among the devotions and practices of piety, the prayer for the holy souls in purgatory should be preeminent. For this reason, the probationers will often meditate and read topics on purgatory. The acts in common will end with a requiem; every Monday the probationers will offer the holy mass and the Communion for the holy souls; and in November they will offer their practices of piety for them" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 168). "Before taking the vows, they will make the pious donation (**Heroic Act of Charity**) in favor of the souls in purgatory" (Vol. 2, page 31).

## Notes

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(1) On May 10, 1888, in a prayer of his own the Father insists imploring a priest from God for the salvation of Messina, "of this people, this city, these three dioceses, these villages, and many souls all over the world." His wishes are the following: "I expect and desire him as the patriarchs and the prophets expected and desired your coming on earth. I expect and desire him as your most holy Mother longed for your coming on earth. I beg you to meet my expectation so that my wish be not deceived. My dear Jesus, grant me this favor I long for so much; deign to send the salvation of these people; and let me see your elect and say, 'Now let your servant go in peace'" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 23).

(2) We should not confuse him with Stanislaus Cannizzaro from Palermo (1826-1910), a research chemist well known all over the world for his law on the atoms and their reactions. This law goes by his name.

(3) The Scintilla of September 1, 1921, announced Cannizzaro's death, recalled his literary merits, and concluded, "He kept his marvelous clear-headedness until his last, and he himself spontaneously asked for the religious comforts." Therefore, it was well known that Cannizzaro became a convert at point of death. Now, at a distance of forty years some would deny his conversion (N. Falcone, Thomas Cannizzaro, D'Amico, Messina, 1966). "Many have tried to see Cannizzaro as the man that knocked at the Church's door, asking for the comfort of faith at his end. But, if you read with serenity De la popularite' universelle he published two years before his death, any other profession will seem unlikely, and the attempt to show a different exposition or to correct his natural and acquired thought, useless" (page 18). "If Father Henry De Vita hastened to the dying poet, it was due to the pious Thomas Pasqua, who was sent for as phlebotomist, but never by explicit will of the dying" (Ibid.).

To answer the Father who had asked details on the poet's death, Father Vitale took information from Thomas Pasqua. I was present at their conversation. Pasqua was outspoken in his affirmation that Cannizzaro spontaneously and freely sent for Father De Vita, superior of the Dominicans at Giostra. Father Vitale remarked, "I wonder why the poet did not send for Canon Di Francia..." And Pasqua, "Professor Cannizzaro knew that Canon Di Francia was out of Messina." As a matter of fact, the Father had informed the poet that he would be absent for a couple of months. The fact Cannizzaro himself asked for the priest is indirectly confirmed by his sending for Father De Vita. Were Thomas Pasqua to choose, he wouldn't have gone so far as Giostra, but would have called a priest from nearby, such as Vitale, Bruno, D'Andrea, Bensaia, etc. Conclusive evidence is the written retraction of which the Father

talks about clearly. Surely, he must be informed by the professor's daughter.

The contrary argument from the thoughts that Cannizzaro had expressed in his book two years before his death has no value. The conversion is a miracle of grace, which happens when God wants. No one decides that it should happen quite a few years before death.

(4) Father Vitale was at dinner together with the Father and he relates that our Founder ended his toast by saying, "Luigi, hear my word; keep for us Loyola's heard!"



# 15

## THE SECOND PRECEPT

1. The evangelical commandment
2. Since his early years
3. He saw and kissed our Lord
4. For the sake of God
5. Great and princes before God
6. True heroism
7. "To my dear lords, the poor"
8. Without compass
9. Apology
10. "Hunting the poor"
11. Notes

# 1. The evangelical commandment

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"You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments the whole law is based, and the prophets as well" (Mt. 22, 37-40).

The Father comments briefly and suggestively:

"In Jesus along with his pure love, we have to love our neighbor as ourselves with passionate, brotherly affection, because our neighbor is image of God, our fellow, and touch stone of our love for Jesus; love for God and neighbor become one precept including the law and the prophets as well. This precept sums up Old and New Testament, the holy Church's laws, the Fathers, Doctors, and ecclesiastical writers' works as well as the word that the apostles, the martyrs, and the confessors preached in all times; in short, everything depends on love of God and love of neighbor as of ourselves': this is charity, charity is God, and God is charity" (Vol. 3, page 166).

Therefore, the Father establishes for his institutes: "Our Lord Jesus Christ's command: **'love each other as I loved you'** (Jn. 13, 34), which distinguishes the true Christians, in this institute is a main precept like the command: 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind'" (Vol. 44, page 20).

"The perfect observance of this commandment is the most effective means of my sanctification" (Ibid. page 114). "Religion is not only worship and piety; it is a practice of good works... to help the poor and the afflicted" (Vol. 45, page 47).

This is the program; let us see how the Father was faithful to it during his life.(1)



## 2. Since his early years

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Before reviewing the Father's charitable activities very briefly, we deem to apply to him the following words of Job, "If I have denied anything to the poor, with no share in it for the fatherless, though like a Father God has reared me from my youth, guiding me even from my mother's womb (Job 31, 16-18); for I rescued the poor who cried out for help... I was a father to the needy; the rights of the stranger I studied" (Ibid. 29, 12 and 16).

The Father gave up his life, his belongings, and the alms he received for the spiritual and temporal charity. He felt the love toward his neighbor at the highest degree, and practiced it as a mission that God had confided to him in favor of the orphans and the unfortunate. His work was manifold, copious, and continuous; Messina was proud of Padre Francia as of a true apostle of charity. Since his youth he gave up his modest belongings, and continued an effective work to relieve so many miseries around him. He was never confused by his own wide and deep pledges. On the contrary, he enlarged, spread, and improved his charitable work. Charity placed a distinguishing mark on him, and the institutions he founded show that he lived on, in, and for it, because Canon Mary Hannibal Di Francia is synonymous with charity. The Servant of God himself gives clear evidence in a letter he addressed to the municipal administrators of Ostuni, when writing about the various works of charity he ingenuously states: "It is a mission I feel born for" (Vol. 42, page 35); and to the charity committee of Taormina, "Since my youth I have consecrated myself to the only end of relieving my neighbor's misery, doing my utmost according to my poor means" (Vol. 41, page 43).

We, however, cannot deprive Anna Toscano of her merit of having settled exceptional examples of virtues to her children, which inspired our Founder since his tender age. According to the Father's saying, she was very inclined to works of charity. Every now and then she brought home a poor boy or girl in need to be cleaned and fed, or sheltered, and she took care of them. The two brothers priests sometimes happened to find no food at their returning home, because their mother had sent it to a needy family; therefore, they had to wait for their turn.

Anna Toscano said that Hannibal was very compassionate with the poor since his tender age, giving them things and food as he could. A cousin of his says, "Since his childhood, he was very charitable toward the poor, and we had to pay attention to keep him from doing everything to them."

Edifying is an incident with a beggar. When Hannibal was ten to twelve years old, his thoughtless classmates hastily made a poor hungry man the object of a joke by throwing their leftovers at him. Mary Hannibal, distressed and caring, picked up fruit, bread, and everything he could carry from the table and followed the poor man who was humiliated by the boys' behavior.

Delicate is the following incident. Di Francia family had neglected to pay the land-tax; according to the custom of those times, a sentinel mounted guard at their house's door while Anna Toscano was in the city taking steps to pay the tax and to remove the sentinel. Meanwhile Hannibal worried for the sentinel who was suffering cold and hunger; he sheltered him inside, giving him breakfast.

To substantiate the evidence of the Father's sister, we refer another charitable episode which happened when the Father began dwelling in Avignone Quarter. He did so under the pretext that he was preaching a triduo to the most holy Heart of Jesus. To spare her son to return home late in the night, Anna Toscano agreed upon it and gave him two wool mattresses. That same day the mattresses changed owner; two poor were given them because they were sleeping on the bare ground. The Father slept on the tables covered by a blanket. As soon as his mother realized the fact, she provided him with two more mattresses, telling him that she was lending them... It goes without saying that they also changed owner. Hannibal helped a very poor family, whose members were living promiscuously.

### 3. He saw and kissed our Lord

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What we have, and will say, makes evident that the Father's love for the poor was an extraordinary gift from the Lord, who destined him to a sublime mission of charity. He was **a father of the orphans and of the poor**, as the citizens of Messina liked to call Padre Di Francia. This gift was confirmed in an occurrence which perhaps goes beyond nature. More than one relates the episode with little variations. We relate the one by Father Santoro (*Bulletin*, May-August 1927, page 132).

"On the evening of February 20, 1925, the padre was in his room with Father Santoro, who had been ordained a priest the year before. Father Santoro tried to learn something important about our founder's life and his foundation. At a certain point, the Father added: "I would like to tell you something... extraordinary..., but by now, we must keep it a secret.

- Padre, think of it as if it were buried in me.
- No, I won't tell you...

Almost imploring, I began urging him through all the reasons that curiosity and affection suggested to me; for the good of the foundation, for our edification, for God's glory, to make us love our vocation... until he gave in.

- I say this both to make it known how the Lord attracted me to the love of the poor and to edify.

In the first days when I began starting the foundation, on my way home I came across a group of people surrounding something: it was a stupid, dirty boy salivating and wearing rags, whom the people were making fun of. I had mercy, took that boy by the hand, and the group dispersed. There was no one at my house. I cleaned up the boy, made him eat, and put him in bed. Then, considering our Lord in that poor creature, according to divine word, I drew near to kiss him, meaning to kiss Jesus. At that moment, the boy disappeared from my sight: I saw our Lord Jesus Christ, his glance penetrating me, and hitting me with tenderness; I repeatedly kissed the face of our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps, it was a vision of intelligence.

Then, everything went back to its former status. I provided the boy with everything and let him go. Since then, I have had

more love for the poor. That boy was sheltered in a hospice; after that, I didn't hear anything about him."

## 4. For the sake of God

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The Father's love for the poor is the result of his love for God. In fact, love for our neighbor is a theological virtue when we love people for the sake of God, and see God in them; not when we love them for themselves or for whatever human reason. "We can be sure that we love God's children when we love God and do what he has commanded" ( Jn. 5, 2).

Such was the Father's love for his neighbor. Canon Celona defined it exactly when he said, "The poor were Jesus Christ himself for the Father."

The Father loved his neighbor with a supernatural love, sacrificing himself to save their souls. This was the end of his labors, his orphanages, his zeal for the *Rogate*, the Pious Union, and the religious congregations. Whatever he had or did was always directed to the love of God and neighbor.

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The environment was the waste of society, and the cases the Father had to meet, were repulsive. They offered no human allure. And yet, he was continuously in the midst of the poor, cleaning, feeding, kissing their feet, and sharing their insects. And to think, he was very clean by nature and education! But he did so for love of God, not by natural sensitivity, which is discontinuous by itself. Therefore, only love of God explains the Father's strong-mindedness and perseverance in the midst of difficulties, oppositions, incomprehensions, and persecutions. He met all of them to defend the poor.

He used to say: "Do you really love the Lord? The answer may be no, otherwise you wouldn't feel repugnant to the ragged, wounded, and dirty man, since the Lord is concealed in him." A sister relates: "That his love for the poor was the result of his

love for God appears also from this fact: Sister Nazzarena's name-day was on August 6. On that day the Servant of God sent to her a dirty hideous old man, as his gift and wishes, telling her to wash his feet. The very sight of that man from distance filled me with disgust. In the Servant of God's way of thinking, that work of charity acquired great value because of the living image of Jesus Christ residing in that poor."

After reading these evidences, let us read the Father's pouring out of his soul in a letter to Prof. Cannizzaro:

"My love for Jesus Christ as true God urges me to obey all his words, arousing in my heart a flame of love for my neighbor. Jesus said, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'; and I strive to do so by devoting my humble life to the good of my neighbor, as much as I can. Jesus said, 'Give to all who beg from you' (Lk. 6, 30), 'What you did for one of my least brothers, you did it for me' (Mt. 25, 40); and I strive not to deny anyone, venerating Jesus Christ in the poor. Jesus blessed children, loved them with tender heart, and said: 'See that you never despise one of these little ones. I assure you, their angels in heaven constantly behold my heavenly Father's face' (Mt. 18, 10). For this reason I love so much children, striving to save them. I consider that the final end of what Jesus said and did is the salvation of souls. His sweating drops of blood in the garden was due to his knowledge of how many souls are lost because of pride and sensuality; therefore, I strive for the salvation of souls. My dearest professor, I am not saying this by pride, because I am nothing, but to demonstrate that love for our neighbor up to the sacrifice of one's own life can only subsist in the love for Jesus Christ God. I am talking about the true, humble, intimate sacrifice, not about fanaticism which succeeds in nothing but to appear loving our neighbor.

My dearest professor, if I did not love Jesus Christ, I would be quickly annoyed by my staying in the midst of the most abject poor, depriving myself of everything, and by losing sleep and quiet because of the poor and children" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 121).

## 5. Great and princes before God

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We have much more to say about the Father's love for the poor.

Let us quote the judgment that the Servant of God Blessed Ludwig of Casoria passed on the Father when in their first meeting he realized the beauty of the Father's soul.

"Indeed, after hearing the padre speaking about the Avignone institution at their first meeting, Father Ludwig, in both a serious and jocular tone, said to Father Bonaventure, his associate and successor: 'What should we do? Should we keep him with us? He is a lover of the poor.'

...In his meetings with the holy man, the padre tried to learn what Father Ludwig did when he could not meet his financial or other obligations. The holy man tried to make the padre understand that even charity had some constraints. The padre, who seemed unsatisfied by Father Ludwig's response because it was very hard for him to turn away the poor, reiterated his sentiments: 'How can we deny the poor? 'Knowing that the padre's persistence came from his love for Jesus, the holy one answered seriously: 'How can we deny the poor? How can we deny the poor? If at times I, Father Ludwig, whose heart is filled with Jesus Christ, grieve because I am unable to help them, what can I do? There is only so much we can do; we must just do our best. 'Our padre confided his frustration with the man who knew him so well.

The padre also questioned him about how to handle the poor who were reluctant to come to confession. The holy man responded: 'Don't push confession right away. After cleaning, clothing, and supporting a person and after helping for at least a month, then you can start talking about confession' (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 69).

Let us read the declaration by the Father for the Rogationists:

"I will love and respect the poor of Jesus Christ with faith and charity, holding them as the suffering members of his mystical body, as well as being always fully aware of how Jesus Christ exalted them by declaring that whatsoever is done for the poor, is done to himself.

I regret that the ignorant, lost world rejects and scorns the poor, just as many Christians often do. I, however, will lead the poor to follow the paths of eternal salvation, and will hold them as great people, as princes before God, according to the Psalm's saying, "their lives will be precious in His sight" (Ps. 72, 14). Even though they may be troublesome, I will be sympathetic aiding them, and helping them as much as I can, and much more by evangelizing and drawing them to God" (Vol. 44, page 114).

The end of charity toward the poor should be the following. "Temporal charity must be combined with spiritual charity because the poor need evangelization. Some of them do not approach the sacraments for many years either from laziness or from ignorance of Christian doctrine. At least on Sundays and feasts, before giving food, we have to gather and teach them catechism, the **I believe, Our Father, and Hail Mary** making them pray and approach the sacraments of confession and Holy Communion. We have to bear in mind that our Lord, as a sign that he was the divine messiah, to the miracle of his omnipotence added the miracle of his mercy: "**The poor are evangelized.**" But evangelizing the poor without helping them is an unfinished work. We must join both; by so doing, we will do a good service pleasing the adorable heart of Jesus, who will reciprocate by giving us copious, divine blessings; therefore, this double charity must never fail" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 114).

The Father combined his teaching with good example.

When Brother Mariano was in Naples, one morning he was told by the Father to dress well, because they had to visit marquis, barons or princes, whom the Father mentioned by name. The morning instead was spent to console and help through copious alms some poor, one more pitiable than the other. On their way home, Brother Mariano asked the Father whether their visits to the aristocrats were delayed to the afternoon. The Servant of God responded:

- We have already paid the visits.
- Did I need to dress well to pick up insects?
- The poor are princes, and the insects we pick up are pearls.

Listen to a sister: "One day there were many poor in the

atrium of our house in Trani waiting for soup. The Father passed through bowing and raising his hat to them until he blessed the food. Because we were wonder-struck, the Father told us, 'Are you not yet convinced that the poor are the image of Jesus Christ?' Another time we arrived to Oria from Messina. Taken a coach at Oria station, while going to Saint Paschal's now and then the Father greeted people on the right and left. By curiosity I began looking at whom he was bowing. He intervened:

- Do you want to know whom I am greeting? They are our lords going to pick up the soup."

An employee of the institutes narrates: "A man named Thomas, who was poor, full of insects, and almost blind due to a lack of hygiene, frequented Saint Paschal's. One day, the padre called me:

- Tell me, Marchese, do you want to help yours who died in the earthquake?

- Yes, Padre, I do.

Then, arm in arm, he presented the wrecked man to me, saying:

- He is greater than a king and an emperor, because he represents Christ.

- Well, I and a helper drew a nice warm bath for Thomas, and the Servant of God gave me brand new clothes of his own to dress the poor."

More than once Thomas was cleaned and clothed by the Father, but he used to sell the new clothes drawing back to his former state. In spite of that the Father continued his work of charity.

Charity bound the Father all his life long: he loved, clothed well the poor as they were Jesus Christ, kissed their feet, and waited on them. His walking with cripples and needy persons was moving. In the early times, returning from begging he happened to give up everything to the poor before reaching the institute. Wearing an apron, he himself sometimes cut the poor's hair and cleaned from waste material.

A Religious remembers the times when he entered the institute. "He had the honor to often eat with the poor, sometimes picking up a spoonful from each of them. He often washed their feet and sometimes the whole new-comer. I was horrified by the



sight of a foul soiling poor sitting at table after the Father's invitation. But he pleasantly remarked that my repugnance would disappear at my full entrance in the order. 'You are a novice,' he said."

Father Vitale points out that the Father "could not live without the emotions caused by these cases naturally repulsive, but supernaturally pleasant." "Several times I saw foul repulsive poor entering the Father's room and going out clean and well clothed. He himself took care of them, because on the side of his bedroom there was a bath." A brother put aside a cup for the poor because one of them had used it. When the Servant of God realized the fact, he strongly reprehended the brother making him understand that the poor are our lords and we should have no fear of their hands and lips, unless they are infected. Furthermore, the Father kept that cup for himself and even though the repented brother asked the cup for his own use, the Father denied his request. The poor were bathed with warm water and well clothed by him. Often he delivered no clothes to the laundry at the end of the week, because he had donated them to the poor; if questioned about it, he used to smile.

Besides the daily soup, the Father used to order a full dinner for the poor on the chief solemnities. I remember how cordially, intimately, and deeply joyous he was on those occasions. He waited on them, begged the poor for some spoonfuls from their plate, then ate, laughed, and talked in their midst. Together with them he toasted to the saint of the feast, our Lord, and the Madonna wanting us to be proud of that day because princes, marquis, and barons had honored our refectory.

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His last heart beats were for the poor. He said: "Lord, at least some of the prayers said by people for me may help the poor having no inheritance to affections." Some days before his demise he recommended Father Vitale to financially help the poor, mentioning many names and establishing the amount to be given. Father Vitale reports what the Father said in his illness. "I have come to terms with the Lord. I have asked him to apply only a fifth of the prayers said in our institution for my healing and a tenth of those made by other religious communities. I asked the Lord to rechannel the remaining prayers for so many suffering poor who have no one praying for them" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 341).

## 6. True heroism

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It was a well-known fact in Messina that the Servant of God picked up some spoonfuls from the poor's plates to form his own plate. Furthermore, he often ate in the same bowl of the nauseating poor. After teaching the Christian doctrine and feeding the poor of Avignone, the Father often changed his plate of pasta with oil (prepared for his delicate health) with the plate of a suffering poor. A sister relates: "In Oria the Father commanded the mother superior to prepare a good dinner for several gentlemen, the following day. By his order we brought about the best dishes and napkins. At the set time, about 30 poor peeped in. Two of them, the most ragged, were chosen by the Father to sit at his sides; we were astounded and looked each other in the face in silence, Father Palma and Mother D'Amore included. At a certain point I realized that one of the poor sitting on the Father's side was discharging phlegm in the plate. As soon as the Father noticed that, he changed his dish with the poor. By some invincible repulsion I burst out, *Madonna mia!* By a gesture the Father silenced me. After dinner I plainly said to him: 'If I become a saint, I want to be clean, not dirty.' He laughed at that, putting his hand on my head." The same sister relates: "One day he invited me and Sister Gertrude to observe a mortification in honor of the child Jesus. We agreed upon it. He led us to a slum where a poor man was lying ill in an impressive state: plenty of bugs had even gnawed his head. We transferred the man in a tent of sheets we had pitched, and while we sisters disinfected the slum the Father drew a warm bath for the poor man, giving him lingerie and clothes brought from the Holy Spirit. Lifting the edge of a sheet, I saw the Father bent over the feet of the sick man. I think he was kissing them."

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One day, the Father knew from a newspaper that a poor old woman was lying abandoned in a slum at Gravitelli. He sent two sisters to see. It was a repulsive place. He ordered to clean the woman along with her slum and hired a maid to help and serve the sick woman until a vacancy be available at the Little Sisters'.

These, however, were afraid of sheltering her, because she used to cry in the night; yet, when she was sheltered, she stopped crying since the first night. The Father said, "Didn't I tell you that her crying depended on hygiene?" The sister continues, "I could refer endless cases which prove that the Father's charity toward his neighbor was from God's charity. His care for the poor and the care he demanded of us was supernatural: he saw the image of God in the poor, and he wanted us to console him. Besides cleaning, clothing, and feeding he questioned the poor about the state of their conscience, personally providing them with proper instruction."

The mother superior of Taormina's reports: "One evening the Taormina sisters were waiting for the padre at a pre-determined time, but he did not come. The next day, they knew the reason. While going to the Messina station by carriage, the padre saw a poor, wretched man lying on the ground. He was so impressed that he stopped, took the poor man back home, bathed him, fed him, and called a barber over to shave him, regardless of the sisters who were waiting in Taormina. Then he put him to bed and drew the attention of the Little Sisters to shelter him. We knew all this from him, who with simplicity and angelic smile concluded, Obviously, adorned as I was with pearls (the poor's insects), I couldn't come over here to share them with you'."

One day, an old, poor, ragged, foul man knocked at the door. He said that Padre Francia had invited him to lunch. I informed the Father: he got up, put off his skull-cap, bowed to the poor, and made him sit at his own chair. I must have made a wry face, because the Father looked at me severely. Then he asked the poor what he would like to eat. 'What *Vossia* want,' the poor said. I brought macaroni, meat, cake, fruit. At the end the Father told me to prepare a combination of food in a box. He took away the napkin he had placed to the poor, said the prayer, and accompanied him up to the door. Then he lectured the mother superior mildly. 'If your spouse Jesus had come here clean and well dressed, you would have given him a great welcome. Now, however, he has come under the shape of a poor (and what a poor!) and you made grimaces. When will you understand that the poor are Jesus Christ?'"

Incidents of this kind were frequent, and Father Vitale describes them with vivid images.

Sometimes he surprised the superior by saying, "Please prepare a special dinner because I have invited a gentleman that cannot be disregarded." The superior, wanting the occasion to stand out, did her best. When everything was ready, the padre opened the door to let in a poor pitiable wretch; this was the gentleman he wanted to be honored. Later, the padre used to clean and dress these people in order that they might appear with a certain decorum (*Father Hannibal Di Francia*, page 343).

The mother superior of Taormina vouches: "An old woman named Peppina used to knock at the door with her walking stick; pretended to receive the alms from the Father only (when he was in). When I raised my objections she opposed that the work of mercy done by a saint was light and consolation to her. One day she did not appear. Some days later the Father perceived her absence, and because I gave no reason he scolded me for my indifferent behavior. Finally, I received information of her hovel and went to find her with other sisters. Musty smell and wastes kept us on the threshold. Then we cleaned her and the hovel, putting things in order. Afterward, me or a butler used to bring her the food to much satisfaction of the Father, who was joyous for our gradual improvement in the true works of mercy. Following his suggestion, we invited the poor woman to transfer to our guest-quarters, but she declined our invitation, preferring to die in her own hovel. She died in the hospital instead, and our orphans participated in her funeral."

"One woman had an abscess on her neck. Because no one had treated her, the growth was spreading and had an unbearable smell. To get rid of her, the poor used to give precedence to her. After she left, I did not see her any more. I wondered if she had died. Later I happened to hear that the padre had found her lying on the ground. Having mercy, he took her to the hospital in a carriage. She was the same woman who wandered here and there because of her unbearable smell."

## **7. To my dear Lords, the poor**

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In the following chapters we'll talk about the Father's alms to the poor; now, we point out that his lavishness to them was perhaps the only reason for being criticized many times, and so cursorily. People said, 'He is a good man, even a saint,' and that was the common opinion, "but he goes

blind by heart, and ill-intentioned persons take advantage of him." In a few words, in their opinion his poor were a rabble of idle and exploiters.

Complaints started from the poor themselves, but for quite opposite reasons. They did not feel satisfied according to their real or imaginary needs. A gentleman says, "I myself once had to intervene in order to defend the sisters distributing bread. They were insulted by the benefited who were never satisfied." So many times the more benefited insulted to him and to the brothers distributing alms, but he forgave them, warning about their wrong against God and men. He demanded of us to do the same.

As to the Father, these complaints were a reason to continue perfecting his work of evangelization. He addressed a letter to the poor in his last years, calling them, "My dear lords, the poor." He recommends them to moderate their requests according to the moral principles to which they have to conform their lives so that providence never fail.

*To my dear lords, the poor:* 1. You must be convinced that it is impossible to satisfy your needs with copious alms because the lords poor are by thousands and to satisfy all of them a fountain should run gold money. 2. Canon Di Francia's and his sisters' direct duty is keeping the two orphanages of Messina. They have to build what the orphans need, which requires a lot of money, and we are running into a great debt. 3. Some of the lords poor appeal to Saint Anthony's providence. Saint Anthony's providence is to satisfy the orphans in everything and we can hardly give little help to the outsiders. To tell the truth, we couldn't even do that.

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Obviously, he had to talk to the poor in such a way. Practically, however, it was easy for him to give, and to give copious alms, since he was only mortified for being unable to give more. The Father continues:

4. I let my lords, the poor, know the reason why poverty increases and what they must do to deserve help from God: a) they shall not blasphemy God. b) If they have children, they shall not set bad examples with blasphemies, bad words, and fights in the family. c) They shall not get drunk. d) They will receive Communion with their family at least once a year and on the chief holidays, always avoiding mortal sin. e) They shall not curse at their neighbor. f) They will say the rosary in family every evening; the prayers in the morning and in the night. g) They shall not covet their neighbor's goods. h) they will work, work, work, each one in their profession. They should not say, "I have no work," because work does not fail the honest and those of good will! They should work every day! Lack of work depends on lack of will,

and such lack could be a punishment from God for incorrect behavior... i) They should live with the holy fear of God, avoiding sin and thinking of saving their souls and those of their relatives. The persons who neglect the salvation of their own souls and of theirs', cannot pretend help from God. The world is going into ruin and poverty is increasing because men and women do not keep their religious duties, are oblivious of God, and are sinning in many ways. Some of them think of excusing themselves by wearing the picture of Saint Anthony, or the Heart of Jesus, etc. Something else is needed, i. e., complying with our duty. The superstitions of good luck charms are useless, rather dangerous, because God is offended! Without the blessing of God we have hungry, misery, and misfortunes, because God does not bless those neglecting their religious duties, or having a dirty conscience.

We read in the Scripture: "I never saw the just begging bread." Why, then, so many are begging bread? Should I say it? Because they never approach confession and Communion; or they are addicted to wine, or something else...; or they covet their neighbor's goods; or they do not respect God, say bad words, and tell lies in order to cheat people. God, however, sees everything and becomes angry over lies and deceit. Therefore, my dear lords, the poor, keep in mind these warnings from your friend and brother in Jesus Christ, Canon Di Francia. Always keep the law of God and the precepts of the Church, behaving according to these warnings. You will see that God, Jesus Christ our Lord, will make peace with you, helping you in everything ((S.C. Vol. 10, pages 116, 117).

## 8. Without compass

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After reading the Father's warning to his lords, the poor, we now come to the people who charged him with bad administration because of his lavishness of alms.

The Father's principles about charity were far off from common standards. Referring to his meeting with the Servant of God, Father James Cusmano, the Father relates the ideas that Father Cusmano expressed about charity on that occasion. Writes the Father, "I asked whether in the charitable institutions one should follow calculations, counting income and expenses, as in a

common administration, to proportion one's expenditure to one's income for the good to be done; or one should be informal, trusting in God. He responded, 'When I didn't follow compasses, I saw miracles!'" (S.C. Vol. 9, page 147). The saints did so. If Cottolengo, Don Bosco, Don Guanella, Don Orione would have followed compasses, they wouldn't have succeeded as they did.

Listen to the Father about his work: If I had taken the compasses as a cool administrator from the time I began sheltering abandoned children, first I would not have bartered my little things; second, to balance the sheltering of the poor abandoned orphans with the meager contributions, I would not have formed the institutes. Any enterprise requires initiative and impulse, but when the matter is about orphans who get lost day after day, then initiative and impulse are even more urgent. In Messina we have two orphanages that shelter many children, giving them an education, life, and safety; instead of getting lost, these children found their right path. Why should I extinguish the flame or instinct that drove me up to here? (Vol. 45, pages 459-460).

The Father never used compasses, but opened his heart to everyone without worries. Someone rightly states, "He was not an organizer, but a genius of charity, living in it; he disregarded this sublunary world, whose bonds and limits he ignored; hence the obvious reactions of ordinary administrators. He always went straight on charity's road, and when people insulted him for this behavior, he did not listen to them, or laughed at that."

The Father defended the poor in the open. "While begging and receiving alms, he often used to say to the benefactors, 'You are rich to help the poor, who are beloved by God.'" A mother superior once told the Father that the poor speculate. The Servant of God responded, "We should believe the poor." Father Drago sought to screen the poor, after information of third persons. When he asked the Father's advice he was told, "Don't be too particular. If a rich humbles himself by asking alms, his humiliation is a sign of need. Give to all, and with discretion when the matter is about gentlefolk who have fallen on hard times."

When we opened our house in Altamura, a beggar knocked at the door. The Father washed his feet, clothed him anew, and fed him despite the sisters had informed him that the beggar was a blasphemer. The Father warned them not to speak against charity, and told them that he expected the beggar's conversion from that work of charity. Then he addressed two orphan girls, "Do you want to make a sacrifice? Give your cherries to this beggar." They did so willingly.

Father Drago reports, "Once, an old man told the Father, 'My heart has a desire to smoke; it has been so long since I smoked.' And the Father 'Blessed you, why didn't you tell me before? What do you smoke?' 'That's a question for gentlemen,' said the poor man, 'I will be happy with anything!' The Father quickly ordered five cigars. I objected that one should not foster vice. He responded, 'This also is an act of charity. Would you take his vice away at his age? Rather, when he comes, give him a *Toscano* in secret!'"

A sister remembers: "I was a seller of bread. One day during the 1915 war a lot of women came in begging bread. Since the police arrested a few of them, the Father went on the roof crying, 'Please leave them, leave them, it's a matter of hunger!'" "On another occasion, because a ruffian slapped a merchant, the sisters called the police. When the guards were taking the well-known fellow to jail, the Padre happened to pass by and began mediating by saying that the incident happened because the man was hungry, that he would see to it that the fellow would repent and avoid bigger problems. The guards went away exclaiming, 'Padre Di Francia! We should handle people of this kind.' The Padre began dealing with the man's soul and his needs" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 346-347). Says Lawyer Romano, "I remember the Servant of God's magnanimity with a certain man that under the pretext of winning a diploma in English language tapped him for money. When I warned him about, he responded ingenuously, 'I am aware of that, but a good time will come when he will achieve the diploma!'"

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## 9. Apology

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We have already seen how the Father reacted to the charges of being lavish with the poor: **he did not listen; he sometimes laughed at that.** Once, however, he defended himself openly. It happened in 1906, on the occasion of an illustrious visit to his orphanage for



girls. He freed himself from several charges, among which the one that he was helping the poor. it is worth reading his apology.

Some persons charge me with helping the poor. To tell the truth, this charge hurts me because helping the afflicted, miserable, abandoned, dying by starvation and cold weather, cripples, blind, and unable to work is a duty for all Christians, even when they have to make an effort; in fact, our Lord Jesus Christ taught us to do to others what we want be done to us. They say: "But you have no means to help them, because you have to take care of the orphans." To these persons I answer: "Never have I deprived my orphans of anything in order to help the poor, because I obtained the means from public charity and I have experienced that a supreme providence, in whose presence both rich and poor are equal, always provided me with the means to give a dish of food and some bread to the most derelict and needy."

They respond that I help beggars who are able to work. I say to them: "Please come to my institute at lunch time; you will see the pool of Siloe full of old feeble people, either blind or cripples, or drooping by starvation. I assure you that I held some of them who had fainted from starvation. If some of them are unemployed, it is due to lack of work. Will the society condemn these to death because they lack work? Charity and humanness dare not nor they deny them a piece of bread."

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These persons insist that some of the poor steal and cheat me. What can I say? It is possible that a rascal conceals himself under the guise of extreme poverty picking up a dish of food and a piece of bread. What a great thing! But, I cannot put into practice the saying, "so that the guilty person may not be saved, the just must perish! So I cannot deny a piece of bread to so many unhappy persons for fear that a rascal is concealed among them! They steal! Please tell me, were you never robbed? Did human fraud and simulation never take money from your pocket or safe box, your vigilance and shrewdness notwithstanding?

Perhaps I am striking a discordant note that revives gloomy memories to you!... So I beg you not to charge me so easily if a beggar who is doubly poor happens to be in the midst of so many unhappy people when I try to give a helping hand. Society took no care of him when he was a little beggar or rascal abandoning him to himself, so he took a wrong way. Will society condemn him to death today? At least, may he find a gentle breeze of peace in the breath of celestial charity which is able to get him back to a better counsel! (Vol. 45, page 462).

## 10. Hunting the poor

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In the last years of the nineteenth century and the first ones of the twentieth, in Italy people clashed openly with the beggars. They said, "It is a shame for a nation so progressed and civilized to see men and women begging in the streets." What was the remedy? Instead of remedying the social wound with proper means, they wasted no time: they put in prison the beggars caught in the very act. Several newspapers of Messina had begun a campaign against the poor. The Father felt the horror of this social injustice, and his heart was broken. He mailed a circular to Messina's publishers defending the poor, and entitling the document,

### Hunting the poor

Dear publisher:

As other publishers have through their presses, you have attracted police attention to the poor that we sometimes see begging in the streets. Unfortunately, the results of this campaign have been dismal for the unhappy impoverished.

For a year, we have witnessed the hunting of the poor. Relentlessly, policemen spy on every move of these miserable creatures who are sometimes old, sometimes crippled, or feeble, or sick, or unable to work. As soon as an officer sees one of them turning the corner or crossing the streets, he takes him into court where a judge finds him guilty of disturbing civic peace and condemns him to one to six months in prison. The unhappy person, guilty only of being poor, is locked in jail, like a criminal, being punished for an average of two to three months before he is set free. Then he faces this dilemma: whether to die of starvation on a street corner or whether to beg again risking law's wrath.

The powerful instinct of self-preservation prevails, and the poor man is compelled to beg again. Once again, the policeman takes him to court where a greater punishment is imposed on him for being a second

time offender. He re-enters jail, is set free only to come back, and the cycle repeats itself. Eventually he gets used to not eating or hangs himself to put an end to it.

I know some people who are in and out of jail constantly!

A district judge also assured me that he had sent about sixty poor to jail!

Everyone sees that this punishment against the poor is a true social injustice.

We can say it is the law that condemns them. Yes, the law condemns troublesome begging and young beggars who like to harass people and perhaps to impose on them instead of working. But it is quite a different matter when a feeble, old man begs with a charitable voice asking for a piece of bread so he does not die of starvation like a dog.

That unhappy man is a human being just as we are; he feels the needs of life as we do. He knocked at the charitable institution's door in vain; he was told that there was no place for him, that there were too many requests and not enough room; therefore, he asks for public charity.

Where is the problem here? Does being a poor person correspond with being a criminal? If so, why did Jesus come into the world to teach us to love each other like brothers and sisters? Why did he want to embrace poverty, defend the poor, and declare that what we do for them is done for him?

Some could say, "isn't it advantageous for the poor to go to jail for shelter and food?" We answer this question by asking another. If you were in the situation of that poor person, would you prefer being prosecuted and condemned to six months in jail rather than enjoying freedom? Surely the poor locked in prison have little chance of eating a good dinner and sleeping on a well-padded bed. They receive some soup and a piece of black bread which they could get through charity. If this is the case, let them eat this bread without the bars and iron doors; let them sleep soundly upon their own straw mattresses without the six months jail sentence and the gloomy future before them. The poor need so many things, but let them enjoy the free sun, free air, and free horizon, especially today when there is so much freedom for everyone.

The more we consider this serious social injustice, the more it terrifies us.

I have lived among the poor for many years. I can prove my claims with facts, documentation, and examples. For instance, in my male institute I have sheltered a poor man who was a garbage collector all his life. He performed his job with such application and fulfillment that he is worthy of admiration. Now he is a tottering, disabled, old man. Because my asylum is for children and its finances are limited, I can give him only room and board. To live, however, a man needs other things besides food. This old man is helped by some benefactors who give him a soldo (1/20 of a lira) on designated days. With this he is able to buy a few shirts, some shoes, and tobacco. A month ago he was going out of

the front gate of one of his benefactors when a policeman took him to the magistrate. His tears and protests were useless: he was condemned to a month of prison.

Please, what crime has this unfortunate one committed? Who can impose punishment when there is no crime? Does this penal code exist in any nation? Surely this is not what law means!

If begging is a crime for the poor, then those who give alms are aiding and abetting in their crimes. These criminal partners include the chief of police, the judges who all have had mercy on the poor and have helped them many times, and me.

You can take all the poor in the world into custody; you can trap and drown them. You will never be able to destroy the feeling of charity that drives people to help the underprivileged. There will always be beneficent hearts willing to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to consider the feeble and abandoned poor as brothers, and to feel the sweet consolation of helping them. You are unable to destroy the poor because the condition of human life and the organization of human society are such that the poor cannot disappear entirely. Jail, trial, or other means notwithstanding, these words of the gospel will always be true: the poor will always be with you.

Instead of turning against the poor beggars, instead of impairing the state and/or provincial finances by keeping the poor in jail, open a new asylum to shelter these unfortunates in Messina. But it is a sad comment on our city that charitable institutions are not very well understood.

As winter comes, it will be worse for the poor. If they are not allowed to beg, what will they do? By the irony of fate, the two public dormitories, which sheltered about eighty people, have closed. During the summer those poor men and women spent the nights in the open. Will they be able to do the same in winter when it snows? If they beg to sleep under a shelter, they will be taken, judged, and condemned.

Dear sir, disregarding religious principles that perhaps divides us, I think that you are inclined to have mercy on these vagrants. I appeal to your humanitarian feelings and ask you to state through the press the exact meaning of 'illicit beggary' as well as to give legal exemption to the feeble, unfortunate, and old poor people. They are unable to work and/or they are crippled. In spite of their various requests, they are not sheltered in any public asylum, in the Collereale poorhouse, at the Little Sisters' house, or at the Pious House. They do not deserve inquisition or prison; instead they deserve pity and help.

The sad, abandoned poor have no lawyer to defend them properly, and they have no newspapers to look out for their interests. They are society's outcasts, considered unworthy of life.

These thoughts may move your generous feelings to take a stand

behind these weak, oppressed poor. Practicing the noble virtue of charity deserves God's blessings and man's.

With the utmost respect,  
Your servant,  
Can. M. Hannibal Di Francia

Several newspapers reported the Father's circular, and some of them commented on it very favorably.

"We have received from holy Canon Di Francia this letter which is the most sincere and high expression of Christian charity. He has been victimizing his noble life for the suffering human beings" (*L'Alba*, September 7, 1899). "The blessed Canon Hannibal Di Francia has mailed to us the following article which always better reveals his angelic heart and his love for the suffering human beings. They find in him a great apostle of Christian charity, unlike some fat and big liberals" (*L'Ordine*, September 14, 1899).

The Father's intervention turned out to be very beneficial to the poor. Says Father Vitale, "His article was so impressive that the questor permitted the poor's begging."

Another initiative of the Father, however, who was grieved by a painful view in Bari, was not crowned with success. We quote his letter from Altamura to *Il Corriere delle Puglie*, on February 21, 1918.

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On the occasion of the regrettable death of Oronzo Rosselli nicknamed **U Rizz**, your newspaper published vibrant articles to censure human, wild acts of brutal street-urchins. They oppressed the poor wretch with insults and ill-treatments up to the cemetery, inducing a grave suspicion that they drove him to the grave by making him drink a poisonous beverage.(2)

The noble aim of the press is: to fight evil, to foster goodness, to be zealous for the rights of human beings, the most pitiable included.

Owing to this reason I feel obliged to call your attention upon events similar to Oronzo Rosselli's, to which I witnessed on the eighteenth of this month in the distinguished city of Bari.

I was going to the station Bari-Matera around 1:00 p.m. with my friend Canon Carmel De Palma of Bari, when in a street near the station we saw a pitiable, afflicted poor surrounded by a gang. They were scorning and vexing him. A few of them pulled him by the edge of his ragged jacket, others bumped into him, and others threw wastes at him. The victim was furious, crying, and struggling. We approached and consoled him, giving some money. He was very thankful.

At our entering another alley near the station, we witnessed a similar incident. A new gang of precocious criminals was squawking, insulting, and ill-treating a half-wit beggar.

At that view I could not refrain myself from reprimanding those rascals, as they deserved. Meantime the half-wit beggar went away, perhaps to find a worse gang and harder ill-treatments.

Dear editor, to put an end to these indecencies in Bari, which is a pearl among the Italian cities, please call the attention of the citizens. For the sake of humankind, for the sake of God in whom all of us are brothers and sisters, let us seize the occasion of the unhappy man's death by poison to defend the unfortunates who are undergoing troubles. At least, may the little criminals' actions against them come to an end.

Let us vindicate the pitiful memory of Oronzo Rosselli by impeding that other people undergo an unfortunate fate!

You and the gentlemen who are powerful for their conditions and relations be concerned with the few tramps and the old feeble beggars; defend them from the bad, oppressive instincts of the inconsiderate boys; see to it that they may be sheltered, or provided and protected."

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Then he recommends the **inconsiderate boys**. "While we pity for the victims of the unbridled, vagrant boys' reckless cruelty, we also consider these unhappy little torturers. Idleness, abandon, and vagrancy make them so cruel and inhuman. If a helping hand pushed them, if a civil authority recruited them for work and moralization, many of them would turn out to be honest citizens and workers. They too have some natural tendency to do good.

Returning to the *few tramps*, he writes, "If my request is proper, I dare beg you to raise a subscription in the *Corriere delle Puglie* to help the most unfortunate and needy of them, at least until Easter.

If you raise such a subscription, I pledge 25 liras" (Vol. 41, pages 139-140).

The Father asked the editor to publish the article, but all in vain; nor the subscription was raised. The lay mentality of that time was openly against any interference of religion and clergy, keeping people from giving weight to an initiative of a priest, who was, furthermore, a stranger.

## Notes

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1. "Religious and social action of Cardinal Dusmet and Hannibal Di Francia," thesis for doctorate by Father Joseph Borraccino R. C. J. at Rome University.

2. Autopsy and chemical valuation fortunately excluded poisoning (*Corriere delle Puglie*, March 3, 1918).





# 16.

## AVAILABLE TO ALL

1. The holy mission of giving
2. His alms
3. Anecdotes
4. For the prisoners
5. For the consecrated souls
6. The Little Sisters of the Poor and  
the Morning Star Sisters
7. Hospitality
8. Notes

# 1. The holy mission of giving

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The Apostle Paul's saying, "I made myself all things to all men in order to save at least some of them" (1 Cor. 9, 22) was the Father's and his institute's program. For this reason he sought an endless charity. "The Daughters of Divine Zeal will keep in mind that the Pious Institute of the interests of the divine Heart has been born with the mission of giving. The more we give, the more the Lord will give us, because he said, "When you give one, you will be given a hundredfold measure and eternal life." And elsewhere, "It is better to give than to receive" (Vol. 1, page 214). One day, the Father said, "If I unfortunately happened to know in paradise that the practice of charity fails in one of my daughters, I would ask the Lord the permission to come down with a rod to flog her." Reporting this saying, a sister gave the Father's reason, "Because by lack of charity we remove divine providence from the institution."

In the early days of the foundation, besides the promises of chastity, poverty, and obedience the sisters novices also made the promise of charity and of prayer to obtain good workers. The Father wrote for the Rogationists, "They will nurture and practice the spiritual and temporal charity toward their neighbor through the work of religion and beneficence, which are the aim of this institute. Bewaring of afflicting whomsoever, they will console and comfort everyone with holy words and financial help, as much as they can. They will practice a special charity toward those who happened to offend or contradict them, avoiding to avenge themselves" (Vol. 3, page 23).

What are the institute's specific works? Those performed by the Father, and the other ones that providence will allow in the proper time. All of them are related to the Rogate:

Our maxim: "Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest," urges us to continuously

pray, asking God for the good evangelical workers to the holy Church, and to perform the works of charity we can do by divine help. Up to now, these works are the education and salvation of the abandoned orphans, and the evangelization and help of the unfortunate, derelict poor. They are two holy missions we must care with faith and love" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 196).

The Father's program, however, was a larger one, as we see from his answer to the question about the new foundations. "According to the means, the circumstances, the invitations, the buildings, the contract, etc., we can open orphanages, kindergartens, laboratories for outside students, boarding schools from elementary schools to colleges." The Rogate urges us to work in any field of the spiritual and temporal culture in order to win souls to the most holy Heart of Jesus, for his glory and consolation." For the Daughters of Divine Zeal the Father adds, "Asylums for the poor, hospitals, and any charitable institution for boarding and outside women" (Vol. 1, pages 185-186).

It goes without saying that the Father recommends the study.

If we have smart students with the opportunity to attend the universities, we should encourage them; they could help other sisters to obtain teaching credentials, and to form a boarding school recognized by the government. Teaching many young women would be a great good, which would help the institution of the Daughters of Divine Zeal.

Those responsible for the studies will accept wholesome young girls of twelve years, who show signs of vocation, to lead them to the study. Because they are young, they have the potential to achieve good results (Vol. 1, page 154).

## 2. His alms

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Writing the life of Saint Peter Damian, his teacher and spiritual master, Saint John of Lody says of him, "Who could number the works of charity he did in so many ways? Who could win him in the practice of giving alms, washing the poor's feet, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, and visiting the sick? Circumstances

or time permitting, he was always engaged in such works" (Saint John of Lodi, *S. Pier Damian e i suoi discepoli*, Ediz. Cantagalli, Siena, page 59).

These statements about Saint Peter Damian seem a beforehand picture of the Father, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Now we are about to talk about his giving alms, whose praise the assembly recounts (Sirach 31, 11).

From the appendix to the original constitutions we quote the following teaching:

Aware of the command and the exhortations of our Lord Jesus Christ "give to everyone who asks you" and "give the remainder to the poor," the pious institute of the Rogationists will be generous toward the poor, the afflicted, and the derelict. The kitchen soup for the poor will never fail in each institute, and after providing the community with everything, a dish of food, some bread, and some money will be given to all the poor who knock at our door, taking into consideration their age and ailments. Helping the poor this way or giving them clothes or other forms of charity after providing the community, will be done with joy because the apostle says, "God delights in the people who give with joy."

Alms must be given in the spirit of faith, remembering our Lord Jesus Christ's promise, "you will receive a hundred times more" and "give to others, and God will give to you: you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands - all that you can hold." On one hand, we have to provide the means of living for us and the institutions; on the other hand, we have to keep our divine Savior's saying, "giving is better than receiving..." Believing in our Lord Jesus Christ's words will remind us that he said, "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me."

To foster the practice of alms and charity toward our neighbor in different ways, we quote the touching words of the Holy Spirit through the prophet Isaiah (58, 7-11):

"...(Is not this the sort of fast that pleases me...) To let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke, to share your bread with the hungry, and shelter the homeless poor, to clothe the man you see to be naked, and not turn from your own kin? Then will your light shine like the dawn and your wound will be quickly healed over. Your integrity will go before you and the glory of Yahweh behind you. Cry, and Yahweh will answer; call, and he will say, 'I am here'. If you do away with the yoke, the clenched fist, the wicked word, if you give your bread to the hungry, and relief to the oppressed, your light will rise in the darkness, and your shadows become like noon. Yahweh will always guide you, giving you relief in desert places. He will give strength to your bones and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never run dry" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 113).

Talking about the Father's alms, we find ourselves in an endless field... We pick up a few sheaves.

Evidences of his love for neighbor are numerous and concordant. "We would need volumes to answer properly. We asked ourselves, 'Where does the Father find the money to quickly face all the needs of things and persons?' He did everything for the sake of the Lord. He spared no effort with words, counsels, examples, helping the people in their needs. One day is hardly enough to report such things. He gathered and sheltered orphans, fed and clothed the poor, and made any sacrifice to help the sick."

Our houses had the daily soup kitchen for the poor. The Father himself tasted the food, and unless it was tasteful, he reprimanded those in charge of it. Our institutions work for the poor. A priest notes, "It is worthy considering that male and female poor knocked at his institute's door every day, receiving soup, bread, and some money." "Every day, at the Holy Spirit, we provided hundreds of poor with soup, 200 kg. of bread, and money (we were running the mill at that time). Because the prefect of the county could not believe the report, he himself came to get the evidence on the spot. When the Father visited his communities, he himself provided the poor with alms more generous than the fixed ones. Pointing to the kettle of the soup for the poor, the Father once said playfully, "This contains alms for the poor; and when we give them the boiled food, it multiplies."

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It was a refrain in Messina:

These are Padre Di Francia's seats,  
Whoever arrives sits down and eats.

One day, the Servant of God heard it and playfully completed it thus, "Whoever arrives, sits down, *commands*, and eats..." He said, "We have to give the poor what they desire." To tell the truth, the best dishes were for the hungry, and his new clothes, or the best at disposal, for the naked.

Sister Eugenia remembers that the Father called her, and said, "From now on, you will prepare linens, keeping them in store; when the poor ask for it, you will give some of them. They must be given new linens."

How glad he was when he was able to make a surprise to the poor! According to a sister, one morning in September 1925 the padre saw some nice peaches on the trees in the garden of the Holy Spirit. He told a sister to please pick some up and bring them to his room. To please the padre, the sister chose the best

ones and laid them on his table. At noon, he told the superior, "They chose these peaches for me; but in the parlor there are many poor; let us go there and give them the fruit to eat."

We report additional relations. "In each house he had clothes of his own, but he gave them almost always to the poor he had cleaned and freed from bugs. The poor were his lords... I had to deal with a deaf blind woman who had lived among low people. As usual, the Servant of God welcomed and entrusted her to me. I became depressed several times because she said bad words to me, but when I informed the Father, he was moved and said to Mother Maione, 'We must teach that old woman!' Every time he went to San Pier Niceto, he always asked about a weak-minded woman sheltered in our house. On the main feasts, she ate with us, sitting near the Father. To keep a coachman from cursing, he gave him a generous alms."

Back home and tired for his apostolate, one evening the Father asked whether we had brought the food to a poor who was unable to pick it up. The person in charge was mortified and sorry for his forgetfulness. Grieved, the Father enrolled his dinner in a napkin, and brought it under his mantle to the poor's slum. "As a waiter, I often saw him giving his own food to some poor, because we had nothing." A sister cook remembers that the Father commissioned a special dish for some days. She thought it was for himself and only the third day she realized that he brought it outside in a small pot. Confidently, she asked him, "Please tell me to whom you bring the food; or else, I will not cook it any more!" Kindly, the Father told her that he brought it to a poor living in a hut near the Holy Spirit.

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A former orphan remembers, "Several times he told me in secret, 'Louis, tonight you will go late to bed.' He went to the sisters' cylindrical revolving tray, got some cans of petrol, and we went around the slums. We lit the lamps, gave the soup to the poor, and he recommended them to pray, and to accept things with Christian submission."

"Now and then, the Father told us to deliver clothes to some poor he had visited before. In cases of necessity, he sheltered them at the Little Sisters, paying himself the monthly tuition."

It is impossible to inquire into his giving alms, because not only his left hand did not know what his right hand had done, according to the gospel's saying, but even his right hand did not

know how much it gave. We shouldn't worry about expenses for the cure of the sick and for the help of the needy, even if we had to pawn a house or to sell the furniture of the church.

A Religious remembers, "I saw the Father the first time on Easter, at Saint Anthony's. At his arrival, the poor surrounded him, and he gave alms to all of them without checking the value of the lira bills. His spontaneous, generous, universal charity touched me." His love for God and neighbor was boundless. While going to the station, he once gave his shoes to a poor, and was compelled to return home by coach." An old man told two Daughters of Divine Zeal at the station, "You are the sisters of that holy padre, who was so kind to me! Once he gave me an alms of 500 liras without checking it."

"He often invited me to perform works of charity by saying, 'Do you want to visit that poor, or to bring help for the sake of God?' First of all, he helped the people by words and by setting examples of Christian life... He gave alms, clothes, and suits, often asking me to find or to buy the merchandise." More than once he gave up some of the clothes he was wearing, or his handkerchief. "For instance, his watch ended up in the hands of a man who manifested to him the needs of his family."

He called the poor princes, barons, marquis, and following his own possibility he gave them alms according to their needs and state. He often gave the poor many articles of his own clothes despite the complaints of the sisters.. While giving generous alms, he did not check the amount, rather he told us, "May your left hand ignore what your right hand is giving." "For the good of the poor and the orphans he installed a mill and a bakery of pure wheat, giving bread to the poor gratis; the others bought it at a reasonable price." "Because I was a seller at the bakery, the Father often asked me for bread, money, and something else for the poor, on the spot. He said that even a hungry man cannot easily swallow bread alone." The coach-man of our house in Trani remembers, "He was also a saint for his giving alms. Wherever we passed by, the poor crowded round the coach; he used to knock with his umbrella to make me stop, and gave the beggars alms over and over again."

### 3. Anecdotes

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Without claiming to exhaust the subject, we glean additional episodes of the Father's charity.

It was well-known that an old woman of Oria, sitting on a rock under the window of the Father's room called him in a plaintive and ingenuous voice, "Come down, *Papa Annibali*, I want you." The Father handed an envelope with money to one of us, saying playfully, "Give this to the old woman of *Papa Annibali*. So many times, however, the Father himself gave her linens, money, and food from the window.

Father Carmel reports:

One day, during the winter of 1910, in Oria, we had only bread and dry figs. When able, the sisters of Saint Benedict helped us with something else. A poor knocked at the door asking help for himself and his family. Questioned by the Servant of God, I responded that we had only bread and dry figs. He became annoyed and told us to provide the poor with something else. When he suddenly perceived that the poor was a former butcher, he said that we could give him a year old lamb we owned. The butcher could sell it for his own needs. Being affectionate to it, the orphans became sad, but the Father told them, "What? Do you want to give an offering to God as Cain, not as Abel?" The poor liked this kind of music, and some days after he came again to beg. The Father gave me five liras for the poor; but he did not deign to accept the offering. When I informed the Servant of God, he said to me, "What? Does he want a cow? Tell him we haven't any." The poor was satisfied with the five liras."

"The Father's generosity to the poor was almost deranging. Some old workers of our garden in Oria were given bread and something else in the morning. The Servant of God found our treatment lacking and ordered warm milk and coffee, which would be good for the old men. First, they were proud and satisfied, but shortly after they asked to turn to the previous



treatment, because, they said, their stomachs could not stand with milk and coffee. The Servant of God told us, 'Well, add more bread, fruit, and cheese.' Father Palma remarked,

'Or the first, or the second treatment.'

'Both of them!' Said the Father.

In 1917 a crowd of people was asking for bread at the Holy Spirit's, but the police had forbidden distribution of bread because of the war. From the crowd came out an elegant lady asking some bread for her children in the name of God. Policemen were watchful and impeding, therefore the Father shrugged his shoulders. At a certain point, as inspired, he ran into the house, came out carrying a bread divided into two sandwiches with two meat balls, and gave it to the lady. He suggested to her, "If police question you, you say, 'Father Di Francia gave his food to me. He has the right to do so'."

When the Father realized that the sisters of Oria were parsimonious in giving alms, he asked the reason. They responded that it was due to the hard times of the post-war. The Servant of God told them, "Women of little faith! You must not be stingy with the poor!" Soon after help and offerings increased.

The mother superior of the house in Francavilla Fontana wrote,

I was transferred to Francavilla Fontana with the orphans in 1909 because of the earthquake. Even though the necessities never failed, we were still poor. One day, a poor man knocked at the door, begging. For lack of faith, as the padre told me later, and taking into consideration both our needs and that we had no alms to give, I convinced myself to send him away. While the poor man was sadly walking away, the padre happened to arrive.

He asked me: "What have you given the poor man?"

My answer was the following: "Padre, we have nothing in the house; all the more, many poor knock at the door daily and we are not able to meet all their requests because the house is poor."

He disliked my way of speaking, and showing his disapproval he said, "I do not believe that you don't have anything. But even if you don't, you should have given him that bottle of oil that is over on that table."

I answered: "That oil is for the lamp for the Blessed Sacrament; I put it over there to be saved."

He looked at me and said: "You have no faith; otherwise you would have given away half of that oil. Now you need to

atone. For nine days you will give a plate of soup and some bread to the poor who knock at the door at any time. Never send away any needy person. In the meantime, pray to the Holy Spirit for enlightenment."

The next day, the charity novena began according to the padre's rules. It seemed that the Lord was pleased because so many poor came in those days and all of them had their needs met. Likewise, the Lord provided us with everything so that we could face them.

Frequently, our founder gave his dinner to an unexpected poor person, or to a crying boy, or to someone else because he felt that his dinner was too rich for him. When the Father returned, he asked me: 'Have you done your penance?' I answered in the affirmative informing him that despite the many poor we helped abundance came in. He was delighted. At my question how should I behave with the poor in the future, he responded: 'I set no limits for the poor; you give as much as you can.' He always told us: "Never send a poor away without giving an alms."

Another witness. "Usually, I was in charge with visiting the poor at their dwelling, and I had to inform the Father of their moral condition. In those days, one hundred liras were his ordinary alms. To help the outside poor, he made use of registered letters which were so many that sometimes I had to go to various postal offices to avoid overloading one employee."

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While giving alms, the Servant of God also considered the decline of the gentlemen, paying special attention to them and fixing a particular time. The gentlefolk who had fallen on evil days enjoyed the kindness of the Father's heart and were helped at their own dwelling periodically and in secret.

Let us read additional reports. One morning I saw Adolf De Meo very afflicted and desperate because he had no means to pay a bill. The sum needed was considerable and the time for payment was expiring that day. I thought of appealing to the Servant of God; therefore, I hastened to manifest the case to him. He thanked me for giving him the opportunity to do a work of charity to a good father and family, and handed to me the sum needed by Adolf.

Unable to fulfill his obligations, a poor gentleman of Trani approached the Servant of God at the rail station, submitting the

case to him. The Father took him by the sisters' coach to the institute, let him eat, and gave him a sum of money. At the gentleman's saying, the sun dissipated the clouds of his spirit that day.

Lawyer Trisolini of Oria once told me that Don Ruggero De Angelis, a declined lord of that town, was generously helped by the Father. To correspond such a generosity, he thought of making the last will in favor of the Father, leaving to him the only property he had: a little house. No sooner said than done, and he gave his will to the Father in a closed envelope. Shortly after, Don Ruggero changed his mind and had recourse to Lawyer Trisolini to have back his will. At least, he should have behaved better not to lose the Father's help... One day when the Servant of God was passing by, Lawyer Trisolini let him know the fact. 'Please give me five minutes, I go to Saint Benedict's and return,' the Father said. Handing the envelope with the will to Lawyer Trisolini, the Father asked him to assure Don Ruggero that the ordinary help would be increased and maintained all his life long.

Writes Father Vitale:

"Those who did not dare to get mixed in with the poor because of their former high status had a special reception; others received some money for their immediate needs such as light, soap, etc.... The padre always helped them with his purse both full and empty" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 343).

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I myself heard from Knight Musico'. "One winter drizzling evening I met the Father with Brother Mary Anthony in the street, carrying a load under their mantle. I asked, "Father, what are you doing in the street at this hour, with this cold and rain?" He responded, 'We cannot think of cold and rain when a family is starving at... They do not dare to come to me; so, I must go to them.' Prof. Gazzara relates, "People of former high rank appealed to the Father, who sometimes entrusted me with confidential commissions. I was told that he gave about 100.000 liras to a family in one year." He himself waited for a month on Lawyer Cipriani of Rome, who was expelled from his house by his own sons. When they repented and called their Father back, the Servant of God paid the fare for Cipriani and told me to buy a brand new suit and a silk cap, the ones the lawyer liked. "With the people of middle class fallen into poverty the Father used a special reception: a separate room and table ware, 'because charity,' he said, 'shouldn't be an occasion of mortification'."

One time he bought cherries of bad quality at high price, but

recommended to eat the good ones only. Father Drago questioned him, "Then, why did you buy them?" The Father answered, "Be silent, you inquisitive person. I had to help that poor seller."

Canon Bembi of Oria writes, "The servant of God treated everyone kindly, had good words for all, and the needs of all resounded in his heart. Several workers were employed in his institute, many poor found a daily help, and Canon Di Francia was revered as the Father of the orphans and of the poor."

Father Carmel reports:

On one occasion the Father wanted to hire a jobless man in our institute of Oria, but I objected that we had no need. He told me, "We need to practice charity." "But we have no money!" I replied. "But this is the very reason, we hire him," he explained. "Thus, we urge providence to help us." This is not the common law of administration. However, if we live on faith, we cannot do otherwise. How many people appealed to Padre Di Francia!

Writes Father Vitale:

In Messina, there were several people who formerly held high rank but because they had had hard times, came to the Avignone Quarter or the Holy Spirit, especially late in the evening. On the whole they did not dare to appear begging. All of them were sure they would find a helping hand in the padre. They asked questions like: "Padre, can you find a job for me, so I can earn a living for my family?" He thought and considering the status of people he would say, "We have already a door keeper, but you can help him"; or, "I have no need of employees, but you can put the library in order." Sometimes he asked the poor if they had jobs. Then he tried to invent them as if he were the mayor or the prefect in that miserable place called Avignone, of which St. Francis of Assisi would have not been envious. But that place was the cradle of the great Anthonian institution (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 343).

To give a present to a community, the Father had commissioned a statue from an artist of Carovigno, and he talked about it with Mr. Palazzo, one of our sisters' brother. He was an expert on the subject. Mr. Palazzo asked the price, and the Father said how much it was. Father Drago spoke up: "It's too much!" Mr. Palazzo confirmed that the price was too high. Shortly after, however, the Father called Father Drago, questioning him, "Who

asked your intervention? Thus, we cannot do a piece of charity... If I want to help a poor man, people tell me that the price is too much, too high."

One day during 1913, a Religious was told to enclose a thousand liras bill in a letter. The Religious held up the bill to make the Servant of God sure that the bill was a thousand liras worth. "Yes, he said, "be not afraid. I want to give a thousand liras." The next day, the Father called the Religious and showed to him a letter with an offering of two thousand liras from a benefactor, and said, "Man of little faith; yesterday we gave a thousand liras, today we receive two thousand liras!"

An almost centenary poor woman neglected in a village near Messina was far from the sacraments. The Father sheltered her in the best room at the Holy Spirit, where a sister could assist her with care and love by day and night.

Paying a visit to her every day, he asked if everything was right; because she was always happy, now and then the padre praised the sister, adding: 'I commend her to you; the only work I require of you is that you serve her well and see to it that she never be alone.' The padre placed a bell on the table so that she could call someone else in her assistant's absent. On her hundredth birthday, he invited her children and grandchildren, who were poor, to eat with her and told the sisters to kiss her hands in homage to God who granted such old age. When the woman died twelve days after the celebration, the padre ordered fervent suffrage" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 349).

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From the report of his sister Teresa we quote an incident which happened at the start of the institution.

"The day of Epiphany, the Father was on his way to the cathedral for the pontifical mass when he met a sick weak-minded old woman, whom the rascals were making fun of her. The Father drives away the boys, calls a coach, and takes her almost dying to the hospital. Because the hospital's employees refused to admit her, he asks them to take provisional care, runs and submits the emergency case to the prefect. The admission is granted by authority. The Father returns to the hospital to be sure of the admission. That work of charity was a mystical golden offering to the child Jesus on the Epiphany feast."

We quote the *Messina Gazette* on the occasion of the committee to honor the Russian Admiral Ponomareff, who along with his soldiers, saved many persons during the 1908 earthquake and in 1921 became a victim of Bolshevism. Because of that circumstance he asked a helping hand from Messina.

Our padre was touched by this hero of charity and ordered his communities of Religious and orphans to save a thousand liras. He sent this money to the impoverished admiral and wrote a letter that the "*Gazette*" published to foster the generosity of others. We quote:

Dear editor:

Canon Di Francia, his fellow-members, sisters, and orphans pledge with favorable disposition a thousand liras coming from their daily sacrifices in favor of the deserving Admiral Ponomareff, who along with his men hastened to help Messina in the earthquake of December 28, 1908, saving many lives from underneath the ruins of the city" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 101).

The *Gazette* of February 22, 1921 commented,

These are the words of a man of heart and noble spirit who finds a way to help even when the circumstances would impede everyone from doing so. His institute's burdens should have exempted him from meeting our request. Instead, he cooperated very generously by even imposing a mortification on his orphans. May the noblest deed of Canon Di Francia be a stimulus to those who are to take away only something from their surplus."

Some days later a new donation from Canon Di Francia was announced in these terms by the *Gazette*" of February 24, 1921:

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From Canon Di Francia's inexhaustible generosity we have received an additional offering: two silver snuff-boxes, which the benefactors had donated to his orphanages, have been given to our subscription. We renew our best thanks to him.

At Oria, a woman had given birth. She was lying in pain on a bed with no sheets when the Father happened to pass by. He was called by her children. "Father Hannibal, our mother is sick." He entered the house, consoled the woman, and blessed her. The day after he returned to hear her confession and to give Communion to the woman who was already relieved, providing the family with food and clothes. Children were given several gifts.

In Trani a child happened to cry under the window of the Father. He sent a sister to inquire: the child was hungry. Moved, the Father gave the child his own food. But, as he knew that the eight members of the child's family were in the same condition, he ordered to give them food every day, to relieve them from the rent of the house, and provide them with clothes. Then he saw to it that they be instructed in Christian doctrine and in the observance of holydays.

To make peace, especially when the matter were the girls, he often and willingly shouldered the families' troubles even by helping them financially. For instance, I know of a family of Genzano (Potenza); husband and wife were fighting. She came up to Oria to receive generous financial help.

## 4. For the prisoners

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Because they need more help and redemption, the prisoners drew the Father's charity in a special way.

He often visited and helped the prisoners of Trani. I think that he also ordered the mother superior along with her community to do the same. Accompanied by other persons, now and then he brought the dinner to some of the prisoners, while we made cakes for them. He also administered the sacraments in the prison.

Because the district prison in Taormina was on the ground floor of the Capuchin former convent, whose first floor was set aside for the sisters, the assistance to the prisoners was easier. After taking care of the prisoners' preparation for Easter through preaching, confession, and mass, the Father used to offer the dinner to the prisoners on that feast, as well as on the Christian chief holidays. When a prisoner happened to be sick, he was assisted with daily food according to the doctor's prescription.

Someone says that also the personnel of the prison was given dinner, after interesting, effective religious instructions. Around 1903, the community of Taormina inaugurated the new kitchen. When the mother superior informed the Father, he asked, "For whom did you cook first?" The mother superior answered, "For

the prisoners and the poor." The Father delighted in it, smiling. He had been well interpreted.

As soon as he arrived to Taormina, he paid the first visit to the prisoners, who became affectionate to him, longing for his coming. One day when the Father was begging in the town, a former prisoner went himself begging as a sign of his gratitude to him. Another day, an imprisoned boy shouted, "I did not intend to kill him!" As a matter of fact, he was involved in a casual homicide during a fight with another boy. The Servant of God succeeded to make him understand his wrong; therefore, and to beg pardon from the Lord. From his window, the Father once threw down a pair of trousers and other articles of clothing to a prisoner in the courtyard. He collected other supplies in his room, just in case of additional charity. As a conclusion of this subject, we quote two evidences. They are significant to the persons who knew the Father personally. "No needy person contacted the Father without receiving comfort." "The Servant of God spent his days helping the people in their soul and body; he wove good works in his life; and no one went away without receiving comfort. He was like a candle enlightening and warming."

## **5. For the consecrated souls**

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Priests and religious communities in need, above all the claustral ones, were a particular object of the Father's charity. He wrote for us,

Helping those who belong directly to the Lord such as the priests and the religious communities in need pleases God at the highest, attracting his best promises of retribution and celestial blessings.

We cannot help being touched and generous toward those who belong to our Lord Jesus Christ, completely trusting in the prophet Malachi's divine promise, "Bring the full tithes and dues to the storehouse so that there may be food in my house, and



then see if I do not open the flood gates of heaven for you and pour out blessing for you in abundance. For your sake I will not lay a strict injunction on the locust not to destroy the fruits of your soil nor to make the vine in your field's barren, says Yahweh Sabaoth. All the nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delights, says Yahweh Sabaoth (Mal. 3, 10...).

When Msgr. Parrillo came as Apostolic Visitor, the Servant of God had to give an account of his lavishness. He cleared himself by writing,

I have the duty to submit to you, who represent the highest authority, a way of behaving which somehow seems a little strange. Specifically, how I have been behaving since more than forty years that I am working in the charitable institutions. I have always been taking a great care of the orphans and the poor, and that's fine. But, I have had the presumption to financially help not only my works, but also the good works of others; not only the persons sheltered in my institutes, but also the beggars, and above all the religious houses. I placed my trust in the divine promise, "You will receive a hundred times more"; as well as "give to others, and God will give to you: you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands - all that you can hold" (Lk. 6, 38).

As to his helping the religious communities, he quotes the above lines by Malachi, and continues,

"I considered my giving as the secret to be always helped by divine providence: my trust in God was never disappointed. Our Lord, in his infinite kindness, overflows us with divine providence. So I can say that my donations are not inconsiderate in relation to my institutes and their members, because they never lacked anything. We spend today's superabundance on the divine providence's bank without waiting for tomorrow" (Vol. 29, page 46).

In fact, he wrote to Father Vitale, "Let us spend the money on the bank of our Lord, who applies the interest rate of a hundred per one and never becomes bankrupt" (Vol. 33, page 52). To Mother Nazzarena, "Let us give good alms; they are the best investment" (Vol. 36, page 13).

As to his behavior toward the poor priests, we quote several evidences. "By personal experience and by assertions of still living brothers, I say that his charity toward the poor priests was special, continuous, and discreet. He provided them with money, gave them hospitality in his institutes, and added additional proofs of his charity to those who had neglected their priestly

character along with their duties." "Caring for their health or for their return to the Church, he paid frequent visits to the sick priests or to the ones who had gone astray, comforted them with his prayer, and gave them generous help. Father Bonarrigo often said, 'The Father has gone to Gualtieri for the confession of the priest'..." "He was special to the priests who had gone astray, as well as to the poor ones." A sister remembers, "I prepared dinner for almost two years to Pastor Chille' and Chaplain Carnazza responsible for the cemetery. Both of them were alone. The latter was assisted until his death. When Pastor Gentile fell sick, he enjoyed the Father's care for his soul and body until his death."

We know from Father Carmel that the Father was particularly generous to the poor priests.

Such a charity was very discreet. On these occasions, while asking for money, he used to say, "I have to do business." One day we were traveling from Oria to Rome. He asked me for some money for a poor priest who was on the train, but he was disappointed because I had a hundred liras only, for the return ticket. Despite my objections he demanded all of them. He handed them to the priest in an envelope. A gentleman sitting on my side asked me who that priest was, and I told him. He was amazed at seeing Canon Di Francia, whom he knew by hearsay. He opened his bag, picked up an envelope, and put some money in. When the Father came back, the gentleman poured out his devotion to him and as a token of his feelings he handed to him the envelope with a thousand liras. The Father commented, "If we had given fifty liras, we would have received five hundred liras; we have given a hundred liras, and the Lord has sent a thousand liras'."

A former friar priest was living in Oria. He had fallen into poverty, because his nephews and nieces had squandered his riches. The Servant of God knew of him from Father Palma and was moved. Even though he censured the former friar's behavior, he immediately said that he was a priest in need and therefore he should be helped at any cost. He gave him all the money we had at home.

Lavish was the Servant of God's generosity in favor of the religious communities. "I closed my eyes," he wrote, "especially when the matter was helping the Religious and the religious houses" (Vol. 29, page 47). At the Servant of God's death, the

mother-house of Messina used to send the amount of 130,000 liras a year as ordinary help to many monasteries and religious houses. Besides, each community had its own list of communities to be helped, either they were in the list of Messina, or not. The mother superior of Taormina had sent a hundred liras to the Dominican sisters of Bologna, after their request. When the sisters responded with a letter of thanks, they asked for an additional help. Amazed, the mother superior of Taormina talked with the Father, who told her, "Do you eat only once? They are enclosed nuns: give them a hundred liras a month." The community of Taormina used to send a hundred liras a month to the Morning Star Sisters, in Naples, but the Father once said to the mother superior, "Send them 200 liras a month. Don't you remember their tottering house?" Because some registered letters from our benefactors contained more money than it was declared, the Father said, "Why don't you do the same?" And sometimes he himself made such letters to make a surprise.

The Capuchin Fathers of Giardini did not succeed to cover the roof of their new church dedicated to Our Lady of Pompei, in the land of Villa Agonia. As the Father happened to pass by, he knew the situation and told Father Anthony of Patti, "I will pay everything, but keep absolute silence!" Father Anthony of Patti broke the silence after the Father's death, and stated, "Your padre was a saint, and a lover of the Madonna."

Also the Redemptorist Fathers found themselves in troubles when they founded a house in Francavilla, and had to restore their church. Writes Salvatore Di Coste, the superior, "I was worried because I needed a lot of money. But Canon Di Francia exhorted me to have trust in divine providence, never fearing to start the work. Much to my comfort, he said that he would send his little help for this work of God and Saint Alphonsus. Even though he himself had to face so many needs of his institutions, he sent me a thousand liras a month for ten months. And to say, he called it a little help" (*Bulletin*, February 1947).

Don Joseph Rossi of Trani, founder of the "Abandoned Childhood," said that he once received a big sum of money from the Servant of God. He wanted to make amends for the Daughters of Divine Zeal's coldness. Don Joseph did not go to their house for some months, and did not receive the usual alms.

Besides giving alms, the Father used to encourage. After a visit to Don Joseph Rossi's institute, he wrote to him, "I assure you that I was well impressed... I know by experience how hard it is starting such institutions, and therefore I admire what you conceive and do with patient concern to foster the orphanage.

May the adorable Heart of Jesus, to whom you have consecrated the children, assist, give credit, and foster the undertaken institution!" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 294). He enforced his saying by enclosing **a good sum of money**.

It is sure that the Servant of God gave financial help to Don Orione. In fact, the Father wrote a card to him on November 27, 1911: "I am ready for the money; let me know when I can go over to hand it to you" (Vol. 37, page 3). The amount of the money is unknown, but we read that Don Orione bought the house for the novitiate at Bandito, near Bra', province of Cuneo, on December 8, 1911. The author of Don Sterpi's life points out, "The holy friendship between Don Orione and the Servant of God Canon Hannibal Di Francia helped buy the quiet dwelling of the Counts Moffas, near the native city of Saint Joseph Cottolengo" (*Don Charles Sterpi*, page 337). The Father was also ready for an additional offering. He writes to Don Orione on September 2, 1915: "Does Your Reverence remember the opportunity I had to help you for Bandito, in the land of Moffa? By divine mercy, today I am in the condition to do more, just in case Your Reverence were in need..." (S.C. Vol. 7, page 131). The Father also gave another kind of help to Don Orione. He wrote, "I am sending to you about 2,000 printed addresses of our devotees. I will have additional ones copied from the registers, being very glad to help your holy institutions this way" (Vol. 37, page 1).

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Talking about female communities in the letter to Msgr. Parrillo, the Father writes, "Should I say it? I will tell you in strict confidence: about ten years ago, I gave 120,000 liras to the declined monastery of Morning Star, in Naples. We give monthly donations of several thousand liras to almost all the monasteries of the Salesians of Saint Francis of Sales in Italy, and some in France. The Salesians of Bologna were given 30,000 liras because of their strict needs. Clare, Dominican sisters, and other ones are helped every month because of the bad times the nuns are running into; they are the victims of the century!" (Vol. 29, page 47).

Before continuing on this subject, I deem to point out the Father's zeal for the sanctification of the consecrated souls and how he was concerned with the religious observance and fervor in the communities he was helping. He writes, "Please let me know whether the *common life* and the perfect rule of Saint Clare is observed in this monastery (the underlining is by the Father)

(Vol. 38, page 27). "I heartily wish the Salesians to become holy in order to please at the utmost the most holy Heart of Jesus, to counterbalance those who do not love him, and to win many souls" (Vol. 38, page 25). On one occasion he points out that the slackening had affected some of the sisters, and for this reason the Lord had hit the whole community! They ought to have expelled them! It is of importance to restore perfect discipline for the sanctification of all the members. You should have an energetic government to restore the strength of perfect observance, because some sisters abuse the kindness and the age of the elders" (Vol. 39, pages 48-50). And elsewhere, "Lack of *serious and well ruled discipline* has been the cause of various slackening. Discipline is so important in the religious institutes that lack of it impairs their spirit" (Vol. 39, page 36).

Let us take up the subject of the Father's help to the monasteries.

While visiting the Clare Sisters of Altamura, the Father knew that they had to repair the monastery's roof. Back home, he sends a card to the abbess, "I offer a thousand liras for the work on the roof. The mother superior of the Daughters of Divine Zeal has decided to offer fifty liras a month for your monastery" (Vol. 38, page 27).

Canon Termine of Trani, confessor of the Clare Sisters of the city, submitted the urgent need of that community to the Servant of God and received immediately what the Servant of God had in his pocket: 500 liras. Around 1910-12, the Father gave a donation of 50,000 liras to make reparations to an institute. It seems to be the Geltrudine's of Naples that the Father had known around that time.

At Ceglie Messapica (Brindisi), the venerable Mother Lalia had founded a house of Dominican Tertiaries, where she lived in exile until her death. The Father was her spiritual director for some time, and a benefactor of that house.

One of those sisters writes, "The Servant of God aided the religious communities and congregations as he would have done for his own. His aid never failed us. He gave the money to build the kitchen and to tile the hall of our institute's entrance. He would have also given his help to open an orphanage in our town, if we had decided so. In 1917 he preached the retreat to our community in Ceglie Messapica, and commented on our rules, the constitutions, and the religious vows. His simple, plain word shook the souls. For instance, a pious mother who was allowed to have the food of her rich parents, left out everything, wore the cilice, and did additional penances.

His help to the Lalia's institution was not restricted to the house of Ceglie. I read in the Father's notes: "Palermo, Dominicans; Ceglie, Dominicans; Rome, Saint Sixtus Dominicans; Rome, Saint Catherine Dominicans; Rome, Saint Dominic and Saint Sixtus Dominicans" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 77).

The Father's relations with the Capuchin Sisters of Citta' di Castello date back to his youth. It is due to his devotion to Saint Veronica Giuliani, who lived, died, and her body is venerated there. From the letters of Abbess Teresa we know that the Father sent alms since then; and he continued doing so his life long. The sisters appealed to him for so many little things that the Father tried to meet. From Trani he writes to Mother Nazzarena, in Messina, "The abbess of Citta' di Castello received the veil for Saint Veronica. She would like to have some pale green and some white paint. If you have some, please send it; if you don't have any, let me know so that I will find it in Naples or Rome. Where you buy them?" (Vol. 35, page 225). A few days later he writes that he has already seen to it (Ibid. page 227).

"From another monastery they write to me with ink so pale that I can hardly read." The Father is thinking of those sisters' poverty, and he answers, "I take the liberty of sending ten liras for a bottle of good ink" (Vol. 39, page 45).

Several monasteries generously prompted themselves to admit the Father's institution to share in the merits of their good works. Thus, they stimulated the Father to increase his help for the material needs of those communities. "When a few sisters proposed to beg on behalf of the Visitation Sisters, who were in poor conditions, as the Father had said, he heartily agreed upon their proposal. He was so generous toward those spouses of Christ!" Several monasteries' letters echo his charity. We quote two of them.

The superior of the Sisters of the Visitation from Salaria Street in Rome wrote:

"He made our communities in Rome as well as others in Italy and abroad share in the providence that the Lord gave him; he has been a blessing for us and others and one of the most illustrious of our benefactors."

From Pescia, the superior of the Visitation wrote:

"We too have met his boundless charity; indeed, he sent money often and whenever we appealed to him for whatever our

needs, he never denied help" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 352).

The Visitation Sisters of Rome have pointed out detailed reminiscences. We report them.

"When the Servant of God came to Rome and passed by, we felt as though Saint Francis of Sales were coming to visit us. Many of the sisters asked to have a private talk for advice, and we agreed upon their request because all of them found comfort, fervor, and incitement to achieve perfection. He was so humble and recollected that he appeared raptured in God. When our late pious chaplain saw him celebrating mass, he was rapt in wonder for his devotion and recollection, seeing in that priest something supernatural." (He never saw him before).

The superior general of the Bocconiste writes to the Father: "We are never satisfied by expressing the fulness of our gratitude to the excess of your exquisite, noble charity toward Daughters of James... For this reason, we dare ask you to give us a picture of you, so that we may hang it on the wall and look at the venerable image of our venerable founder's worthiest friend."(2)

The Father could not help neglecting the monasteries in Messina. They were so many before the earthquake that one of the streets was named "Street of the monasteries" (today's XXIV Maggio). The Father gave the holy secluded the comfort of his charity. Joseph Bonarrigo who acted as a treasurer at Avignone remembers, "One day the Father told me to buy and to unload five quintals of beans at Saint Teresa monastery. It was at today's Saint Dominic Savio's place." It was done in 1894, when our institute was in financial troubles. But this was the Father's secret: the less he owed, the more he gave alms to draw the divine providence upon his institutions.

We have already talked of the Father's devotion to the Blessed Eustochio. Could he neglect her daughters? He was their great benefactor. A sister recalls, "I know by personal experience that besides the monthly check, he gave the dinner to the sisters of Montevergine, and so he did with the Salesian Fathers of Taormina, who took care of our chapel." When he was in need of special enlightenment from heaven, the Father remembered them even from afar. He writes to Vitale from Trani, "I enclose 250 liras; please give a hundred liras to the Little Sisters, a hundred liras to Montevergine, and fifty liras to the Salesians of Taormina" (Vol. 33, page 65).

When the superiors succeeded to reopen Saint Clare monastery

in Messina after toilsome negotiations, the Father was so happy because a new hearth of prayer was enkindled. He had longed so much for it. The nuns wrote:

We talked with him for about an hour, and we felt like we were talking to a saint because of his behavior and words... As we left, he gave us dried figs, three loaves of bread and a good sum of money to take care of our initial needs...

He did not stop being charitable toward us: he came over, always giving generous alms and saying: 'If you need anything, write to me.' When a candidate was coming into the order, he sent money to help pay expenses while he continued sending vegetables, oil, wood, etc.... We called him our padre... Another time, he sent a four pound fish with a bottle of oil... His only aim was helping, relieving his neighbor from pain, and to do so he sacrificed himself.

The fish reminds me of another episode narrated by a sister or Brother Mary Anthony. One day, while entering the Clare monastery, he heard a hawker selling fresh fish in the street, and the Father told the sister, "Please give me a container, for I am going to buy some fish for you." The sister returned with a plate, but the Father said, "What can I do with this plate? I need a big container." No sooner said that done...

Saint Clare monastery recalls to me another gentle episode of the Father's charity. November 9, 1923, was the centenary anniversary of the old abbess, Sister Isabel Di Giovanni, of the dukes of Precacuore. She entered the cloister as a boarder at the age of three years and became a sister. She went away from Messina after the earthquake and returned at the reopening of the monastery. The Father praised her in his verses as "an archive of memories of Messina." The Father celebrated her centenary by increasing his help to the monastery and with a performance by the Daughters of Divine Zeal and orphans.

The *Thirty Three Monastery* in Naples was in bad conditions, and the nuns were starving. Besides giving his alms, the Father tried to draw Saint Anthony's bread toward that religious house.

By daily experience we know that Saint Anthony grants numerous favors to the people who ask for them and promise to give the bread to the orphans and the poor. The Father thought, "Won't the saint grant his favors to the people through the



prayers of the cloistered nuns?" He printed a paper and explained the nature of this devotion:

Among the people in need of Saint Anthony's bread we find a special class of persons we should not forget: the cloistered nuns. They are very dear to God, but are victims of the impoverishment caused by the suppression law and by lack of faith and charity. And yet, while the world frolics drawing divine punishments, these scared virgins consecrated to God, these mystical spouses of Jesus pray, wail, and sigh before God, drawing divine mercies. Dear faithful, until now Saint Anthony of Padua has been granting his favors to the people who have promised the bread to the poor and the orphans; from now on, he will grant more copious favors to those who promise their help to the sacred virgins impoverished by the world's tyranny, enemy of God. The saint wants you to help the spouses of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Then, he explains how to make the promise and names the monastery that needs help.

In Naples there is a monastery named Trentatre' upon our Lord Jesus Christ's years. The people who are longing for graces should appeal to the humble, fervent prayers of these pious, recollected virgins, promising to the saint to help them. The virgins will pray to the saint, and the saint will obtain from the child Jesus unexpected favors. Faithful, try and find out!

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By permission of the churches' rectors, the Father exposed a framed letter in many Neapolitan churches near the picture of the saint. The box for the alms was named, "Box of Saint Anthony's bread for the impoverished sacred virgins" (S.C. Vol. 9, page 161).

The care the Father devoted to the Daughters of the Sacred Side was not restricted to their spiritual and disciplinary life. Praising the Father's charity, one of those sisters states that it should be enough hinting at what "he did for our institute. If he had not come, perhaps it would have died." Later, the sisters suffered a painful division, but our Founder continued to be as a father for all of them, as we'll see later. The sister continues, "When the Servant of God was ill-treated, he continued to take care of us and of those who separated as though we were his daughters." The Father wrote: "I took care of this adoptive daughter, brought her before the Church, fed her soul and body the best I could, carrying and presenting her to the most holy Heart of Jesus and Mary. Every time these dear daughters submitted

ted their needs to me, I always met them..." (S.C. Vol. 7, page 195). We hardly find a letter to the superiors of the Daughters of the Sacred Side without reading that he was enclosing alms for general, or specific needs of their houses. Now we specify what Msgr. Farina said in general terms in his relation about the Daughters of the Sacred Side of Spinazzola. To avoid the expulsion of the sisters from the house where they were dwelling, the Servant of God gave a donation of 40,000 liras.

## **6. The Little Sisters of the Poor and the Morning Star Sisters**

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The Little Sisters of the Poor in Messina and the Morning Star Sisters in Naples enjoyed the Father's preference in his almsgiving.

Through the Father's and Canon Ciccolo's good offices the Little Sisters came to Messina to renew the Avignone Quarter. On February 27, 1882, the Father took them from the station to his home "in a coach driven by two horses out of respect for the consecrated souls." They found a house near the city along Ringo beach, and sheltered quite a few of the poor of Avignone. Later, they moved to Gazzi, and the burden of Avignone remained in the Father's hands. When Father Ciccolo involved himself completely with these sisters, the Father remained alone working in Avignone... In 1920, near the end of his life, Father Ciccolo used to tell the sisters, "Turn to Canon Di Francia. He is responsible for your coming to Messina; he should help you." Needless to say, the Father was and remained a generous benefactor of that institute.

Besides sending his usual monthly offering, the Father had in store a bunch of envelopes with the address of the Little Sisters. Thus, it was easy for him to put money inside and mail it to them. So says Sister Beatrice, who prepared the envelopes. Also the shoemaker worked for their institute at the Father's expenses.

One day, the sister in charge of the alms boxes had brought one of them to the Father. Meantime the Little Sisters came in, and the Father emptied the box in their hands without seeing how much he was giving. A relation from the Little Sisters says that the Father did so almost every time they called upon him. One day they also found an envelope with a big sum of money; they felt guilty and returned to the Father to give it back. "The Father, however, responded with great kindness: 'What is given, is given.'"

When Bishop Paino at the beginning of his episcopate was "eager for building the house of the Little Sisters of the Poor," and showed his wish for help. The Father offered 150,000 liras. Says the Father in the quoted letter to Msgr. Parrillo, "Really, Msgr. Paino began building the hospice. Some of the Little Sisters died in the earthquake, and their institute was destroyed. They were told by the archbishop of my donation, and came over here to thank me. They asked me how much I had given, but I didn't reveal it" (Vol. 29, page 47).

This report also mentions the meeting of the Father with the Little Sisters of Andria, who received "a generous offering."

One day, the Father paid a visit to that institute together with Father Vitale and me. We saw in the kitchen a little statue of Saint Joseph carrying a piece of wood on his shoulders; it meant that he had to provide the house with wood. The Father smiled and said, "Please free Saint Joseph because he is providing you." He ordered a freight of wood for their institute."

As to Morning Star:

The Father met the founder of that monastery, the Servant of God Sister Mary Luisa of Jesus, on July 26, 1870, and he was indelibly impressed! In 1922 he writes:

Fifty two years ago I experienced such sacred excitement as I stood before the gate of the Morning Star Monastery. Then again, my heart swelled when I was in the presence of the humble servant of the Lord.. Not only did I see and talk to her, but also I became the object of her sacred affection during her last five years of life. She foresaw my future under the inspiration of the heavenly bridegroom. I enjoyed frequent correspondence with her, and her spiritual daughters eventually gave me her white veil and the candid wimple, which are treasures that I have cherished since she entered the kingdom of God. Fifty years have passed since she died (Vol. 45, page 554).

These sacred bonds between the young cleric and the holy foundress continued with the fervent nuns of that monastery,

especially with Sister Mary Lucy of the Sacred Heart and Sister Mary Consiglio. All of them took the Father's institution at heart, imploring its stability and progress from the Lord. Singing the praise of Mary Lucy in the funeral oration in 1907, the Father recalls the Morning Star Sisters' contribution:

In 1880 I was a newly-ordained priest committed to evangelize many beggars who lived assembled in a far off corner of Messina. Going to Naples, I recommended my incipient work to these sacred virgins' prayers, telling them that after proper instruction I would name the beggars "The Poor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus." Such a name touched the fibers of that loving soul. Together with a few virgins she became so concerned with my incipient work as to become the guardian angel, powerfully stimulating its formation. It's more than 27 years since I am miserably working in this institution, sometimes facing difficulties so grave as to throw everything upside down in a moment. Sister Mary Luisa along with her happy Sister Consiglio followed the events step by step, taking a special interest in their prayer before the Lord and his sweetest Mother, the bright Morning Star. How many times my strength grew so feeble as to totter and leave out everything in the presence of impossible solutions. But I had a harbor of refuge: writing to Morning Star Monastery. She answered my letters with heavenly comfort, almost prophesying the future success. More than her letters to me, that loving soul's humble prayers reached heaven, drawing the grace I was unworthy of. It supported me in my hard task.

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Sister Mary Luisa shared the pains and the joys in the various vicissitudes of this institution. She played an essential role. So many years ago, when nothing was based, she wrote to me, "The Lord Jesus will form this institution; it takes time. We'll see the completing of this institution from heaven, me and others who were the founders" (Vol. 45, pages 137-138).

The Father never failed to recompense those fervent zealous Religious, above all when their institute suffered the effects of bad times.

First, he returns the prayer. He writes to the mother superior:

Every day during the mass, I offer five intentions for this institute: 1. Sanctification. 2. Divine providence. 3. Purchase of the Morning Star building, or another one. 4. Another Servant of God like Navarro (he had been the guardian angel of the founder). 5. A new Servant of God

like Sister Mary Luisa of Jesus. I am praying with great fervor; may God accomplish it in his endless mercy!" (Vol. 39, page 51). Then he heartens the new mother superior, exhorting her to take care of discipline. "Even though unworthy, I exhort you to trust in the divine spouse, who made you the successor to Sister Mary Luisa; he will give the grace you need. See to it that observance, prayer, silence, the religious practices, and mutual charity bloom. Beware of overlooking the little defects, because the communities slacken by them. I beg your pardon, if I dare so much (Vol. 39, page 84).

When the monastery is lacking means, he gives generous alms, almost always enclosing money in his letters. When he has no money, he writes to the house of Messina to provide for them. A sister remembers, "Upon the Father's request from Naples, the superior general, Sister Nazzarena, was sending a thousand liras to Morning Star Monastery by money-order. It was the only money we had in the house. Meanwhile, a donation of a thousand liras came in through a benefactor." Another sister, "In Messina we owned about 30.000 liras. The Father disposed of half of them in favor of Morning Star, saying that he was investing at a rate of a hundred per one in a bank which never goes bankrupt."

The worst catastrophe fell on the institute of Mary Luisa of Jesus when the Healing Society condemned the beautiful, roomy institute built by her near Saint Anthony abbot. The sacred virgins were expelled, and the house of the Lord along with the church dedicated to the most holy Virgin under the title of Morning Star was knocked down" (Vol. 45, page 562). The sisters were "sheltered in an uncomfortable, small, unsanitary house lacking light and air. They were surrounded by dirty, noisy alleys populated by mob, near Santa Lucy a Mare, where great shouting deafened and distracted them from meditation and prayer!" (Ibid. page 564). In short time, eight sisters died.

The sad condition worried the Father. He wrote to the mother superior, "I cannot express how much grieved I am for the health of the nuns, whom I consider as daughters and sisters in Jesus Christ. If the sick need a change of air, my institutes are at your disposal" (Vol. 39, page 30). "I hope to hear good news about the sick sisters. Meantime, if you need something, tell me plainly. See to it that they have soup, milk, eggs, etc." (Ibid. page 32).

The superior accepted the invitation, and some of the sisters went to Taormina, Altamura, and Trani to change air and to rest. They returned to their community relieved.

But it was necessary to move the community from the

unhealthy place, and the Father endeavored to succeed in it. He sought to mobilize the Neapolitan Catholics. In December 1922, he had a speech to a Catholic women society headed by duchess of Airolo. Lecturing about the Servant of God Sister Mary Luisa, glory of Naples, "a new Saint Teresa, a true Saint Gertrude of our days," he awoke the Neapolitans' interest in giving their support for the building of Morning Star Monastery and church. As we have said above, he contributed with 120,000 liras. He also printed and prefaced the commentary of Sister Mary Luisa on the Song of Songs, leaving the proceeds to the monastery.

To develop an institution, however, the building is not enough. He noted:

Sister Mary Luisa's institute came to such a lack of means and vocations as to reach the brink of death. It should correspond to the spiritual and social needs of the present time (Vol. 39, page 5). May Jesus assure this way the future of the institute! Something must be done, some resource is needed. The way you live cannot last, and the institution is in danger. Cloistered nuns may have alms today, tomorrow may not. When the Lord calls me to eternity, none knows whether my successors will help you the way I do. The Lord needs not me, nor anyone else, but he wants us to use our means and to be foreseeing. The Lord says, "Help yourself, and I will help you" (Ibid. page 6).

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To be factual, the Father suggested the foundation of an orphanage:

In your rules, you have the seed of the orphanage, viz., the education of the poor girls. It's not a long way from the education of poor girls to an orphanage. If the institute steps forth a little bit for the education and salvation of the abandoned girls, it does not go beyond, nor does it change the nature of your mission; rather, improves it" (Vol. 39, page 5). The orphanage will draw upon you the blessings of God and men. The youth of this institution must move, being energetic, otherwise everything comes to nothing (Ibid. page 55).

However it turns out, he assures his prayers to this end, wants the sisters to pray much in order to know the will of God, and suggests specific prayers and novenas. Then he concludes, "Let us pray and let me know" (Ibid.). The Morning Star Sisters came into activity spreading the circle of their apostolate, and the sweetest Virgin, Morning Star, blessed and developed them.

## 7. Hospitality

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The Father prescribes, "A form of charity we must have at heart, performing it with kindness and sacred care, is hospitality. If the guests are poor, we will provide them with everything without charging. Let us remember Saint Paul's saying: **"Because of hospitality Abraham deserved lodging the angels"** (Heb. 13, 2). "Each house will have the guest rooms separated from the institute so that the guests may have no relations with the community. Some brother or priest will take care of them" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 113).

This is very fine when a suitable, roomy institute has such facilities, but the Avignone Quarter could hardly shelter its people. And yet, hospitality should not be denied under the pretext of lacking room. For this reason, in the late evening people had to set up everything for the guest in a class, or in the laboratory, or in the porter's lodge, and remove everything in the morning.

One evening, after preparing a few make-shift beds, a new guest came in, late in the night, and I had also to provide for him. My attitude betrayed my inner discomfort, as if I were thinking of sending the guest elsewhere for lack of room. Aware of that, the Father told me, "If we don't suffer inconvenience, what is our charity worthy of? If we had suitable facilities, how little deserving our charity would be..."

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In the last years of the Father, one evening I was really compelled to deny hospitality for absolute lack of room. When the Father heard of it, he became sorry and told me, "You could have lodged him in my room." From then on, the Father's room was at disposal of the guests, since he remained at the Holy Spirit.

Drago remembers: "A friar came to Oria late in the night saying that he was the procurator general of his order, but I remained very doubtful. After giving him a dinner, I sent him to an inn at my expenses. When I informed the Servant of God, he reproached me. At my defense, I ventured the doubt that he could be a thief, but the Father smiling said, 'What could he rob?'"

In 1892 the Father gave hospitality in Messina to a priest seeming not entirely in good standing. When he wrote thanking, the Father responded,

I gave you hospitality by duty, because the Lord wants us to do so; please forgive me if I was unable to do better; we are in **poverty**. I know

from your letter that you will go to Africa. But, my goodness, how many things people say of you. The whole information agrees that you are a missionary, as well as you are out of your order. My dear friend, I do not know what to think of: it must be some mystery. Your perfect lay behavior, your leaving out the canonical hours on the ground of unjustified reasons, and so many circumstances arouse suspicion upon you. Meanwhile I esteem you heartily. My dearest friend, just in case you were out of your order, I exhort you to return to your holy religion. My brother, consider that our faithful service to God is our real interest in this life to win the eternal one! Everything comes to an end! Eternity is coming. Let us save souls and ourselves! Why don't you tell me the mission you are going to? Everything is mystery! Everywhere you go, do not forget us, your memory is very dear to us. Saint Joseph has accepted the *Chinese* prayer and a benefactor will buy part of the building for us. Please write to us. Just in case you come to Messina, these little houses are always open to you. Be fervent, observant, humble, detached from everything, obedient, sincere, *in charitate non ficta, cum omni humilitate et patientia* (Vol. 37, page 21).

After the 1908 earthquake, the Servant of God received in the institute of Messina the venerable Priest Francis Jannello who was blind since many years. In his youth he had founded *The Catholic Sicily*, a newspaper that caused a ruffian to attempt upon his life. He had been the vice-director of the Messina seminary for several years. The Father writes, "He wished to retire in our institute and we felt honored and happy, giving him our filial cares and accurate services." How delicate the Father was to him, to whom he often went for confession; how he watched over so that nothing failed to him, and how many times he submitted to our consideration his heroic patience as an example." Eventually he died on February 11, 1919, and the Father remembered his memory on *God and Neighbor* of the following month with kind words (S.C. Vol. 1, page 209).

Let us glean from various relations: "The Father had a veneration for hospitality. Since Avignone Quarter was lacking facilities, he did his best so that the frequent, and even famous guests have an easy lodging, warmly exhorting us to continue doing so." "He held hospitality as sacred: not only we had to give hospitality, but we had also to meet beforehand the guest's needs and wishes." Says a sister, "He helped the missionaries in any way, also by giving hospitality. Now and then, I was entrusted by the Father with giving the most generous and gentle hospitality in Trani." "He often and seriously admonished us never to deny



hospitality to priests or laymen." The Father watched over so that everything be done "with well-chosen courtesy and care." A sister recalls, "The servant of God had ordered the dinner for two persons. Because I knew their social status, I set the table in a common way; but, the Father told me to clear the table and to set it in the best way, saying, "We must deal so with the guests, independently from their social status."

"The Servant of God took information about their needs, diet, when they liked dinner, or anything else and used to tell us: 'To give hospitality is not enough; we have to do it exactly right in order to avoid trouble and awkwardness for the guests.' He said about himself: 'Once I was invited to lunch, but by 2:00 p.m. no one had thought of eating; I was unable to endure it. I lacked simplicity. I should have said: -excuse me, I am not used to this lunch time; please give me something because I am not feeling well- therefore, we must meet the needs of our guests'" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, pages 350-351).

At the beginning of the foundation, the sisters gave hospitality to two Religious, and on that occasion the Father seized the opportunity to exhort his daughters. "I am very pleased that two daughters of Saint Francis dwell among you. Treat them the best you can and learn how they are devoted to the service of Jesus in their order. Giving hospitality to these daughters is a grace from the child Jesus. This is the second religious community that lodges in the hovels of the Little Poor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We have this great honor! Let us be grateful to the Lord, because these good sisters have begun loving our institution and are praying for its improvement."

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Blessed daughters, you see how many small trees are rising in the Church of our Lord; they take different shapes, but all of them are beautiful. They give new fruits for Jesus and souls... Who knows whether divine mercy wants to bless this seed, this little grain, making it grow in the holy Church's garden! Due to my sins and defects, I am unworthy of so much; you, however, pray the Lord to continue giving you the means of sanctification that he has granted until now.

If you zealously practice holy virtues, especially the daily little ones; if you love your rule, your name, and your emblem, we have ground to hope that the little seed will fructify (Vol. 34, page 75).

A sister reports: "Two sisters of another congregation had missed the last train in the evening and knocked at our door at 10:30 in the night. The Father gave them hospitality and called upon me to have the sister cook and the linen sister got up to

prepare the dinner and the room. The next day, he also provided them with the breakfast for the travel."

The French Religious Bovin was expelled by the suppression law before the 1908 earthquake; the Father lodged him for two years.

Every time I read in the canonical hours Saint Gregory's saying, "We have to invite and to urge the pilgrims to accept our hospitality" (Easter Monday, reading 3), my thoughts fly to the Father.

If a priest happened to come over, the Father entreated him to lodge, and he himself often prepared the room. Writes Father Vitale: "One evening while returning home, he saw a priest on the ferry and said to himself: where is he going to sleep now after the earthquake? He invited the priest back to our institute. That night we heard a knocking at our door: 'Quick, get up, we have to prepare lodgings for a guest'" (Ibid. page 351).

Three Capuchins came to Oria in a late winter night, and Brother Joseph Anthony Meli heard them saying at the station that they were going to the seminary for lodgings. The Servant of God reproached the brother because he had not invited them to our institute. Despite the night and the rain, the Father sent the brother with the lantern to search for them. They were before the closed door of the seminary, and accepted the brother's invitation. The Servant of God apologized, prepared warm water to wash their feet himself, and searched for blankets, perhaps picking up some of his. "By day and by night, for so many years, we received guests. He himself often asked some passengers if they had lodgings, and in case of need, he offered his houses, despite they were small and poor... Some time he also took bishops. At our remarking that it was improper for their dignity he responded that his poverty excused him from everything."

Once, I was with the Father in Naples, and we did not find hospitality at several religious communities of the city (in that time the clergy house did not exist). We went to the Father's relatives'. He told me, "See, my son, how much we suffer to find hospitality; it must foster our institute's spirit of hospitality in us." After recalling Abraham's giving hospitality to the angels, he continued, "To express his pleasure for the institute's spirit, the Lord gave us the honor to lodge in the poor Avignone houses two bishops, the successors to the apostles." I remember them:

Msgr. Nicholas Mary Dobrecic, Archbishop of Antivari, primate of the then Serbia, and Msgr. Eugenio Giambro, Bishop of Nicastro. Oh, how solicitous the Father was so that nothing was lacking! He himself prepared the rooms, and because the bishop of Nicastro was tall, to avoid any discomfort the Father prolonged the mattress by placing two cushions at the end of it.

## Notes

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(1) Mother Anthony Lalia (1839-1914) from Misilmeri (Palermo), the founder of Dominican Sisters of Saint Sisto Vecchio in Rome, had a great soul in a small body undermined by penance and infirmities. After governing her institute for 17 years, the congregants put her aside. In the plan of God, she had to make fruitful the institution with her immolation. "How excellent is Mother Lalia in that hour! She must disappear, her congregation, not, because it is a work of God, the result of tears and heroic deeds. Her spiritual directors, such as Father Lombardo, Lepidi, Canon Di Francia supported her in founding the congregation of Saint Sisto Vecchio. They kept near her in the hour of darkness, in the hour of her suffering to present that purest host to God. Deposed from the general's office, she goes into exile, blessing and kissing the hands hitting her. A mother is always mistaken, and she must pay dearly, suffer, and die to save her children, as Jesus did!" ( Taurisano, preface to *Mother Anthony Lalia* by Sister M. G. Arena, O.P.).

Writing to the Father on March 7, 1913, she exclaims, "My sweet exile, my dear prison, my delightful paradise! Jesus is alone in this sacred tabernacle, and I am alone in this beloved cell. He forms, and is my paradise. I hope to pass from this paradise of holy resignation to eternal rest." She died the following year on April 9, 1914. Twenty five years later, when so many prejudices disappeared and several events were cleared, her congregation acknowledged her as a great founder, and took her remains at the mother-house. On July 22, 1939, her remains were buried in the chapter hall of Saint Sisto Vecchio, which is the cradle of the Dominican order and a witness of three resurrections from the dead by Saint Dominic. The recent biography by Timothy Centi O.P. (*Madre M. Antonia Lalia, fondatrice delle Suore Domenicane di S. Sisto Vecchio*- Edizioni S. Sisto Vecchio, Rome, 1972) lays emphasis on the Father's spiritual direction to Mother Lalia.

(2) The Servant of God James Cusmano (1834-1888) from Palermo was a doctor who became a diocesan priest. He stands out in the nineteenth century as a great apostle of charity. He founded The Servants of the Poor and The Sisters Servants of the Poor, known better as *Bocconisti and Bocconiste*. Such names originated from a use in a friend's house, where each table companions reserved a mouthful for the poor, with joy and edification.

(3) It was Francis Saverio Ciampa, a great benefactor of our institute.



# 17.

## THE FATHER

1. Progressing gladly in the way of charity
2. Charity with us and the others
3. Not for expedition only
4. Charity is also made of prayer
5. Kindness and firmness
6. Correction
7. Always heartening
8. Always for the material and spiritual good  
of his children
9. Mutual charity and respect
10. Along with the sick
11. The first great war
12. Notes

# 1. Progressing gladly in the way of charity

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"Different religious families have come into existence in which spiritual resources are multiplied for the progress in holiness of their members and for the good of the entire body of Christ... Thus they are enabled to live securely and to maintain faithfully the religious life to which they have pledged themselves. Rejoicing in spirit they advance on the road of love" (L.G. 43 ).

Let us listen again to the Father on this subject.

As a miserable and unworthy director, I beseech myself and my brothers in Jesus Christ to make mutual charity reign in this institute; the tender, true, Christian, holy, pure charity, which makes no distinction between the persons. May it be in God and for God like the charity of our models Jesus and Mary; may this charity pervade our actions and form the spirit of this least congregation in its existence.

Our dealing with our neighbor will be ruled by the apostle's divine saying, "Now I will show you the way which surpasses all the others. If I speak with human tongues and angelic as well, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and, with full knowledge, comprehend all mysteries, if I have faith great enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give everything I have to feed the poor, and hand over my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure.

Love never fails. Prophecies will cease, tongues will be silent, knowledge will pass away" (1 Cor. 13, 1-8).

What a deep meaning these divine words contain! They are a great rule for those who want to imitate the most holy charity of our divine

model, Jesus Christ . Charity drew him to the altar of the cross.

For the congregants of the Rogation of Jesus' Heart, charity will be the soul and the study of their perfection. They will seek the spiritual and temporal good of others as their own, at least affectively.

Everyone will beware of failing in the charity toward the brethren. This virtue is so excellent that we should always ask for it from the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. It helps us, our institute, the orphans we are educating, the poor of Jesus' Heart, and also the holy Church (S.C. Vol. 10, pages 195-196).

## 2. Charity with us and the others

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"Over all these virtues put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect" (Col. 3, 14). Read how the Father applied this teaching of the apostle to the community.

"Behaving charitably and conveniently with the persons who live with us is the touch-stone of virtue and good nature. Behaving cements the community, which subsists in the members' mutual union of charity" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 173). To be factual he suggests,

I will try to form a tender, affectionate, loving heart for the members of the institute, asking the most holy Heart of Jesus to grant me the spirit of charity toward my brethren in order to love, sympathize, wish, and procure their good as much as I can, as if it were mine.

Bewaring of nurturing aversion or grudge against anyone, still less against those who seem contrary or offensive to me, I promise the following:

1. I will not be prone to believe that I have been offended, I will think instead that my imagination and selfishness amplify the things making them appear grim to me.

2. If someone really offends me, I will not become indignant, but I will sympathize, love, and look on him favorably, recommending him to the Lord in order to return good for evil (Vol. 44, page 120).

Charity, however, cannot be confined to the circle of one's own community, as the priest and Levite of the gospel's parable

meant. Charity is open to all the children of God. The Father tells us:

"We must use charity, respect, and fine manners among us, as well as with everyone also for giving good example. If we do not edify the people with honest, charitable manners, holy garb and institution will be discredited by our dealing harshly, or our offending people with words and deeds. Sometimes we can deny the pretensions of people with fine manners and charity. But it's better to abound in charity and fine manners than to be harsh" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 196).

### 3. Not for expedition only

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Let us see how the Father practiced charity in the government of his communities.

The way he was named shows the nature of his charity. He was not named as director, superior, general, founder, nor Father Di Francia; he was named *the padre*. That's it. It is true that in his own funeral oration he said that "he used to sign so for expedition" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 240), but his spiritual children did not mean so, nor the city of Messina. They named him *the padre* antonomastically. Lawyer Romano specifies, "In Messina, *the Canon* meant Canon Vitale; *the Padre*, Canon Di Francia" (Tusino, *Il Padre Francis Bonaventure Vitale*, page 70). Archbishop Paino did the same in his speech before the padre's coffin. "Let me shed my tears: yes, my tears, because we all have lost the padre, my dear orphans. Messina on the whole feels orphaned as I do. I have felt the superiority of the heart every time he came over to say his words of love and faith.

All of us feel orphaned, all feel like children in the presence of Canon Di Francia's outstanding fatherhood" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 371).

But even though he was *the padre* (and we have to pay our deep respect and veneration to him), he wished to be like one of



us everywhere: in the church, in the refectory, in the courtyard. For instance, he practiced the confession of his own faults in the refectory, as we did.

As to observance, he was demanding, but in a Fatherly way. "I recommend you to be fond of discipline, because it supports the community, and no community can progress without it. Discipline means observance of the rules, of the schedule, and of the silence! Rule, Schedule, Silence. What a responsibility they take upon themselves those daughters who disregard discipline, causing others to do the same! From now on, each of you may be like a bee making honey in silence!" (Vol. 34, page 75). He points out, "The observance and virtue of the individual also belong to the Church, to humankind! Therefore, any inobservance and lack of virtue is a cheating of which we'll give an account to the Lord!..." (S. C. Vol.10, page 72). He writes to a mother superior during the first world war. "Insist upon observance on my behalf, in such tremendous times! We must avoid provoking our Lord! Instead, we must be fervent in the love of Jesus and Mary, competing in humility, obedience, silence, sacrifice, humble works, charity, and mutual respect, also paying careful attention to prayer, from which any sanctification depends. Persons lukewarm and inattentive to holy prayer will never become holy!...(S.C. Vol. 5, page 24). "Blessed daughters, I exhort you to renew your spirit, rising from faults, humbling yourselves, and continuing your improvement in the holy virtues without fear. Do not fail in the practice of the little, daily virtues and mortifications, because some little virtues are worthier in God's eyes than some sublime ones! Likewise, beware of the little defects, whose frequency impedes union with God. 'Catch the foxes, the little foxes that damage the vineyards' (Song 2, 15); viz., root out the little passions, malices, and bad inclinations that damage the vineyard of the spirit" (Vol. 34, page 1).

However self-controlled he was, the Father worried when people did not correspond to grace. He was exceptional. When he realized a little fault in us, he made us understand its gravity, and even reproached us. But, shortly after, he became calm. As soon as he saw a sign of repentance, he joyfully reduced or eliminated the punishment. "He admonished like a Father, making us understand the evil of the faults and the offense to God."

## 4. Charity is also made of prayer...

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To prevent lack of charity among his children and to avoid slackening in the spiritual life, the Father calls the superiors' attention:

*Decrease of holy, mutual love* is a most fateful door of general decline! The superior will be very attentive in this matter. First, he will love his subjects *much, much, much* with tender holy affection, showing it by facts (Vol. 1, page 135).

Both superiors and subjects must be very attentive to dispatch occasions and any kind of slackening in the observance of the holy virtues. For this reason no outsider will be admitted in our community. By loving one another with pure, tender, holy love we must form one heart and one soul. Therefore, we'll be very sorry for the slackening of any of us, being eager for his spiritual recovery, and glad for his spiritual good (Vol. 40, page 141).

We show first our charity by praying sincerely for one another, especially when someone is in danger of losing his virtue or his vocation. The Religious who cries before God to obtain grace for the tottering brother will become most acceptable, whereas the community's indifference before a tottering vocation is very pitiable! In such a case, the superior may tell the community to pray for *an intention*, without specifying it (Vol. 1, page 136).

And how much the Father prayed for his children! Besides the general intentions in his prayers and the intentions in the prayers of the institute, he wrote numerous prayers for specific persons.

For instance, he remembers the persons who lived in the institute: "the kindergarten children, the little old women, the clerics, the tailors, the shoemakers, and everyone who shared in it." He asks, "O Jesus, Good Shepherd, I beseech you to bless them. Save children from corruption, lead the older to the haven of salvation, and sinners to penance. Very compassionate Lord,

see to it that all of us see again each other in paradise!" Specifically: "Immaculate Mary, I entreat you particularly for that son L... (We do not know who he is). Put him under your motherly protection and save him!" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 26).

A petition to the eternal Father for the merits of the most holy Name of Jesus asks that none of the members of the institutions be lost: nor Religious nor children, nor present nor future ones.

A long prayer "for my daughters of the Little Retreat" ends with a thought about the future congregants. "My Jesus, I beseech you not only for them, but also for the future ones who will share the little flock, and for the redeemed souls" (Vol. 6, page 142). For the little group of the clerics: "Sweetest Heart of Jesus, I entrust it to you. Place it in your open wound, infuse in it the vital humor of your grace, virtues, and life; form it with your blessings, and bring it to perfect maturity" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 28). He prays for the clerics.

Most holy Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, Mother of the Church, I deliver and entrust them to you. The greatest gift I can give you is putting in your hands those who long to become the representatives of your divine son, the saviors of souls... Holy Mother, pray, pray, pray, and work for their sanctification, making them grow in the divine union with Jesus. O most holy Mother, I also beseech you to grant me sweetness and grace when I exhort the clerics to the practice of virtue and discipline. Keep me from setting bad examples, even the slightest one! O most holy Virgin, I also pray for the bodily health of these elects in order that they may help the Church. O sweetest Mother, infuse holy joy in their hearts, keeping them always glad. Cause of our joy, pray for us! Holy Mother, hear my supplication! Grant it for the sake, the honor, and the glory of Jesus; for the greater consolation of his Heart. Amen (Ibid. page 29).

On so many occasions the Father appealed to Saint Anthony promising prayers, celebrations of masses, and giving of alms to the poor. His children were often the object of his promises. For instance, when each of us returned from the war, he celebrated a mass of thanksgiving and gave thirteen kg. of bread to the poor. The condition of the following promise reveals the kindness of his charity: "If X gives in to holy obedience!" (S.C. Vol. 9, page 303).

Prayer with ardent charity for our brethren also includes our dead ones. How the Father remembered them! I will never forget the Father's whisper at my ear on the day of my priestly ordination

tion, "Remember Father Bonarrigo." And yet, he was dead since fourteen years. The April 16, 1922, Easter Sunday, the Father dictated to me this short article for our bulletin:

*Our dear deceased*

The communion of saints is an article of our faith. When a dear deceased is morally supposed to enjoy the beatific vision because he lived and died saintly, we resort to him almost instinctively in the emergencies. It happens usually, and sometimes we experience sensibly the protection of ours who are in heaven or in purgatory.

Once, I was searching for important papers, in vain. While staying in Giardini, I thought of saying a mass for our dearest Father Bonarrigo. During the mass, an idea crossed my mind. 'Will he give me a sign of having appreciated the mass?' I was not thinking of the papers. Not at all. Back home in Taormina, I wished to put things in order in some cases when I found myself having those papers in my hands. Father Bonarrigo's handwriting described on the wrapper which papers were in. I was amazed! Didn't the holy man give me an evident sign that he had accepted the mass and was thankful?

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As the Church of Jesus Christ is formed by those who are in heaven, on earth, and in purgatory, so a congregation is formed by its members who are in heaven, in purgatory, and earth. They share among themselves the treasure of faith.

Sometimes I think that the best of our communities is already in heaven. It is formed by brothers, sisters, and orphans; without any distinction between male and female, because all of them are like the angels of God. The only priest of our congregation in heaven is Father Bonarrigo, who is waiting to meet me first.

Our heavenly community shines with the divine *Rogate* and with a particular beauty from the divine zeal of Jesus' Heart. It watches over our houses and prays for their members, that we be one with Jesus and Mary, as Jesus is one with his Father" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 161).

## 5. Kindness and firmness

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"Kindness stood out in the Father's government, through which he corrected faults. For instance, he mildly reproached me for my natural wildness in talking and acting, and delayed my taking of the religious garb one year. To point out my way of talking, he asked Mother Nazzarena, 'Sister, do you never give a piece of sugar to this daughter?' One day he couldn't leave for unknown reasons. At his coming back I went to him for comfort, and he Fatherly cheered up my afflicted spirit. Leaving his room, he met Father Occhiuto, pastor of Saint Eufemia (Calabria), and told him gladly, 'It has been a blessing that I did not leave, because this daughter needed me'."

How he sympathized and heartened people! He once wrote to Father Vitale, who was very busy, "I imagine you're bustling about! May the Heart of Jesus assist you. Do not tire yourself by writing to me, if you cannot" (Vol. 31, page 7). When the effects of the war were felt, the Father makes witty remarks to Father Vitale, "Is Canon Vitale going to the front? No less! But he will fight bravely, arming himself with the hauberk of his great faith, with the shield of divine protection, with the sword and the helmet of prayer, and will win" (Vol. 32, page 92). Soon after, "Machine-guns, bayonets, 420, weapons and army were defeated by General Vitali. The quarter is beflagged, the enemy takes to flight!..." (Vol. 32, page 114).

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One of the first novices distinguished herself in a song to the Madonna, and the Father wrote, "Canon Hannibal Mary Di Francia congratulates upon the Novice Affronte and delights in this first flower of sacred harmony dedicated to the most holy Virgin, for the Lord's glory. May he bless you and make you belong totally to him. February 28, 1890" (Vol. 34, page 61). One day, he wrote to a sister who combined musical expertise with a sweet, enchanting voice.

Words of Jesus:

I gave a harmonious voice to thee'  
It is right if you return it to me.

Words of the soul:

I am nothing, but what you gave me,  
My Jesus, I will return to thee."

On the occasion of a nice performance, the Father gave her a picture of Our Lady of Lourdes; on the back he wrote: "Cheer in the Lord and a particular blessing, wishing you the harmony of holy virtues because this is the true harmonious song before the Lord. C.A.M.D.F." (Vol. 43, page 164).

I tell you an incident regarding me. It is well known that I have no gift for poetry. On one occasion, however, I was unable to decline doing some verses for the Father's name's day, and I strove... At the first occasion the Father told me, "I read your verses... pretty well; you need practice..." On another occasion not only I dared writing verses, but I also resorted to the Father, who had the patience to read them without throwing my scribbles into the waste paper basket!

Tired of the religious discipline, two sisters returned to the world. But, shortly after they repented and asked the Father to receive them again... The Father remarks:

Are you not yet aware that the devil won you? A good Religious suffers aversion with patience, and when she is despised and humiliated she delights in it for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Poor Lord! He must suffer even from the souls consecrated to him! What the worldly persons do, is not enough!

If you are repented and willing to return to the feet of our Lord, I make an exception and open the doors of the mother-house in Messina. Thus, you begin a new life, and with true repentance and perfect behavior you clear and erase your inconsiderate step and the bad example you have settled. How much evil is done with an example such as this! (Vol. 34, page 122).

Lectures, spiritual readings, private talks were good occasions for the Servant of God to lead us to the Lord. All of us Religious and orphans, as well as lay people took advantage."

The Father insisted, "Dearest daughters, I exhort you to be faithful to the grace of God, who calls you to holiness and to Jesus" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 181). But he was uncompromising about principles. He wrote, "The superiors and the directors will promise to fatherly correct their subjects, as well as to expel inexorably the incorrigible pertinacious (Vol. 40, page 142).

Writing to a mother superior he states, "The sisters should know that I cannot keep for any reason the ones who do not live

according to the rules, but I expel them" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 123). Treating about a sister in particular, he writes,

Be not moved by tenderness or by inopportune piety for X, because I doubt that this person will succeed. Let us pray and be vigilant, letting me know her behavior. Please encourage and treat her with true charity, but *demand* her to behave! In the community we must seek the common more than the individual good. It is better to be few in number and good, than having false vocations, which ruin the communities" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 201).

The sister was unwilling to admit her faults, and the Father was inexorable.

Since she does not admit her faults, it is impossible that X behave better, and she will not without a great miracle! Treat her charitably and prudently as you have done until now, but be firm that she must leave.

Because the mother superior was interceding for X, the Father insists,

"Please, to whom do we have to forgive? To a person thinking of having committed no fault? You must admit that the only remedy for her is her going back home. It is better for her and for us. Hold with certainty that a director of a community is practicing charity when he/she expels subversive persons; and when he/she hesitates to do so, he/she is acting against charity" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 198).

Unfortunately, this case of expulsion was not the only one. The Father confides to Msgr. Razzoli to have expelled more than 150 youth in thirty years: "Some of them after a few years of postulate, and a few ones after the taking of the garb because they were incorrigible. Thanks to God, I have been firm to put an end to them" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 197). In doing so the Father did not rush; in fact, after deciding the expulsion of a sister he writes to a mother superior:

Sister X must return home. It is true that the Lord can change her in a moment, and we pray for it. But she shows no sign, nor does she admit her faults. She denies everything with a bad spirit, has no religious vocation, and no inclination to obedience. Her stubbornness to remain in the institute is mistaken for vocation; she does so for her convenience and by a trick of the devil who wants to ruin our houses. We cannot wait for her eventual conversion, which can never come. On the contrary,

we have to keep our houses and the souls entrusted to us free from such a subversive person (S.C. Vol. 8, page 192).

## 6. Correction

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Before making the decision to expel a person, the Father did his best to make the guilty admit his/her faults. Correction aimed at this. He writes to superiors and subjects wise rules on this topic.

Who receives corrections shows that he is a simple-minded person well disposed to virtue; on the contrary, who refuses corrections shows that he is a proud, incorrigible person.

We warmly exhort the probationers to humble themselves interiorly when they are corrected, and to accept the punishment as deserving of it; otherwise selfishness will deceive them. The probationer who longs for religious life recognizes his failure every time he is corrected; if he did not, he would be unable to improve virtue, and his vocation would appear fallacious. Let us remember the words of the psalmist: **"A virtuous man may strike me in reproof, for my own good, but a wicked one shall never anoint my head with oil"** (Ps. 140, 5). (S.C. Vol. 10, page 175). If ever the superiors warn or admonish me for my faults, I will receive their warnings and admonitions with humility of heart and with all my soul, without justifying myself or arguing about it; on the contrary, I will acknowledge my fault with humble, simple heart and will amend. If I am not aware of the fault, I will consider my being unable to see it as due to my selfishness which has dimmed my sight, and, therefore, I need to humiliate myself twice in my heart. If I am sure I have not fallen into the fault I am charged with, for humility and prudence's sake I will keep silence or I will justify myself calmly and with simplicity once or twice (Vol. 44, page 120).

Here there are some thoughts for the superiors.

Correcting his subjects' defects is a hardest task for the superior. The more this task is of importance, the harder it is when the superior



undertakes it without appropriate caution, because he may fail and harm, instead of correcting.

Nothing is as delicate as correcting. Correcting is like a drug; when its dose is wrong or the drug itself is mistaken it may be poison or at least dangerous. For instance, if you reproach when a reserved judgment should be enough, or you scold when a sweet word is needed, it is like administering a wrong drug, which is harmful instead of healing. Oh, how much ruin the wrong corrections bring about! To perform his duty well, therefore, the superior must **diagnose the defects**.

First, he has to understand, know, value, and be fully aware of his subjects' defects by resorting to prayer, divine enlightenment, and careful attention. He has to spiritually diagnose each subject in order to understand the roots of the defects, for they are different from person to person. Some of the roots are deeper, others shallow; here, there is more malice, there, more weakness and fragility. The understanding of various individuals' defects is indispensable for the application of remedies.

To understand the individuals with their defects, nature, and character, so as to apply the right remedy, each superior will pray insistently to God to obtain enlightenment. The daily prayer must be said in each particular case through an intimate invocation upon the Lord, when correction is needed. Our daily prayer to the Lord and the most holy Virgin for helping us in dealing with subjects reaches its aim when we pray for particular cases, especially when we are responsible for the people and ask for enlightenment. In such cases our Lord cannot help granting success. But, if the superiors neglect the remote and the immediate prayer, they will lack enlightenment and become unworthy of it. The superior must pray continuously to win enlightenment on how to guide the community and the individuals. In particular cases, when the matter is urgent, he will pray interiorly, even for a moment before acting.

The person who corrects should follow these rules:

The superior will beware of correcting under the impulse of anger or indignation, avoiding to offend the subject or his parents by talking, for instance, about his poverty, low birth, etc., because it hurts. When the superior becomes angry, he needs to restrain himself, cooling down and delaying the correction. Ecclesiasticus says that in anger people say many words that later they find unjust. Sometimes, however, the superior may correct in a somewhat loud voice if zeal requires it. But true zeal requires that the superior be devoutly indignant, self-controlled, worried for God's glory and salvation of souls as well as concerned with eliminating or remedying bad examples. The prophet said that one may be angry without sinning (Ps. 4,5). The superior will speak firmly, will seriously consider the offense, and will show that his attitude is from zeal, not from anger or scorn. Anger and scorn are devastating to the soul of the subject, and thrust him into diffidence and desperation. Zeal, instead, is pure charity, enlivens, and attracts, even though it sometimes

seems to throw down (Vol. 1, pages 139-141). Because the superior is not infallible, "as soon as he perceives that he has miscalculated the correction, he will pray to the Madonna of the Remedy, himself starting remedying by retracting the correction directly or indirectly. In case of need, he will not hesitate to redress the wrong by declaring plainly his mistake, because upholding the mistake is arrogance and the cause of serious consequences. We must implore for the divine enlightenment in everything (Ibid. page 141).

Writes Father Vitale, "While correcting, he did his best to let people know that his aim was correction of defects and purification of their souls. This motivation led him more than once to relieve someone from punishment, because of favorable disposition or readiness to obey" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 328).

By applying these rules, the Father's corrections were effective. He was so good that when he played the rigorous role no one took offense, rather found everything right. He was a Father to us in everything.

I relate a punishment he inflicted on me.

"I was the sacristan of the church in Oria when one day after mass, the padre called me and asked me if I was the sacristan. I answered, "Yes, Padre."

"Did you prepare the hosts in the pyx?" he asked.

"Yes, Padre."

"Don't you know that the pyx must not be filled to the brim in order to avoid the host's falling to the ground? This morning when I opened the pyx, one of them fell upon the corporal; suppose it was consecrated and fell to the ground. Today you will do a penance..."

"Willingly, padre; which one?"

"Eat your lunch, kneeling."

After the penance, when I went to ask pardon, the padre was writing. While kneeling, I began saying: "Padre, I have come to beg your pardon for the grief I caused this morning..."

He smiled and said: "It was not a grief, because the host was not consecrated. Sometimes, I correct children to see if they are humble. Do not worry. God bless you."

One day I was rushing through the corridor in front of his

room. He peered out the door, with a gesture of his hand indicated to be moderate, and smiling said, "Don't you remember Dante saying, '*haste* mars all decency of act?' (Purgatory III, ll). Haste steals perfection from things, mars things. You can go, but without rushing." A sister says, "Once I was running down the stairs. The Father stopped me saying, 'My daughter, a Religious should not walk like that; it breaks the silence. We have to respect the Lord's house, otherwise everything comes to an end, to an end'."

Once he called to order a novice and sent her to the feet of the Blessed Sacrament. In the evening, talking to all the novices in a way that the interested person could understand, he said, "Daughters, you have not to lose hearts when you happen to fall into defects, nor will the others wonder about that. The Lord covers with defects the good He has and will infuse in souls, but we have to correspond to him with humility and trust. You must also know (and here he stressed the words) that having an alive character is a grace from the Lord and we should thank him and profit by it, because it helps us to become holy. Therefore, the ones should not lose hearts, nor will the others wonder." By insisting on the grace of having an alive character he soothed the heart of the youth who was so in need of comfort.

The Father once asked the mother superior of Taormina to send someone, for he had to dictate a few letters. The superior sent a new aspirant. As soon as she finished writing the sentence the Father had dictated, she looked at him as to invite him to continue. After she had done so a couple of times, the Father said, "I am recalling my grand mother." The youth kept silent, but Brother Mary Anthony who was on the Father's side asked, "Why, padre?" And he responded to him in such a way that the youth could hear. "Because my grandmother suffered grief when people looked at her!" The youth understood and looked at the Father no longer.

Sister Mary Beatrice once behaved improperly with the Rogationists, and the Father warned her; soon after, however, he consoled her with a card. "To Mary Beatrice, my dear daughter in Jesus Christ. A token and a blessing from the padre for her docility and humility in receiving the Fatherly warning. It was due to an overlooked fault against the respectful relations one should ever have with the priestly religious community. Messina, July 14, 1926. The padre" (Vol. 34, page 52).

The same sister recalls the Father's exceptional manners on the occasion of her entering the novitiate. It is the first time I hear of such things.

“On the eve of my taking the garb together with three youth, the Father showed several tools of discipline in a basket, hinting at the sacrifices and renunciations we had to face in the religious life. He did so to test us. The day we took the garb the Father ordered us to kiss the sisters' and the maids' feet at refectory. We received our food from them as alms, in the poorest plates we had in the house.”

While talking with the Father, one had to weigh his/her words and gestures.

The Padre recommended that we be careful about our inner lives, use proper speech suitable to human actions, and avoid covering a vice with the appearance of a virtue. When we were with him, we had to watch our words and gestures as not to see him grimace. He prohibited to hold the exactness in the observance of the virtue as scruple, to call human dignity one's own selfishness, to say that it is peculiar to a strong character not to accept the opinion of others when it depends on pride, and to call our speaking frankness and simplicity when we ought to be silent (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 308). So many acts, unnoticed by us, caught his attention, e. g. putting one's feet on a chair, passing in front of the Holy Sacrament while holding a package in one's hands, laughing with no moderation in a respected person's presence, gossiping, charging someone with ignorance without pointing out why, and the like. For him, avoidance of such things was fundamental in achieving holy perfection (*Ibid.* page 309).

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As to murmuring, Father Caudo recalls how the Father silenced a fellow. "I do not know if what you are saying is true; but it is true that your fault in speaking badly of your brother is worse than his fault" (*La Scintilla*, August 20, 1951). I remember another episode concerning Father Caudo. A priest from Catania had sent to the Father a complimentary book bearing the following title, *My Trip to Lourdes*. The Father was willing to reciprocate the gift by sending the book by Father Caudo, *From Messina to Lourdes*, and told me to ask for it. Father Caudo, however, expressed the opinion that it would be improper, because that priest had cribbed from his book. The Father was astonished because he could not understand how a fellow could publish a literary theft as his own writing. I had to prove it by submitting to him the passages plagiarized word by word. Sure of the fact, the Father told me smiling and with a touch of patriotism, "That's enough, that's enough, we have understood. *Catania*

*copied out Messina."*

As required by charity, the Father spared no one when correction was needed.

Listen to Father Vitale:

"I remember that we burst out laughing for one's trumped-up answer. The Father was sitting near me and said prudently, 'Don't laugh.' Another time I was talking with a few Daughters of Divine Zeal about a certain topic in the mother superior's presence. While speaking, I addressed a sister, because she seemed to understand better than the others. When *the padre* gave me the eye, I did not understand why. Then he handed me a piece of paper with these words written on it: 'Address the mother superior.' I knew that to avoid speaking to her was to discredit her; therefore, I turned to her."

On another occasion the Father gave the chance of a renunciation to Father Vitale, who had written from Oria to his sister at the Holy Spirit in Messina. The Father wrote, "Your sister is doing well, but I have not handed your picture postcard to her. Sensibility and flesh should not rule us; they are deceivers!" (Vol. 31, page 20).

A sister was displeased with her transfer to Altamura, which caused her so many indispositions... The Father writes paternally,

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Daughter in Jesus Christ, please see whether the indisposition you plead depends on the regret that you live in Altamura, far from the house of Trani. The air is excellent in Altamura. You have no disease. Your physical weakness is increased by prostration because you live in this house with regret. It is homesickness, due to lack of submission and of virtue. You are not making a steady resolution to live where obedience wants you to. You are not praying to the Lord and the most holy Virgin for help to live where the divine will has placed you. You are like a child crying and seeking mom. Daughter, you must know that when a youth dislikes being in a house, she is affected by *homesickness*. It is a moral disease causing other diseases apparently. It can cause even fever! When a young Religious understands that holy obedience and the Lord's will want her to stay in a place, she stands fast against the temptations of the devil and of nature. She does not fall sick but is full of peace, strength, and health!... Blessed daughter, be calm, take courage, be in a happy mood, do not behave like a child. As a Religious, show faithfulness to your celestial spouse. Resume your work little by little, and be perfectly obedient to your good mother superior. God helps all the obedient souls! I hope to hear good news of you! (Vol. 34, page 62).

Sometimes people appealed to the Father for trifles, and he tried to illumine the good daughters... He writes to the superior

general, "Please tell Sister Mary Letteria that I have no time to answer superfluous questions! For instance, if tomorrow she asks me whether she can eat her food at refectory, should I answer? Does she think that writing does not cost me anything? My blessing" (Vol. 35, page 172).

He did not even spare the superior general. She ought to be irreproachable in everything. Once, she wrote a letter to a superior with a tone the Father disliked, and therefore he wrote, "As to the letter you sent to her, I have cut the passage I am enclosing; I thought it was not good. Blessed daughter, you should be always polite, affable, and humble especially with the elders and the superiors; otherwise you shock" (Vol. 35, page 4). On another occasion he insists, "Blessed daughter, I beg you to be moderate, humble, respectful, and edifying when you write to the spouses of Jesus Christ. We should avoid to get our sisters accustomed to a worldly tone, or to resentment, and the like. We have to talk as Religious. The Lord says, 'Grace is poured out upon your lips; thus God has blessed you forever' (Ps. 45, 3); and, 'The lute and the harp offer sweet melody, but better than either, a voice that is true'" (Eccl. 40, 21). (Vol. 36, page 186). He writes again to her, "Do you see how we take false steps? Scripture says, 'One often gives vent to his wrath, and then he perceives he is mistaken'" (Ibid.). As to slips, "A soul can be lost in a moment! Besides, it was the Lord's will, but we must pray to be illumined on how to lead souls; it is a delicate matter" (Vol. 35, page 49).

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One day Mother Nazzarena was told to apologize before all for having been late some moments in a community's act. Writes a sister, "On one occasion he called the mother superior who was correcting me excitedly and told her, 'Sister, do not oppress her!'"

Nice is the following call to order. The negotiations to buy a land in Padua were pending, the day of expiration was near, money was needed urgently, and no news was coming from Messina... Finally a letter was delivered, which announced in the last lines, as a matter of no importance, that the money had been sent. Listen to the Father.

"This morning I have received your registered letter and the insured one from Canon Celona with the money order of 38,000 liras. Because of the postal delay, the Franciscan friars were afraid that no money

would come. To assure them and to know something about the money, I transmitted a telegram. Half an hour had hardly passed when I received your registered letter. Anxious, I went through the letter with my eyes, but... you were writing of everything except the main thing! You talked of Altamura, Melanie, Mastropasqua, Procopio, my health, etc. After reading two pages I was losing the hope that the money had been sent. Lo and below! In the third page, as a matter of no importance and in the midst of other pieces of news, I found that you had entrusted Canon Celona with sending the money. I have described my going through all these details to say that common sense is needed when you write... Only Sister M. Carmel D'Amore puts everything in order when she writes, informing of everything. But because you too have got your share of brains, you can do as well as she does by paying attention. It perhaps happens because she is not worried as you are. You see, for instance, how I began this letter; I informed you that I have received the 35 cents you have sent. I think it pleases you. But, if I had talked of everything in two or three pages, you would have remained doubtful of the matter which is at your heart." Then he concludes, "Now it is enough with this short literary, philosophical instruction" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 242).

Above all, the spiritual life of Mother Nazzarena interested the Father. One day he wrote to her, "Unless grace illumines you, and you overcome the predominating passion, viz., attachment to one's own opinion, you will not become holy" (Vol. 31, page 10). Writing about some vocations, "I beg you to detach yourself from your own opinion... Do you think that such attachment does no evil to your soul? That you are going to expiate nothing in purgatory?" (Vol. 35, 59). Because a sister in a commanding position caused disorder, he wrote to her, "I always said that you are not fit for commanding or watching over: some persons become unbalanced in the commanding position" (Vol. 35, 56). On another occasion, "I found two little reactions or resentments in your last letter!... Take care of your interior life" (Vol. 36, page 47).

The Father did not even spare Melanie. And yet, he held her as "a first rate saint, full with God's spirit, very innocent, enamored of Jesus and Mary, and a penitent soul" (Vol. 42, page 60). As a daughter of Adam, Melanie too was imperfect, and the Father points out that her defects cast a shadow on her. "So that this shadow disappear it is necessary to listen to the voice of miracles, to which one cannot resist. Otherwise Melanie will never reach the honor of the altars" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 69).

Because Saint Jerome knew the works and the merits of the holy bishop of Nola, Saint Paulinus, he wrote from the desert demanding of him excellency in everything. "I cannot suffer any

mediocrity in you, because I long that you achieve everything at the highest degree" (Hier. epist. 58 ad Paulinum). So did the Father with Melanie. He wanted her holy in order to certify the apparition of the Madonna with her personal life. Therefore, he did not spare her, even though he behaved very kindly. "Dearest mother, I beg you to pardon me if sometimes I had the presumption to correct you. I did so out of love for Jesus, and because I am very interested that the little shepherd of the most holy Mary be irreproachable and holy. You must bear witness to the great apparition, keeping the devil from working against our Mother of La Salette" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 11).

Melanie was inclined to exceed in rigor. That's how the Father invites her to be kind in the government of the community of the Holy Spirit:

I hand over to your benign charity and tender mercy these daughters, especially the unruly, faulty, imperfect ones. May you be the good shepherd who tracks the lost sheep and guides them again to the fold of the celestial lover, caressing them lovingly! The sweet, benign, loving word spoken at proper time heartens the weak souls, infuses hope and trust, and urges to do well. "A word in season, how good it is!" (Prov. 15, 23). But, if you see in God that some of these daughters do not deserve that word because they take no profit by it, you will never cease praying to the beautiful mother Mary to convert them, to have mercy on these wounded doves. May she pour out on their wounds the wine of the right rigor, the oil of holy charity, and mercy to win all of them to Jesus. Amen (Vol. 42, page 107).

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## 7. Always heartening

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We make a summary choice from the Father's writings.

In the early times of the foundation he writes to the sisters,

"In the foundation of this Pious Institution the Lord requires a lot of sacrifices because its destiny will be perhaps great. Meantime, blessed daughters, strengthen your heart and



look after your sanctification; be zealous for the divine glory and for the salvation of souls; pray fervently to win good workers to the holy Church, and be sure that Jesus Christ will comfort and console you" (Vol. 34, page 2).

To the probationers of Oria candidates for the sacred garb he wrote, "Dearest children, may your holy wish be the result of your ardent love for Jesus. Love for Jesus, our goodness, and longing to be consecrated to his divine service are a great happiness! Dearest children, please practice divine love and the virtue of humility, which is the base of the other virtues. Be pure as angels, because Jesus loves so much the innocent souls. May holy obedience be your joy. May Jesus make you belong totally to him and not at all to this bad world" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 40). Answering the wishes for Easter, the Father wrote, "I thank you heartily for your wishes and return them twice. May Jesus, supreme goodness, infuse his holy love in you so that you may think of, desire, and yearn for Jesus only. Dearest children, consider the grace of the holy vocation you are given and endeavor to correspond to it. Love so much the holy virtues, also counting on the little things." Because in those times several Religious were at the front, the Father concludes, "I beg you to pray for your brethren who are in the army" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 42). He writes to Father Vitale, "Please tell our dearest young Rogationists the best things on my behalf. I always pray that they become holy. The Heart of Jesus is expecting that they turn out well. If they meet his most holy aims, they will be happy !" (Vol. 33, page 52).

The Father once felt bound to humiliate a sister; but, in the evening he asked the mother superior to send that sister to say the rosary with him. Because she was indisposed and had gone to bed, the superior sent another sister, but the Father dismissed her. The following morning he said to the humiliated sister, "Yesterday in the evening I called *you* to say the rosary, because I had wounded your heart."

The Father sent the following letter to a superior on behalf of Jesus.

Jesus to her beloved daughter and spouse. Never distrust my mercy. You are dear to me, and the aim of your pure intention wounds my heart. I love you with endless love. Pay your service to me with a joyous heart; but when you feel like crying, do so with me and my mother. My love and will, humility and obedience are your nourishment. Treat everyone with wisdom, prudence, and charity. Pray to me so much for the souls entrusted to you, and do nothing without appealing to me for

enlightenment and help. My daughter and spouse, I bless you. If you are faithful to me, I will have a crown prepared for you in heaven. Your Jesus (Vol. 34, page 40).

A sister who felt the burden of obedience received the following letter from the Father: "Consider the great happiness of belonging to God through the religious vows. Don't be afraid of the vow of holy obedience, because Jesus Christ said, 'My yoke is easy and my burden light' (Mt. 11, 30). When you obey, think of obeying the most holy Virgin; in fact, you know that she is the Divine Superior" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 261).

Despite the Father had tried to make a sister understand the false step she was taking, she decided to leave. He wrote to her, "Obviously, I am grieved for several reasons, but I feel peace in my conscience since I have always taught you the truth without nurturing your selfishness" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 336).

A good, but somewhat ugly sister had a bad breath. Reports a sister, "Naturally, dealing with her in our conversations or casual meeting was unpleasant. But, for this very reason, the Servant of God often took her in his travels and preferred her when he had to dictate something. The poor sister used to say in her simplicity, "How good the Father was! He was fond of me!"

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The superior general, Mother Nazzarena, needed a lot of encouragement because of the troubles inherent to her office, and the Servant of God was always a Father to her.

Keep firm without losing heart; Jesus and Mary are with you. The elder faithful sisters are few. Be united, love one another too much, and immolate yourselves for the institution of the Lord! (Vol. 35, page 52). I am proud for your cooperation in the Lord; in fact, you have been always a docile, obedient daughter. I would rather say that you have been a faithful companion in the institute's vicissitudes, as well as in the sacrifices we are facing for our holy ideal. But our great hope of fulfilling good wishes comforts us (Vol. 35, page 5). Look after your spirit by paying attention to the fear of God; avoid to tire yourself with distrust and discouragement, but let divine will and obedience guide you; else, you lose heart in vain (Vol. 35, page 39).

On the subject of the community's defects: "Do not cry behaving like a child. I have not understood whether the grave

defects are by the children, or the probationers, or the sisters. You must give a clear explanation, otherwise I cannot be sure from afar. However, the divine superior will see to everything, be calm" (Vol. 35, page 112). On another occasion: "Cheer up. It is written, 'In the evening grief, in the morning joy.' Jesus will console you, because you have committed your life to him" (Vol. 36, page 140). For her name's day: "I wish you to continue working in the field of your soul, bearing fruits in your heart for Jesus" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 245).

We like to conclude with the following words which manifest the Father's heart and form a golden rule for the government of the communities.

As to our affairs of Messina, let us pray confidently. The most holy Virgin will not abandon us. Cheer up, do not lose heart, see to it that rules and discipline be observed, and the youth be subject. Be meek and authoritative, giving example of observance, discipline, and piety. Trust in the most holy Virgin, whose vicar you are in the government of the community; pray often to her with all your trust for the sake of her merits and the merits of Saint Joseph; she will hear you. Holy cross, suffering, and want are necessary in the foundation of an institute, but happy are those who immolate themselves for the consolation of the most holy Heart of Jesus! The Daughter of Divine Zeal must be very zealous in carrying the cross, immolating herself for the sanctification and salvation of souls (Vol. 36, page 172).

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## **8. Always for the material and spiritual good of his children**

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The Servant of God's government was always prudent, carefully aiming at our material and spiritual good.

The Father went so far in his charity as to prohibit anyone to go out of the refectory to avoid disturbing the meal.

In the male communities, above all in winter time, the Servant of God was seen more than once walking through the dormitories in the night to eliminate currents of air and to check

that everyone be warm and provided with blankets.

He often exhorted the mother superior to avoid any warning against the Religious before ascertaining their fault; and the humiliation from a public fault should be enough by itself. So says a sister. He never scolded anyone in the presence of others, except for fault committed in public.

When Mother D' Amore died, the community of Trani was shocked. "In this event we saw how the splendor of the Father's charity shone. He watched over the cooking every day, was attentive in the refectory so that nothing be lacking, that the suffering have a more suitable food, that the sisters eat fresh eggs, and nothing decay in the storehouse.

Says a sister, "He worried about our material work, keeping us from carrying a heavy load. To avoid going up and down the stairs twice, we had filled the soup kettle for the poor and were carrying it; the Father saw our unbalanced carrying and stopped us. Despite our objections, he ordered to unload part of it." In Oria, a probationer was carrying a basket of food from the kitchen to the cylindrical rotating tray. The Father warned her about the heavy load, and he himself helped her carry it. On another occasion the same probationer was carrying a load of wood. At sight of her, the Father became anxious and was calling the mother superior, but the probationer lifted up the load with one hand to prove that it was not so heavy. That calmed down the Servant of God.

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A sister ascribes the merit of her vocation to the Father. "He supported and defended my vocation very Fatherly. My mother was a widow with three more children and was opposing my vocation, causing grief to me and the Father, who behaved very patiently and charitably. My mother tried to have me often at home by feigning sick, and the Father let me go, helping her in various ways; he even told me to buy the cake for her. My mother once feigned to be dying, and we, as well as the Father, sent for the doctor. When we knew the truth, I laughed at that together with the sisters. The Father, however, took it seriously and warned me for my lack of respect toward my mother. The Servant of God overcame the obstacles my mother put in my way by proposing to take my little brothers in the institute for boys and by paying for the sewing machine she had bought before I entered the congregation."

A novice was undergoing hard trials and was tempted to give in. The Father met her in the advertisement office and told her in a low voice, "I am recommending you to Our Lady every day in the mass, asking her to give you strength, to make you win, and to be humble and obedient. As to the taking of the vows, be calm and sure; you will take them at my first coming here. I bless you. Be calm." Peace began reigning in that heart.

A lay brother ascribes a reading of the hearts to the Father "When I entered the institute I felt it was unsuitable to me, therefore I wrote to my parents to come over and take me home. I was with Father Vitale who had tried in vain to persuade me to remain and he was giving me the permission to leave, when the Father came in from the Holy Spirit. Even though he did not know me yet, nor did he know why I was with Father Vitale, he said, 'This youth must stay. A voice told me insistently this morning: go to Saint Anthony's.' I remained, and the temptation disappeared."

On another occasion the Father's reading of hearts revealed a Religious' defection. One day the reading at refectory was over and the community was going to get up when Brother Giambattista Noto took the reading book and began reading by himself. The Father got up, took the book from the brother, and put it on its place. Back to his seat, he secretly said to Father Vitale that the youth had no vocation. We and Father Vitale amazed at that when we were told of the fact, because that second- or third *liceo* youth was a promising one. But he abandoned the institute some years later.

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We glean episodes of another kind.

A sister reports, "I was going to the city of Augusta to pick up a former orphaned girl who had implored material and spiritual help. When I arrived at the Giardini station, I saw the Father who handled me a second class ticket saying, 'You need a second class ticket; it is a long journey' (we used to travel third class). Another time we were going from Naples to Trani by midnight train. The Father returned to the station after about an hour we had said good-bye; he was back to see from beyond the carriage window if we had had dinner, and if we had the lunch basket for the following day."

I like reporting a very modest episode concerning me, which dates back to my entrance in the institute of Oria. It let me appreciate the Father's thoughtfulness. As usual, the Father had talked on the Passion of Jesus and had shown a picture of the Crucified in the attitude of supreme pain and abandon. I got up

saying, "Father, can you give me that picture?" He responded, "Listen, son. I have only this one, and I have to show it to the communities as I did to you to excite your love to the suffering Jesus. But be sure, I will send you one."

Months passed away and I was already oblivious of the promise. When Mr. Pietro Palma came from Messina, he told me, and "The Father gave me an envelope, asking me to deliver it into your hands." It was the dear picture of the Crucified that I am keeping for about 60 years as a dear token from the Father and his devotion to the Passion. Among his worries, the Father gave care for a boy.

A sister wrote,

As soon as I entered the community, I realized the holy man's great charity. For example, because he knew that I had an injured leg, he prohibited my doing any manual work, such as carrying heavy things, picking up things fallen on the ground, etc. He was himself ready to do such things in order to avoid my suffering. His mildness and charity were evident in every act, meeting, and event. Once I was told that *the padre* would punish me severely for a little fault I had. Instead when I saw him, I was received with a great smile and good words. It was enough to soothe, hearten, and amend me.

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He also gave such an answer to a fellow brother who was suffering inner pains that the founder was unable to appease. He said: "I can only ask the Lord to give me the bitter cup that causes you such agony" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 341).

The last time the Father was at Oria in November of 1926, he felt himself too feeble to visit and say good-by to the sisters at Saint Benedict's; therefore, he made them come down to Saint Paschal's. As soon as he perceived that the former orphan Salmeri was absent (she was a member of the house), he asked why. The sisters responded that it was due to her corns. The Father sent the coach for her; it was the Father's last staying in Oria and he did not want to deprive her of his blessing. She says, "I was received with great Fatherly charity. He told me that he too was suffering from two corns, and suggested to appeal to Saint Charles Borromeo, who suffered by the same disturbance. He let me kiss his hand, as presaging that our meeting was the last one."

More episodes.

He suggested a triduo of prayers to a youth who was going to apply for admission to the Daughters of Divine Zeal. He promised that he too would say the same prayers, and added, "You wish to become a sister; you will, but I wish three things from you: self-denial, obedience, and conformity to God's will." Another youth willing to apply for admission was told, "My sisters compete in the humblest works, such as sweeping, cooking, washing dishes, etc. Do you like that?..." These youths became sisters. A youth was accompanied by her confessor to the Father who along with the archbishop and Mother Nazzarena was treating the opening of the house in Trani. She relates, "The Father asked me, 'Do you sweep?' I responded, 'Father, I will learn!' He received me immediately. A youth who attended the sisters' laboratory went to him. The Father asked many questions about her vocation, but delayed his decision and exhorted her to pray. On September 29, 1910, while giving her Communion, the Father looked at her in a particular way. Back to the sacristy, before putting off the sacred vestments he sent for the mother superior and for the youth, asking her if she really wanted to become a sister. Then he added, "If I tell you to remain here without saying good-bye to your parents, do you agree?" "Yes," she said. At noon, a sister accompanied her to say good-bye to her parents. The Father told Mother Dorothy that by doing so he was carrying out a special inspiration he had during the mass.

Another young woman had decided to enter the community on Ascension day. The mother superior presented her to the Father with this motivation, "She wants to ascend to virtue." "Yes," remarked the Father, "but before ascending, we must descend. Jesus, the lily of the valley, is down in humility." While giving her the aspirant's apron, the Father said, "Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve." One day he asked Sister Lucilla to carry a picture of the Sacred Heart. While going upstairs, he asked the sister, "Have you taken the vows?" "Yes," she answered. "Then, you are a spouse of Jesus, a spouse of God! But being a spouse of Jesus means to be like Jesus, and he has a crown of thorns: you too have to carry the thorns for the sake of Jesus..."

A sister saw the Father only once, at his last visit in Trani, when she was a probationer. In the meeting the Father said, "This year you will take the religious garb. I exhort you to pray, to pray and foster your enthusiasm for prayer. You must compete in virtue."

Some people recall the topics of the Father's conversations: "the Passion of our Lord, the devotion to the Sacred Heart of

Jesus, Mary's sorrows, and our answering the grace of the Lord, above all on the part of the Religious."

He once talked about the religious garb:

Daughters, what great a grace from the Lord is wearing the religious garb and how we should correspond to it!

But woe to those who do not correspond... By itself, the garb of a person who does not correspond to the grace of God makes the angels weep. They look at the souls entrusted to them and say, "Oh, that garb, that garb, how unfitting is to that soul. That scapular, how unbecoming is to her behavior. Where is the patience of that soul? She loses her temper for trifles." And the angels, my daughters, cry! They look again and say, "She wears the white *modestino*, but where is her modesty, purity, and mortification in order to keep herself pure before the angels?" And they cry, my daughters. They look at the veil and say, "Where is her recollection in God? She is absent-minded, distracted by trifles, and nonsense..." By continuing with such penetrating words and a wailing voice he touched and instilled in us a very high feeling of respect to the religious garb.

Another sister reports, "His lectures often made me cry, because his word was so penetrating as to touch the hearts. I must also say that every time I approached the Father, one of his words was enough to console me. He used to talk about the spirit of sacrifice and self-denial. We had to offer ourselves as victims to atone for the offenses against Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, for our faults, and for the sins committed in the world. Such a spirit was rooted in his heart."

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He once asked the sisters, "Which is the virtue crowning the others?" We tried to find the right answer. Finally, a sister said, *perseverance*. Then he lectured beautifully on the firmness of perfection, which does not consist of raptures, visions, revelations, etc., but of practice of the virtue until the end of life, because only perseverance is crowned.

We emphasize again the Father's kindness. He had gathered the community for a lecture. Noticing the absence of a sister who was resting because she had to keep awake in the night, the Father said, "We delay the lecture so that all of you attend it. I am interested that all of you listen to the word of God. The good of one soul has as much importance as the good of all."

An extraordinary enlightenment from God showed up in



another episode. Says a sister, "The Father was preaching in the chapel when suddenly he stopped to continue saying mass. After the mass I asked about that interruption. He responded, "I knew that only six persons would profit by the word of God, so I stopped to avoid the responsibility of the others."

## 9. Mutual charity and respect

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The Father wrote for us,

"Keep jealously the union of hearts within the bonds of mutual holy love, and hold one another as beloved brothers in Jesus Christ. Observance of the rules, practice of the virtues, and avoidance of contradiction will help maintain such a union. The apostle says, 'See to it that you abstain from controversies and quarrels'" (Ti. 3, 9). (Vol. 3, page 23).

The Father was very attentive in keeping alive the command of mutual love.

When little fights arose in our community, the Father reminded us of Jesus, who forgave his persecutors. "If some quarrel arose among the sisters, after making peace the Father wanted no talk about it. He did so after a sister's escape; he received her back to the folk, and everything was over.

His repeated exhortations on this topic showed his interest in forgiving one another eagerly, as well as in avoiding the spirit of vengeance or of grudge. Once, a lay brothers did not talk with another one for a few days, because of some quarrels. The assistant wrote to the Father. The Servant of God answered by a special delivery letter ordering the separation of the guilty from the community, depriving him of the Communion (if he did not confess), and threatening him with expulsion in case of disobedience.

One more teaching by the Father, substantiated by an example.

When a Religious is touchy by nature, unless he amends, he is rude to others, or he charges them of some offense, or he is lacking in charity

and courtesy. In such a case the devil is on the look-out to infuse indignation and grudge in the offended person! Fateful moment! If that person yields to the temptation by lack of virtue, the hearts are divided, and grumble, suspicion, and bad example follow. Here, the superior will take care of the offended person rather than of the offender. He will appease him by reminding him of the holy principles and by praying for him" (Vol. 1, page 136).

In the first months of 1910 a sectarian persecution suppressed the orphanage for girls in Francavilla Fontana. The Father saved the orphanage for boys by transferring it to Messina in secret. Back to Francavilla, he found the sisters shocked and upset. They were living the *fateful moment* we have quoted above. They could feel in their inner fibers sentiments of grudge against the offenders of whom they talked openly. It could be the beginning of spiritual decline, as well as "the beginning of the community's slackening."

To avoid it, the Father wrote "a prayer to the Holy Spirit for our persecutors." "To obey our Lord Jesus Christ's most holy law of loving our enemies and praying for our persecutors and slanderers," he asks the Holy Spirit to descend "powerfully and lovingly in the hearts and minds of our persecutors as well as the slanderers. They afflicted us by persecuting and defaming these least institutions, upsetting and almost destroying some of them." He entreats the Holy Spirit to *touch by repentance* their hearts and to "convert them to the most holy Heart of Jesus." He continues, "Write them in the book of eternal life, pour your blessings and gifts, and deliver them from the evil of body and soul. Assist and enlighten them, above all in the hour of their death... We present this supplication from the innermost of our hearts as we should for ourselves and for our dearest beloved. To obtain this grace, we are ready to suffer whatever sacrifice, even the loss of our lives, with your help" (Vol. 4, page 123).

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This prayer was said by the community for several months.

The mutual respect based on the principles of faith is also a manifestation of charity. The Father writes, "Besides loving one another with pure love, each one will respect the others, imitating the example of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Vol. 3, page 23). He specifies,

"I will combine holy love with my sincere respect toward the institute's components, adults or children, superiors or fellows

or workers, considering that God created, redeemed, and gathered them here; that our Lord gave up himself for each of them; that he feeds them with his divine body and Most Precious Blood more than often, destining them to eternal glory. Avoiding to even say the least offensive word to a child, I will address the priests with the title of Father, and will deal kindly with the brothers, the poor, and the children" (Vol. 44, page 12).

He wrote to the mother superior:

Besides a tender, motherly love for her daughters, the mother superior must have a great respect for them as the spouses, or the fiancées of Jesus Christ. She will show her respect in such a prudent way that not one of them will decrease her own reverential fear. The mother superior will never say offensive words, nor will address worldly warning to them. Needless to say, it does not prevent the mother superior from correcting with dignity, from warning, and even from punishing them. Otherwise, she would respect their bodies, but despise their souls (Vol. 1, page 130).

We must point out how the Father dealt with everyone; he had all consideration even for a boy. I remember that the Father once asked the linen youth:

- May I beg you?
- Yes, Father, command.
- I need a towel.

The youth could not help being amazed and told everyone about the Father's kindness.

A sister says, "One day the Father dictated to me a letter addressed to the mother superior of Trani, Sister Dorothy. He asked her to transfer a sister from Trani to Altamura, but in such humble terms that I reasoned with myself, 'What! He is the founder, the superior, everything in the congregation, and begs so humbly?' As though the Father had listened to my reasoning, he stopped, looked at me, and said, 'I respect my sisters, don't you know? This is the reason I write so, saying *please*.' Another time I had begun the letter by writing, 'By the Father's command,'... He said, 'I never give orders to the sisters.' I say instead, 'Would you mind doing this? Or, please be so kind...' I corrected my writing."

Familiarity which comes to lack of respect was never approved by the Father. An old proverb puts it, "too much confidence comes to impoliteness." What we emphasize more on this subject is the Father's respect for his nearest cooperators, Father Vitale

and Father Palma. Even though the Father was the superior, as well as older and warm-hearted, still he never lowered the tune of respect in his conversation with them; not even in the moments of great cordiality and confidence. He was always a gentleman, and addressed them with "Your Reverence" in any occasion. The least title he used for them in his cordiality and confidence was the dialect *Vossia*, which stands for "Your Lordship."

## 10. Along with the sick

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Someone questioned a Rogationist, "Do you know if the Servant of God had preferences for anyone within the community?" "Yes," he responded, "for those who suffered more."

The sick are the first in suffering. "He was so sensitive to other people's suffering that if he had been able, he would have spent all his time in assisting the sick and suffering. He used to say, 'What great a mission it is to assist and comfort the suffering!'" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 341).

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The Father wanted us to take care of our health without being pathophobists. Once I did something imprudently; the Father warned me, "You don't know how to appreciate health! When we are healthy, we can do so much good!"

As to sight, he complained that "our communities underestimate its value, and some even use to read in half light despite my continuous, repeated warnings" (Vol. 36, page 166).

He was concerned with our living in an orderly way.

As for hygiene, I pride myself on the fact, for I follow the Kneip's system, I have read the Mantegazza's treatise, and keep hygiene seriously... Air and light are the main factors of life, and we complain that too many people ignore this important hygienic

rule, which is so important. It stands out among us... Thanks to God, the prosperous health my orphans are enjoying depends mainly on the observance of this hygienic rule: air, air, always air, fresh air, new air, pure air by day and night, in the dormitory, in the laboratory, in the school, during play-time, in the refectory, and everywhere (Vol. 45, page 460-61).

A patient and charitable Religious, expert in how to take care of the sick and how to receive, keep, and treat them... will perceive the people who do not feel well, even when they conceal it, and in agreement with the superiors he will take care of them in the infirmary (Vol. 3, page 34).

To treat the sick and to help the people in their needs we should not worry about expenses, even at the cost of pledging the house and the furniture of the church.

Our sick were the special object of the Father's charity.

Writes Father Vitale about the 1887 cholera:

"Oh, the care, the kindness, the anxiety, and the fears of the Father to safeguard the spiritual and bodily health of his children! More than a loving mother, he would often gaze into their eyes trying to understand what fear or pain afflicted them, to know whether they needed special food or medical care" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, page 94).

In those days, the priest Don Francis, our Founder's brother, shared in the worries and the cares for the sick of Avignone. Almost half of the community was infected. Rosina De Blasi, a former orphan, reports that Don Francis's turn in attending the sick was 5:00 p.m. to 12:00 midnight, while the Father's turn began at midnight. "When he realized that all of us were resting, he went to the church to pray, but now and then he checked to see if anyone needed help. Besides, he prevented the healthy persons from approaching the sick. He chose only one nurse, and heartened her with these words, "May our Lord keep you from any evil!" In spite of being very delicate, the nurse suffered nothing in her assistance to the sick. The Father himself played the role of nurse, and he never went out of the institute for fear that someone might die during his absence. One evening he gave extreme unction to five sick and attended them all night long together with his brother Don Francis." Only Sarino, a five year old child died while saying the Hail Mary.

The Father was always greatly concerned with bodily and spiritual health. Brother Louis Mary Barbante reports, "One day the Father warned me mildly because when he was absent I had followed the doctor's instruction and treated Brother Francis affected by osseo-tuberculosis. When I fell sick, the Father sent me to Saint Pier Niceto for a change of air." Says a sister, "I cannot forget the very motherly care the Father used when I was

sick. He accompanied me to Taormina and there he used to visit the ill sisters always accompanied by another sister." "He was always anxious when we were sick, mobilizing superior and sisters to attend us. A sister told me that when she was affected by headache the Father said a few words of consolation, touched upon her head, and she was freed from pain."

Listen to a few reports about his very Fatherly cares.

"A fit of coughing was enough for him to say to the mother superior, 'Send this daughter to bed for a couple of weeks.' If a sister was pale, he sent her to Guardia, our country property. More than a Father, he was a mother to us. 'Did you eat? Did you sleep? Do you need anything?' These were his questions when someone of us was indisposed. Some sisters were in charge to check the windows, to avoid currents of air, to change air. It was incredible how he considered things in detail so that we lack nothing. One day the sister who attended Mother Nazzarena replaced the door keeper who had gone to Taormina. When the Father saw her at the door, he sent her back to Mother Nazzarena."

Father Drago reports that in 1909 when the Father went to Francavilla, he found two probationers sick. Because we had no male community in Oria, the Father asked the benevolent Bishop Di Tommaso to lodge them in the seminary. They had lunch and dinner at Saint Benedict's. Around that time Father Palma was willing to go to Messina with the Father for urgent affairs, but he was told that the affair most urgent in that circumstance was the good health of the probationers. After a couple of weeks, the probationers recovered and Father Palma descended to Messina.

His fatherly, or better yet, motherly care was for every one; for children was much more tender. In many of them he thought of seeing sickness, paleness, need of treatment.

"While giving Communion to the probationers, he perceived that one of us was pale. To recognize the pale one, he touched upon her with the Communion plate. During the recreation, he asked who was the one he touched upon. 'Me,' said one. And the Father told the master, 'Please send her into the country, she needs cure.' A sister narrates: "A sick young woman was sheltered by charity. She was reluctant to observing a no-salt diet. To hearten her, the Servant of God made the resolve to join the diet, and I began preparing his food with no salt. The day after,

however, I rebelled and prepared the normal food; the Father, however, refused it by saying, 'Why do you want to deprive me of an act of charity? I am doing so to hearten the sick'."

Those were times when tuberculosis was cured at home, and the Father wrote, "Take the necessary precautions to avoid infection" (Vol. 3, page 35).

Sister Camilla was young when she was in charge of the infectious. She testifies, "The doctor was going to replace me with an older sister in the assistance to the infectious, but the Father said, 'No, doctor, she won't fall sick; be sure.' Now I am 67 of age ( deposition of September 23, 1946). Since then I have been working in the infirmary but I never fell sick, nor feverish; the sisters know the Father's prophecy about me" (U. 14, 44)

Visiting the communities, the first care of the Father was for the sick. He once arrived very tired to Rome at midnight. As usual, he went to the chapel to pray, and after visiting the Blessed Sacrament he asked information about the sick sisters.

Also while traveling the Father remembered his sick. For instance, he writes to the mother general, " Right now I do not remember the questions I should make, but I like to be informed about Sister Helen. Tell her of my blessings" (Vol. 36, page 132). A few days after he writes, "Tell Sister Helen that I bless her; may she be strong in the Hearts of Jesus and Mary who love her" (Vol. 36, page 137). A mother superior asked the Father to transfer a tubercular orphaned girl to another house. The Father writes to the mother general,

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This pretence cannot be allowed. Please tell the mother superior that if the Lord has disposed this cross for that house, she must embrace it. In similar cases, none ever thought of transferring the sick. Besides, if they take precautions, they run no risk. When a person dies surrounded by the community's charity, she will pray for that community from heaven (Vol. 36, page 173).

On one hand, we had no need to worry about money, nor to spare sacrifice and care for the sick; on the other hand, the sick should behave as Religious and profit by sickness to become holy. Therefore, he wrote for us,

"If I do not feel well or I need medical care, I will beware of failing because of sickness. I will rely patiently on the superiors' and on the brethren's charity, holding that even a sick Religious has to observe holy poverty and to suffer some want or negligence

as permitted by God in order to set better examples; as a matter of fact, the good soldier is tested in the battle" (Vol. 44, page 137).

He tells the nurse that is part of his/her duty to take care for the piety and the recollection of the sick in order to foster union with God.

"The male nurse will also see to it that devotion and piety be observed in the infirmary. Paying careful attention that the holy Communion be available to the sick every day, he will read spiritual passages for those who are able to listen, will exhort the sick to cheerfulness and patience, will prevent defects and idle talk, making them bear in mind that the devil makes the sick relax when bodily health only is cared for" (Vol. 3, page 35).

Writing to the sick, the Father often reminded them of the spiritual profit they had to draw from illness. "We are spending and have spent so much money for your health, and we hope that your behavior will bless it" (Vol. 34, page 11). After a major surgery, Sister D'Amore was feverish for seven months. The Father writes to her, "Thus, you can rise to a new life of observance and humility. If you cannot receive holy Communion, you can embrace the cross with the Crucified. Be in divine presence, now and then say ejaculatory prayers, and beg someone to read from spiritual books for you" (Vol. 34, page 21). On another occasion: "Do not worry about your spirit, because suffering helps more than prayer and action. Have a pure intention, a sincere spirit, and love for God. Nothing else is needed" (Vol. 34, page 22). "Conform to the will of God, humble yourself, and suffer all things to expiate your sins. We hope that you will recover reformed in your spirit" (Vol. 34, page 24). "Because you are feverish, be cautious. Since the doctor orders a liquid diet, do it without complaining; otherwise you scandalize the probationer. It takes time to recover. I exhort you to avoid any defect of words, impatience, etc. Look a little bit after the spirit which is worthier than the body!" (Vol. 34, page 25). "I am glad that you are doing better. May the divine superior grant you the grace of recovery. Declare war to selfishness, promising docility and meekness" (Vol. 35, page 123).



## 11. The first great war

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Beginning with August 1, 1914, the start of the great war, the world waited for the news in trepidation. In the saying of Saint Pius X the great war spread as fire to almost all the European nations and to America! The people hoped that Italy remain neutral. In February 1915, the Father pointed out to an article of the *Corriere della Sera* which asserted, on the ground of reliable information from Vienna, that Austria was well disposed to acknowledge our rights on the unredeemed lands. However, our Founder wrote to Father Vitale, "Politically speaking, we have good hints of no war in Italy: but I fear sin. The army does nothing but cursing!" (Vol. 31, page 64). Is it daring to say that war is a punishment from God? The fact is that Italy declared war and it was a long, hard, and bloody one!

The greatest of the Father's worries was sin of the army in that time. He wrote to a Religious at the front, "Such are the times, dearest son! People are not prone to believe that Someone on high decides for the nations, and that curse, scurrilous language, and dishonesty of any army can put a good cause in jeopardy! To help our homeland, the government should prohibit and punish such sins" (Vol. 30, page 93). For this reason the Father wrote a letter to the General Louis Cadorna in the first months of the war, exhorting him to prohibit cursing and scurrilous language in the army in order to draw the blessing of God.(2)

He enjoined his communities to say prayers for peace, and exhorted them to be observant and faithful to the Lord. "Observe perfectly the religious virtues, loving Jesus and Mary in the religious actions, prayer, holy obedience, and discipline. By doing so you can trust that the most holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary will protect you" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 252). "Let us pray continuously and behave according to the strict fear of God. Tell it to everyone!" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 253).

A regime of austerity was needed, all the more because the Father had no intention to be stingy with the poor. As usual, he behaved according to the principles of faith. First, he enjoined the communities to expose "the picture of Our Lady of Bread, so that the most holy Virgin kindly provide us with the necessities."

Second, he gave wise rules for the production, saving, conservation, and rationing. As to the production:

The communities having agricultural lands will culture them paying the workers, according to the custom of the place. If workers are lacking, or the communities want to save on the expenses of the culture, it is praiseworthy that the young and even the sisters cultivate the lands. It is time to earn our living by the sweat of our brow... To live, we must snatch the food out of the land!

If you have no bread, you can have potatoes, vegetables, cereals, and fruits from the land. To live, everything is good with the blessing of the Lord... Dearest daughters, any work aiming at producing for you, the orphans who ask for bread, and the poor who knock at our door is blessed by the Lord. Even pure vegetables help avoid death. Besides the culture of the land, you can raise animals, such as chicken, doves, rabbits, pigs, goats, cows, etc. They help you the most.

After treating about economics, preservation of commodities, and rationing, he concludes with Fatherly affection,

Finally, we beg you that the observance of these economical rules deprive no one of the necessary nourishment. We have to trust in the adorable Heart of Jesus, the most holy Virgin, Saint Joseph, and Saint Anthony of Padua. They will help us until we are observant, serve God, love Jesus and Mary, practice the holy virtues, follow our spiritual industries, and work without sparing ourselves (Vol. 34, pages 125-127).

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In 1917, the Father opened a house in Altamura for the orphaned girls of the war, and in 1917 he sent 8 sisters to Padua upon request of the bishop of the city to serve in the military hospital Belzoni.

Obviously, the consequences of the war were heavily felt in the Rogationist institute, because several of its members answered the call to the army... and the Father had to shoulder more burdens.

The beginning of the war caught almost all of us for the military service. The holy Founder was deeply grieved, but kept calm. Each of us received his letters full of trust and tenderness.

As soon as he received notice that his children were enlisted, he opened himself to Father Vitale, "Let us always praise the divine will! We are nothing. The Creator knows how to guide his creatures" (Vol. 31, page 58). "Long live Jesus! Let us pray!"

Poor and dear son, the spirit cries! But let us leave everything and all of us in the adorable Heart of Jesus!... Let us cry before the Lord! Now is time of wails and sighs! Heart of Jesus, save us!" (Vol. 32, page 86). When he knew of my call to the army, he wrote, "I am told that you have been declared fit for the war! What can I say? I was grieved to tears, but can we distrust the sweetest mercy of the most holy Heart of Jesus? Never! It is written (by Saint Paul) that everything is for good to those who love and fear God" (Vol. 30, page 90).

Then the Father wrote the "prayer for our brethren soldiers," which our communities said every day. His children in the army were always a topic of his conversations, speeches, and verses on the Eucharistic feast of July first. "I assure you that we are continuously praying for all of you" (Vol. 30, page 92). "Be sure that I never leave out the prayer for all of you" (Ibid. page 94). "It is a week since I am in Rome. In a few days I will have a private audience with the Holy Father, God willing. I will ask a special blessing for you who are in the army" (Ibid. page 102). "Do not lose heart; these are ways of God. Dearest children, when you come back, as we firmly hope in the love of the most holy Heart of Jesus, you will be already men fit for becoming champions of Jesus Christ and his Evangelical Rogation! Meantime the Lord wants you to pass through internal and external manifold sacrifices. Who has never suffered, what does he know? Surrender yourself to the most holy Heart of Jesus and his holy Mother, letting Providence guide you" (Ibid. page 101).

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How the Father delighted in our concord! "It is wonderful how from different areas our dearest children soldiers are united in a holy friendship and brotherhood. They write each other, giving news, informing of their destination, and all of them are perfectly united to us as they were before. Our community is stronger now. May the good Jesus give them back to our houses!" Vol. 32, page 132).

Unfortunately, the war made a casualty among us. The young student, Brother Mansueto Drago, died while fighting on Monte Nero (Carso), on March 24, 1917. The Father remembers him so, "He was an exemplary, well promising youth; he has already succeeded to enter paradise! We hope that the adorable Heart of Jesus has taken him as a victim to save all of you" (Vol. 30, page 84). The Father perpetuated the name of the victim in the hymn of July first 1917:

Very merciful companion  
Of our exile, see  
The *Rogate* 's little folk  
Sighing for you,  
Who adores your decree  
About our son Mansueto  
You wanted to be with you.  
(Vol. 46, page 298).

Another victim of the war was a cousin of Brother Mansueto, the Rogationist lay Brother Mariano Drago. He was a soldier in Palermo when he became blind in a few days.

As soon as the Father was informed of the grave threat hanging over his dearest son, he hastened to Palermo. From there he wrote to Father Vitale and Father Palma in Oria. "The Lord has visited us with his cross always blessed! *Calix meus inebrians quam praeclarus est!* Our dearest Brother Mariano is in a grave danger of becoming blind!..." After touching upon the reasons of the spreading infection, he continues, "Never my heart was so pierced! To die young at the front is not the greatest of the sorrows, as we thought! To lose sight at the age of 25, and to live as though dead for forty, fifty years is more terrible! By the grace of the Lord, as Christians and ministers of the Lord, we always praise and bless his very adorable will. But, owing to our fatherly love for our dearest children in Jesus Christ, God does not prohibit us from imploring a grace, a grace!" (Vol. 32, page 5).

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The Father remained eleven days in Palermo working as a nurse, and together with Father John Messina he tried to take home the poor son. In a letter he narrates the painful work he did to get the discharge papers. People suspected that the young man had caused the disease (Vol. 32, page 9).

On February 19, 1917, the remainder of his sight was over forever! The Father writes on February 20,

"I have telegraphed to almost all of our houses and monasteries, as well as to Servants of God! I have entreated the adorable Heart of Jesus, the most holy Mother, the angels, the saints, Saint Anthony of Padua, the holy souls in purgatory, Sister Teresa of the child Jesus... I have put La Salette water on his eyes... I have signed him with the most holy Name of Jesus, as Saint Vincent Ferreri suggests...but night supervened: his eyes closed in the darkness to open to eternal light, as we hope!"

The patient's serenity consoled the Father greatly. "The many prayers people say for him draw the Lord's mercy on him, who has been so deeply calm tonight. When I was leaving because he dismissed me, I heard something as though he were lamenting. I asked what the matter was. He calmly responded, "I am singing: *Blood of the First Martyr!!!!...*" (Vol. 32, page 8).

The Father hoped that proper cures could save at least one of the patient's eyes, because it seemed less damaged; it was all no good! The eye specialists agreed upon the uselessness of human treatment in that case. Prof. Cirincione, oculist of international fame said, "Son, do not trust men, but only God!"

It was through trust in God that the Father multiplied and made people multiply the prayers for Brother Mariano's healing. He took him to San Giovanni Rotondo, to Father Pio. He signed the dead eyes with the sign of the cross, but they did not open. To the Father asking whether there was any hope Father Pio responded, "Let us knock. What the Lord is not doing now, can do later..."

Failed this attempt, the Father sent Brother Mariano to Pompei "at the feet of the One who is the channel of all graces as well as of the miracles of the divine mercy!" He declared to Father Vitale: "I do not want to leave out the trust in the beloved Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Whether men are holy or not, they are men; but any good comes from above!" Then he concludes, "As to our Brother Mariano, he is very resigned. Let us adore divine will!" (Ibid.).

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Even though very resigned, the dear youth sometimes felt dejected, and once that he complained for his sad condition, the Father told him, "Son, to console you, I will pray to the Lord to give you back at least the sight of one eye by taking it away from me" (*Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia*, pages 340-341).

## Notes

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(1) Like a son, Father Bonarrigo gathered the writings and the memories of the Father, who once wrote to Father Palma, "This morning I opened the big case and found in front of me a bundle of papers with my poems of Taormina. Who put it there? Perhaps the holy soul of Father Bonarrigo" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 52).

(2) I have read this letter, but no copy has been found in the Father's writings.

(3) Father John Messina (1871-1949) was a priest of great zeal and charity. To redeem the children of the people, he founded the "Pious Work and Prayer House" in the Quarter Saint Erasmus, which he playfully defined, "Africa of Palermo." We could call it the Avignone Quarter of Palermo. To face the needs of his institution, he founded the "Orsoline Congregate," under the rules of Saint Angela Merici. Out of the blue, one day he was ordered by the mayor of Palermo to transfer his community to another place, because his great, beautiful house disfigured the beauty of the seaside. Therefore, it should be destroyed!" It was a great blow to him. His heart did not hold the news, and he died a few days later. People, however, reacted against the mayor's decision and the house remained over there... In 1967, the Orsoline by Father Messina were associated to Don Orione's "Little Missionaries of Charity."

# 18.

## "I LOVE MY CHILDREN"

1. The origin of famous stanzas
2. Most holy work
3. ...Rich in good
4. Among his children
5. With queer chaps...
6. "The heart he had"
7. His name day
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# 1. The origin of famous stanzas

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In need as usual, the Father had asked the administrators of the city for an extraordinary aid worthy 1,000 liras for the feasts of middle August 1902.

The city administration was in the hands of the Jacobins of the Mountain, declared enemies of God and of the priests.

At the August 12 council meeting, the socialist party (also called the 'mountain' party) launched a full attack against Canon Di Francia, who sat in a corner of the hall in a section reserved for the public. He received the 'kindest regards' from lovers of the people. One said that the padre did not know how to educate because he was a priest! Another declared that the philanthropist had a random gathering of youths united under no ideal direction! Somebody else spoke out against his hygienic and disciplinary methods!... The proposal for money was rejected (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 171).

The way the Father was handled by the city council arose the protest of the Beacon (August 14).

We are not so touched by the rejection of a thousand liras aid (we know the hellish hatred of the council's majority against the religious institutions). But we feel indignant for the slanderous actions of those sirs against the most benefactor of the orphans and against his institutions. They have covered him with insults...saying that he has a random gathering of youths. Pure slanders, because the orphans work in the mill, the bakery, tailoring, typography, and shoe-maker's all day long. To learn morality, we should send the little girls to the Normal Female institute, and the boys... to another one!" On August 29, the newspaper points out, "By voting against 1,000 liras to Canon Di Francia, the counselors did their worst and voted against the will of the people, who would give ten thousand liras to the angel of charity.

On this occasion Lawyer Angel Toscano wrote some verses, praising God and exalting the beneficial mission of the Father of the orphans. (1)

The Servant of God answered these verses with a poem, a



jewel of his heart, which the Rogationists can never forget. He mailed it to the lawyer on September 25 with the following dedication, "To the eminent Dr. Angel Toscano who with affectionate verses and kindness of heart heartened my humble labors for the salvation of the abandoned orphans."

As a note of pilgrim songs  
The sound of your pretty zither reaches my ear,  
O unknown friend, and prolongs  
The innocent love for my children, so dear.  
I love my children, they are for me  
The dearest ideal of my life.  
I rescued them from oblivion, giving them lee  
Urged from within by a hoping strife.  
Little Italian flowers, recent born yet  
Were easy prey of the abyss,  
No one gazed at them lovingly, nor met  
To make them happy with a bliss.  
Little children dispersed in the street  
Having no love, no joy, no smile.  
Oh, what a future, what a defeat  
Would have them crushed under their guile.  
Cleansed pearls are my little girls:  
I collected them from mud one by one,  
As shells from the streets of the churls.  
They have started off toward a civil run.  
They call me Padre: God's minister  
Lays his hands on their locks.  
They call mother: the sweet calls spur  
The Lord's chaste spouse to her flocks.  
That bread fail not at your view  
I froze, I sweated... - Today  
Your food is here, the God who loves you  
Will provide for the next day.  
Often I have knocked on iron doors in vain,  
Atrocity has been my verdict:  
Get out of here, you person insane,  
Suffer the pain for doing your bit.  
My children, one day you will know  
My martyrdom and love;  
A Father could not love more his own,  
For you I implored men and God, above!  
O unknown friend, might your verse  
Melt the ice and turn it into fire,  
So that piety reign in the universe  
The piety which in heaven and earth I desire.

## 2. Most holy work

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Let us study the Servant of God as the Father of the orphans. He was conspicuous for the charity toward his neighbor, but his most tender heart-beats were for the orphans. Referring to the beginning of the orphanage in Rome, a sister reports, "The Father dictated a prayer, asking the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Madonna to send the most mischievous orphans who would be easily lost, unless they were sheltered in that charitable place."

The Father's apostolate among the orphans is bound to the Rogationist mission by ideal and history.

He writes, "It is by charity that the Heart of Jesus said in his zeal, 'Pray, therefore, to the owner of the harvest to send workers to gather in his harvest.' If we broaden our heart in this divine charity, we'll fulfill our duty of good evangelical workers..." (S.C. Vol. 10, page 196).

The Father himself relates how his institutions were historically tied to the Rogate. When he went in the midst of the Avignone rabble, he remembered the gospel's saying of the crowds without a shepherd, the Lord's groan for the harvest which gets lost, and the divine command, "Pray, therefore," etc. "Since then," he says, "I committed myself to relieve that abandoned crowd spiritually and materially " (S.C. Vol. 10, page 207).

Hence the orphanages.

While teaching us, the Father called our attention to these thoughts. He used to say, "Because the priests spread the kingdom of God, they are irreplaceable. Children educated in a Christian way will live saintly, whereas the older who have not been educated so, will be easily unsound." And more than often he added, "Be concerned with the mud in the streets, i.e., with the abandoned persons, because they sin and lead other people to sin. The grace of the Lord also works upon them. Lombrosos' opinion about the delinquent child's irretrievability is false."

Therefore the Father insisted upon the worthiness of the apostolate among the orphans.

Saving tender children is a holiest work to which we will attend with sacrifice, deeply aware of the excellent good we do when we take them away from vagabondage, risks, and depravity and provide them with a sound education and environment. Thus, by God's help we form them to become good Christians, perfect Catholics, honest and industrious citizens as well as good parents when they marry (S.C. Vol. 10, page 197). Salvation of abandoned orphans will be one of the most cherished works of the Rogationists of the Heart of Jesus. They will provide the orphans with a sound education and an appropriate profession... they will provide them with the things they need, especially when they are sick, regarding the last of the orphans as the first of the Fathers (Vol. 3, page 29).

Beginning the treatise on the orphanages, he recalls these thoughts:

Now our talk is about the orphanages, which represent our mission of gathering scattered, poor, abandoned, orphaned children in order to save them spiritually and materially. We pursue this aim by delivering the orphans from abandonment, depravity of the world, hunger, misery, idleness, scandals, risks, and temporal and eternal ruin!

How much the most holy Heart of Jesus delights in this work for the abandoned orphans' salvation! What a conquest of souls is snatching them from the devil and bringing them to God! (Vol. 1, page 239).

Snatching them! The Father did so several times at the beginning of the institution. The rough, dull-witted mothers of Avignone were refractory to civilization and virtue as well as unable to understand that sheltering their daughters was for their good; they instead meant to sponge the Father's zeal. Remember how the Father sweated to recollect the orphaned girls when their mothers took them home because of Jensen's excess of zeal.

The orphaned Josephine Lembo is a case in point. The Father snatched her from her relatives. Those people fought to have her back, but the Father did the same to keep her, appealing to the Lord. To save the Lembo, he wrote prayers to the Lord, Our Lady, and Saint Joseph.

O good shepherd Jesus, keep the hellish enemy from snatching out of your loving hands this little sheep who belongs to you only, because you are the Father of the orphans. I am an unworthy minister, but I beg

you to save your little daughter from those who are trying to pick her up. They have a mind to lead her through an unsound education.

Most holy Virgin, I beg you to enlighten me on what I have to do for the salvation of this little orphan. Please enlighten those who are treating this affair; help us to succeed.

My dear Saint Joseph, deign to calm the spirits of this orphan's relatives, especially N. N., giving her the holy fear of God. May she leave the little orphan in the Retreat. I also commend her remnant relatives; see to it that they agree with us for the good of this little orphan, if Jesus wants it (Vol. 6, pages 145-146).

To succeed, the Father combined prayer and action. He set up a more reasonable council of family, and obtained to have the child until her complete education. When her education was complete, their relatives called her to Argentina. She wrote to the Father narrating how she broke with her sister who expelled her from the house. The Father wrote, "Poor daughter, how many troubles you passed through! I foresaw everything because I know society and what it means to have relatives without religious education!" He points out, "I bless the troubles I underwent for your salvation and what I suffered in dealing with your relatives. Now you are in a condition to appreciate the good you have received from this institute, and you appreciate it. The most holy Virgin loved you so much. Now, you never stop thanking her, and be faithful to a so loving mother and to her son, Jesus, our supreme goodness" (Vol. 42, page 58). Then he counseled her on how to behave in her job.

### **3. ...Rich in Goodness**

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The Father calls our full attention on the natural and supernatural reasons which should inspire us while practicing this most holy work.

Rescuing an orphan from a deadly future along with providing him

a spiritual and temporal well-being is such a redemption that it does not end with the individual orphan, but continues from generation to generation, bringing about innumerable goods!

A male and a female educated orphan who succeed, will convey their education and morals in the midst of society through their example as well as by becoming parents of children. They will share with them the teaching of faith and civilization, practice of piety and training they received in the pious institute, where they grew up for God and their happy future.

Those who strive diligently for the salvation of tender children, in whom they awaken the smile of love; who eliminate tears and desperation, deserve a great reward...

Let us conclude by considering how great and immense is the priceless reward that our Lord Jesus Christ will give the lovely brides who are completely committed to this holy mission. They will be rewarded during their life, at death, and after-death, because their mission rejoices forever the most holy Heart of Jesus, the holy Church on earth, the heavenly court in paradise, the angels, the saints, and especially the great mother Mary (Vol. 1, pages 239-40).

We would say that no work is so appreciated and pleasing to the most holy Heart of Jesus as the education of little children. In this case, our Lord will not cry out with uttermost anguish the utterance of the Holy Scripture, 'What do you gain by my blood?' (Ps. 30, 9) as he does at the sight of the frightful abuse the world commits against childish souls and at the sight of their unhappy life or eternal loss. On the contrary, at the sight of the holiest mission aiming at saving the abandoned, derelict orphans as well as at the sight of its good results, our Lord Jesus Christ will exclaim, 'What a gain by my blood!' These and the future souls are brought to my Heart by my faithful ministers and my faithful spouses! Blessed be the blood I shed in the midst of terrible suffering for the salvation of souls!"

Everyone knows how much the child Jesus suffered for the babies the impious Herod slaughtered when Joseph and Mary took him to Egypt. He saw those babies slaughtered and drowned in their blood, felt their poor mothers' torment and cries in his most sensitive Heart. He experienced that horrible scene as if it were the occurring in his sweetest Heart as well as the sword-points and the saber cuts piercing his own Heart! And yet, he was consoled by the thought that the babies who were slaughtered in his place would be glorified in heaven.

But the most holy Heart of Jesus suffered even more when he foresaw the numberless tender souls, who deprived of parents and of an opportunity to be educated to a good life by zealous persons, would be left open to the spiritual slaughter which is caused by sin.

This unheard slaughter has happened millions and millions of times ever since the world began! My daughters in Jesus Christ, if you took care of yourselves only, you would run the risk of eternal loss. "Let us

not hold our own soul more precious than the souls of our brothers" (Act. 20, 24). Let us take the utmost care of the abandoned orphans. But because this involves the education of childish, young souls, we must expand our zeal not only to the abandoned orphans, but also to the tender, young souls who come into our ministry, either in the kindergarten, or in day-schools, or in the orphanages. These institutions are concerned with the salvation of present and future souls, pleasing the most holy Heart of Jesus just as the orphanages do (Vol. 1, pages 239-240).

## 4. Among his children

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Let us glance at the Father staying in the midst of his children.

Avignone Quarter: the boys are in the laboratories. Brother Louis is walking in the courtyard arm-in-arm with Brother Mariano, who is already blind. The little boys exempt from work are whimpering for some of their squabbles at the foot of the gigantic eucalyptus standing out and perfuming the place. Suddenly, the Father enters the courtyard wearing hat and outstretched cape, which increases the majesty of his noble gait. The boys burst out, 'The padre! The padre!' They hasten to him happily, clapping hands. The Father smiles, opens the cape, and the kids are under it, gladly. 'Let us walk so! Let us walk so!,' says the Father. With measured steps they go round the courtyard... It's both reality and symbol" (Father Tusino, Conferenze pedagogiche e formative, page 83).

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Under the shadow of his anxious and generous Fatherhood, full of love and martyrdom, the Father protected, defended, and guided his children in the way of life. Writes Father Vitale,

By gathering abandoned children he meant to save them from corruption; moreover, he watched over them like a mother watches over her children. He infused feelings of intimate piety and fear of God in their tender souls; he himself taught catechism in his own very effective way to make them love virtue and hate vice.

How many cares and industries he conceived of to prepare them for their first communion, and with how much fervor he made them receive Jesus more often! For them he wrote particular preparations and thanksgiving; for them, he made delightful speeches before mass; for them, he formed societies of piety, such as the "Luigini of Immaculate Mary." Gory stories of witches and magicians were not to his liking because these stories bring fear and terror making children sometimes grow shy, afraid, and superstitious. His rules about their education are jewels of practice for the immediate superiors and assistants" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 325).

How delighted he was when children called him "Padre!" The community priests were referred to by their names; 'Padre' was for our founder alone.

When he returned after an absence, and kneeling children said: "Bless us Padre," his eyes shone with happiness.

During playtime he was often among boys or girls to cheer them up by being comic, telling anecdotes or engaging in pleasantries aimed at moral teachings. Then he would let them play youthfully and joyously (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, pages 338-39).

For him, the little orphans were little Christs, and he had the honor to accept some of their food from their spoons to make up his dish. Writes Father Vitale, "Now and then, as though he liked living their way, he entered the refectory and said affectionately, 'Won't you give anything to your Padre, who is a poor man?' Children presented their plates. He picked up a spoonful here and there and ate among the children, much to their satisfaction" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 339).

A former female orphan reports, "One day the Father made the proposal of making a trip in the Holy Spirit's garden. At a certain place, he made us have a seat. Some children distributed bread; the Father, cheese. When he reached me, I was told: 'Hold a piece more.' At the end of the distribution he came again to me and said, 'Please give me a bit of cheese'."

Sometimes he was childish. In Oria, the good sisters of Saint Benedict gave us baked chestnuts. The Servant of God fingered them, and found that they were hard. He prohibited the tasteful snack for fear we could harm our teeth. He caused the chestnuts to be soaked, and replaced them with biscuits.

Once he happened to see a child with a piece of almond candy in her mouth; quickly, he took it away and warned the assistant about possible danger, adding: "When you give almond to children, you have to first crush it." The more children were little, or suffering, the more he loved them. Knowing how severe the padre was with people dozing during services, the sisters tried to awaken small children sleeping in the

chapel. When the padre noticed this, he said to the sisters: "Do not touch them; let these innocent creatures sleep at the foot of Jesus; he delights in it. However, it is a different matter with the older ones who are aware of how to respect the Lord."

At the Taormina orphanage he met a little child crying and screaming, inconsolably. He felt compassion and shed tears himself. When he asked a sister what was wrong, she said, "She does not want milk."

"O my daughter, she does not want it because she dislikes it; leave it to me. Why do you make her cry this way?" He took the girl by the hand and led her to his room. With a sad voice he repeated over and over: "My poor daughter, they have grieved you; they have made you cry; you are only three years old." (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, pages 337-338).

He had a delicate, gentle feeling of Fatherhood with the orphans. One day, a little girl asked, "Padre, water!" He rushed to his room and brought a glass of water, helping the girl drink. The sister tried to replace the Father, who said, "Please do not intervene when the orphans appeal to me as a Father, as I try to be for them. You cannot imagine my joy in these cases." The same sister remembers that the Father was allergic to lemons (it is strange for a Sicilian). He was given goose-flesh from touching and even more from peeling them. And yet, to mortify and overcome himself, at Taormina he peeled and sliced the lemons for the orphans who liked having them from the Father. I perceived the Father's sacrifice and prohibited the girls to ask or to receive lemons from the Servant of God. When the Father knew the fact, he told me, "Why do you deprive me of this occasion which helps me to win myself?"

## **5. With queer chaps...**

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A former orphan who became a sister narrates, "It was three years since I entered the orphanage together with my sister. At age of ten she became so unmanageable as to bite not only me, but also the mother superior and the padre; and yet, she was educated by the sisters.



One day the Father called her, said a prayer, and sprinkled her with water from a bottle: she changed immediately. From then on, the Father called me 'the sister of the baptized one.' I know he did the same with someone else."

We quote from Father Vitale.

"One evening, the padre appeared in Oria with five children; he sent the two girls to the sisters of Saint Benedict; while he sent the three boys to the prefect of our community.

The prefect said: 'padre, we have no vacancy.'

'We must; I have delivered them from protestants who wreak havoc in their city.'

'Padre, would you mind explaining how and where we can accomodate them?'

'No, no, it is up to you; the children must be saved.'

When the padre behaved resolutely, it was through trust in God and he got what he asked for. The children remained at Saint Paschal, but as time passed, one of them began showing symptoms of kleptomania. When unseen, he pilfered everything: keys, an iron, handkerchiefs, and socks, concealing them in the pockets, sleeves, his vest, etc. He went to bed with something in his fist he had taken. It dropped out of his hand when he fell asleep. One morning, an assistant could not find his shoes. The little maniac had thrown them in the bathroom. Another day, about 20 blankets disappeared. They were concealed behind an altar in the church. But he was reluctant to steal money and food. He was tested, but he never did.

It was a serious matter. Neither mildness, nor warning, nor punishment, nor threat of expulsion worked. Because he had no parents, his grandmother was told that the boy should be returned to her. The poor woman answered that such a vice was hereditary, coming from both a grandfather and his father who was continually in jail for robbery. Advised by some people, the poor old woman sent in a request to intern the boy in a house of correction and mailed it to the superiors of the orphanage to see that this be done.

In the meantime, the padre was in Oria. Informed in detail about this problem as well as about the uselessness of any attempts at remedy, at first he thought there was no solution. But when he began reading the request, he turned pale and said 'This is a death sentence; the boy will dwell among criminals. The terror of jail will overwhelm his fear of God. No one knows how the boy will react to the strictness of those laws; he may become lost!...'

But what could we do?

The padre recognized the need of the houses of correction. He thought and said: 'We'll talk about this tomorrow.'

People understood that he was going to pray before deciding about the spiritual life of the boy. He had taken the child away from worldly perils; he wanted to keep him in the heart of Jesus with the other orphans; he lacked courage to send him away.

The padre may have spent the day and night praying and doing penance.

The next day, he explained a bright plan as a last resort. The word 'thief' in capital letters would be attached to the collar of the young kleptomaniac. He had to wear this label everywhere, except in the church. He would be told that the label would be removed after he mended his ways. The boy felt crushed by shame. Slowly, he learned to restrain himself, correcting his problem. He remained in the community much to the padre's satisfaction" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, pages 329-30).

Mary Salmeri, a former orphan who remained in the institute as a daughter of the house and died at Saint Benedict in March of 1972 at the age of about ninety remembers, "So many times I informed the padre that I had vocation any longer, and he always listened to me patiently helping me to win out temptation. Once I wrote a letter to him. Later, when I approached him again insisting that I had no vocation, he showed what I had written: that my insisting on leaving the religious life was a temptation of the devil. From then on such a temptation disappeared."

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## **6. The heart he had**

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"To avoid stomach ache to the orphans, the Father used to taste the food to check whether it was cooked well. He told us to give them cookies seldom, but when he had some, he reserved all of them for the orphans." One year, at carnival time the Father was given some

sweets while staying at the Holy Spirit. He sent them to Avignone Quarter with this card, "They are for the orphans only; the aspirants will remember that this is a time of atonement and penance." "Someone devoted to Saint Anthony promised to cater a dinner for the orphans. The padre accepted the offer on the condition that he could taste the food before it was served. He found it a little under cooked and sent it to the kitchen to be cooked longer" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 338). Also the best fruit was for the orphans. "He told me to pick up some good figs, but when I offered them to him, he ate none, but gave them all to the orphans." "One evening, the padre heard a young female orphan crying; she had arrived that same day at the Messina orphanage. He sent for her, and while caressing her paternally, he told the sister to bring some fruit to the girl. When the sister came back, he was not satisfied,... and said seriously: 'Where is the fruit that was on this table? Did you save it for me?' The sister understood and brought that piece. The padre said: 'Now it is all right; this is for this girl, not for me.' He peeled it and gave it to the child, piece by piece" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 336). When the first fruits were not enough for the whole community, they were given to the orphans only.

He wanted the assistants to provide abundant bread on the tables, and said, "Sometimes the boys do not ask for it, because they may be ashamed."

"Usually, the Servant of God wanted good and abundant food for his communities. Sometimes Father Vitale amazed at that, but the Servant of God's expeditious answer kept him silent, "Oh, come now!...Father Vitale, the boys eat heartily and by two jumps digest everything quickly."

Due to reasons of saving, Father Vitale replaced the brother in charge of victuals with another one. As soon as the Servant of God realized that course and fruit were not abundant as before, he ordered to return to the first appointee, Brother Placid, who was generous." "The Servant of God did not suffer that the orphans were punished for long; therefore, when he saw someone of them in a corner, he went toward, questioned, and disposed him to beg pardon in order to be delivered from punishment. Then, to guarantee authority, the Father took information from the assistant prefect to know if the boy had behaved." I do not remember whether he threatened anyone with expulsion. To the mischievous boys he used to say, "Pay attention! The Lord may punish you." The best boys were awarded with booklets and rosaries.

"On another occasion, the padre wanted the Taormina orphans to spend a day-off at Giardini. At dinner, the padre waited on them. When he realized there were not enough glasses, he asked the superior: 'Why is there a lack of glasses?'

She answered: 'The house is poor.'

'Come with me,' he said. When they reached the cupboard, they found crystal glasses, large and small. The padre picked them up joyously and said: 'The orphans are more entitled to use them than the aristocratic ladies.' That was a glorious day for the girls" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 338).

One more gentle episode.

"The Servant of God had promised the hooks to the Taormina orphans to fish at the Giardini sea, and he himself accompanied the orphans. I was the superior. Four boats were chartered. What inexpressible joy for the Father and the orphans every time they caught a little fish! At the end of their fishing, the Father bought about twelve pounds of fish, and asked the children how they liked them cooked. Each one showed her personal taste. Back home, despite my tiredness and the cook's mumbling, helped by the older among the orphans I cooked the fish according to each one's taste. The feast was great, the joy inexpressible. When the Servant of God returned after a few days, he asked me if I had cooked as he had said. 'Yes, Father,' I responded. 'Good,' he said, 'they call us Father and mother and we must be as such. These are circumstances that impress feelings of gratitude toward the Lord on the orphans, and urge them to obey'."

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"Two of the orphans who didn't have parents or relatives, complained that no one ever called upon them. As soon as the padre knew about this, he said: 'the poor daughters, we must console them!' He picked up two packets with candy and an Easter lamb inside, addressed them, and told the sister to deliver them to the orphans on Easter, saying that they were sent by their Father.

The girls' hearts beat with joy and surprise: 'Do we have a Father?!'

In the afternoon, he told the sister to send the girls to the parlor because their Father was waiting. Both confused and joyous, the orphans hastened to the parlor, opened the door, and they met the padre standing, smiling, and saying: 'Here I am;

am I not your Father?' Touched by the exquisite kindness and delicate heart of the man who was more than a Father, the girls could not help crying" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 339).

"On another occasion, seeing a little orphan looking pale, he asked: 'How are you feeling?'

'Padre,' she said, 'during the night I cannot sleep because of the mosquitos.'

Immediately, he sent for the superior and told her: "The mosquito net that you have prepared for my bed shall be placed at the girl's bed. Also be solicitous and get information about the girl's health. The smallest one of the orphans is more worthy than both the starter and the mother general." In the evening he asked me if I had prepared everything, and renewed his exhortations with the same words. When this orphan, by the name Papale, got married, her house was struck by lightning. The Servant of God told us to furnish her with linen, he gave some money, and disposed a monthly help.

The Father preferred a fourteen year orphan Falanga of Taormina because she was half-wit. Every time he went over, he sought and gave her a place of honor, making her sit on his side. One day we rushed to welcome the Father's coming, but the poor Falanga fell down breaking a leg. The Servant of God was grieved, sent for doctors and medicine, had her taken to senator Durante(2) who was spending his holidays at his native town Letoianni, and then took her to Messina. She recovered after six months, because the first plaster was faulty. Finally the Servant of God became calm; for six months he had been restless, asking us continuously detailed information about the orphan's health. One day he told me, "Even though a half-wit, she is a creature of God, and you have to treat her as a privileged one." "Every time he came over, he repeated the same exhortations, 'You must be as mothers with your orphans. A mother looks after her daughters to see if they are pale, if they eat, if they sleep; if they don't, she asks why. Do the same yourselves.' He himself set the example and said, 'Woe to you who often undertake this responsibility thoughtlessly'."

Treating how the Father behaved with the sick orphans, Father Vitale writes,

"Describing his solicitous care for the sick is difficult. Assistants and sisters who took care of them had to explain the daily and nightly treatments in detail. Because he disliked entrusting the convalescing needy to strangers, as soon as he was able, he

bought two country houses, one for the boys, another one for the girls; these houses were also suitable for special cases of the sick" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 338).

We report a strange episode about a mother superior's behavior. It taught a good lesson from the Father. "The mother superior of the orphanage of Trani told the orphans that they needed her permission to go and eat at refectory when the bell rang the meal time. When the Father happened to be in Trani, the orphans asked him for such a permission. He was amazed at that, and repealed such use. Then he addressed the mother superior, 'It is strange; it is you that should ask the orphans for the permission to eat; in fact, if the orphans were not, would you stay here?' This simple, but deep thought touched all of us."

## 7. His name day in 1923

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We touch upon the Father's name day for two pieces of poetry he wrote to the orphans of Trani.

In the performance for the name of the Virgin Mary, a few orphaned girls declaimed some verses to the Father. He was given these verses. To reciprocate, he wrote as many verses in the same meter and rhyme.

He addressed the first piece of poetry to Josephine Loiodice.

If I had virtues like flowers,  
Painted with loving color,  
Gentle counsels like the Father's  
I would give you, as a donor.

My daughter, I would hand them to you,  
To make you love Jesus with live affection;  
Now I pray to Jesus for you  
To receive a good reception.  
May you be the gift he embraces  
Smiling with many graces.

Never is winter, nor flower-bed is dry  
For those who care to love Jesus;  
Neither nature, nor minds die  
But for Jesus they find the accent  
You will also say fervent  
On my behalf.

Daughter, gather my words  
Into your heart, where less than ever  
The ray animator be lost:  
It's love for God, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost!  
(Vol. 42, page 2).

Then he responds to the other orphans, exhorting and giving his verses. "I remember the day you celebrated my name day. I am very happy for your calm and obedience... Be always docile, obedient, and devout, so our Lord and the most holy Virgin will protect you in life and death... Consider that we have to die, because death is for every one; that after death we'll face an eternal reward or an eternal punishment! Say your prayer devoutly and receive holy Communion with a good preparation. Pray the beautiful novena to Immaculate Mary to prepare yourselves for her feast; she will give you her graces."

These are the verses:

Daughters blessed by Jesus' Heart  
The Father carries you in his heart,

And prays that you have God's fear  
So that you may be always dear.

He prays so: - Jesus, may it be true  
That these daughters grow in virtue,

Like pretty and white lilies  
Far from the world and the spears.

May they have a good result  
And in eternal life exult.

Immaculate Mary, our pioneer,  
Keep them in the celestial sphere.  
(Vol. 34, page 185)

## 8. Admittance

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Let us see the teaching of the Father as an educator.(3) He had begun the institution in the midst of the Avignone poor, who were absolutely in need of help; therefore, the indispensable requisite to be admitted in his institution was poverty or abandon. These were the valid titles for the Father's charity.

"No one is more exposed to perils and depravation than the poor orphaned, or stray and wandering girls; therefore, they are more needy of help" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 155). Of course, their admittance to the institution was free. "Usually, you will receive the more abandoned and poor orphans without pretending a monthly tuition. It would be a grave fault if the poor orphans were denied admittance because they are unable to pay."

The Father agrees that relatives or benefactors provide the orphan with a bed and a child's outfit, but "at the end, whatever the results may be, the orphan will be received in the name of God, whose creature he is" (Vol. 1, page 245).

While in Padua in 1907, the Father was glad to receive an orphaned girl, and wrote to Father Palma, "She is a little girl somehow sick, half-wit, barefoot, and abandoned! She will be a gift very pleasant to our Saint!" (Vol. 30, page 24).

We report a significant episode. The maid of Count Dentice of Frasso was a widow. She came to the Father with a letter of recommendation from the count to shelter her child. The Father responded, "This is not an abandoned child; he is under the protection of the count, who can send him to another institute with a monthly tuition. Thus, he seizes the occasion to do a good work for his soul, and we save a vacancy for an abandoned orphan." In circumstances such as this, the Father recommended



prudence and firmness, finding out good grounds for denying acceptance, with great tact.

Another condition about the little girls. The Father preferred the motherless ones. In the Father's way of thinking the orphans should remain in the institute until the age of 18-20, or better yet, until their coming of age. The mothers, however, often took their girls home for cheap excuses, baffling the Father's efforts of education.

Memoirs of our Pious Institution by Father Santoro, after narrating the orphanage's deterioration because the mothers took home their daughters, reports the following declarations of the Father: "Since then, he began understanding that we should avoid sheltering fatherless girls; in fact, he had always or almost always to suffer because of their mothers' behavior. Common people with no understanding of the duty to educate their daughters, took them home when someone said to them, 'They ill-treat your daughter'." And the police sent for the Father several times. Perceiving by innate or acquired malice the Father's care to save their daughters, they took advantage and sponged off of him. For instance, we are reminded of how a mother introduced herself to the director, shouting in her determined vernacular, 'Comu! I genti mi mancianu a facci dicennu: aviti na figghia dda' intra, e nun vi dugnanu nenti!' (people eat my face alive saying, you sent your daughter to the orphanage, and they give you nothing!) (Bulletin, January-April 1927, page 202).

In a letter to the mayor of Oria, while treating the case of two girls who had been taken home, the Father recalls the rule "to never receive fatherless children who have their mother, because a long experience, which never fails, convinced me that due to female inconstancy and natural, unruled sensitivity, the mothers today shelter their daughters with great enthusiasm, and tomorrow they take them home." He vindicates himself by saying, "Who authorizes a mother to exploit my institute by sheltering a child arbitrarily" (Vol. 41, page 106).

However, this is not an absolute rule. In fact, the Father writes, "Rare, particular cases require that we receive by prudence the fatherless child having her mother" (Vol. 1, page 241). To tell the truth, the Father often left out this rule; his heart did not allow him to deny a shelter to pitiful children... Who knows how many of them he received?

Age is another limit to the admittance of the orphans. They must be five to seven years old, because the Father wants them

innocent in order to form a pure environment. He writes, "Taking parentless children of little age it is ideal to form an orphanage model. The sisters can also receive little girls of two years of age, but not many of them because they would give much trouble. To educate the orphans step by step, the acceptance of children at the opening of an orphanage should be gradual. When the little orphans are well educated in piety and work, then even good girls of about ten years can be accepted, because they will conform to the good ambient and well-going of the community" (Vol. 1, page 241). The Father was easy-accomodating to the orphans'age because he did not resist his impulse of charity, but he left some limits to us by rule, especially about age.

The fourteen Rosary Scimone of Taormina is a typical case. A fourteen year old orphaned girl from Taormina worked as a scullion in various houses to earn her living. Beaten and fired because she pilfered, she went from bad to worse in other houses. Dispersed, ragged, hair topsy-turvy, and morally upset she was wearisome to herself and others, having no hope of a good future. One day she was drawing water at a fountain when a foreigner passed by, looked at her, and took a snapshot after letting her pose as a characteristic girl.

In the photo she appeared like an African savage woman, barefoot and muddy, her hair topsy-turvy, the look on her face troubled; on the whole, she infused a feeling of horror and compassion, because she was an orphan abandoned to herself in the bloom of her youth. That photo appeared in some post-cards of Taormina.

Some days later, pious people asked me to shelter that poor orphan; I received her along with her extreme poverty. The youth was trained in education and vocational work, and at 21 years of age she was already transformed: no one could recognize her as the girl in the foreigner's snapshot. When she left the institute to be hired by a noble family of Taormina, we took a photo. What a difference between the first photo and the second one! The latter shows the good education's miraculous effects! The photo shows a neatly dressed serene youth, whose look transpires the gentle dignity of a calm soul that is born again, that looks forward to the future with confident trust. She is handling an opened book, which signifies morals, dignity, and culture. Where is the African savage woman, whose gloomy look disheartened and distressed? The African savage woman disappeared not through

the blizzards of life, but through the beneficial, enlivening ray of the civil, moral, and intellectual education! (S.C. Vol. 5, pages 157-58).

## 9. Religious education

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What was the Father's aim in the education of his youth?

He aimed at leading his children to their last end, as the magisterium of the Church teaches authoritatively. "It is of greatest importance not to be mistaken both in education and in the direction toward the last end, because education and last end are intimately connected. In fact, since education consists in forming the human being as it must be and behave in this terrestrial life in order to reach its last end for which it was created, it is obvious... that we have no true education when it does not aim at the last end (Pious XI, Encyclical *Divini illius Magistri*, December 31, 1929). The Father said the same thing in a different way in 1890, at the end of the rules for the orphans.

Please train the orphans in discipline and work, since they are children. Later, they will be happy for that. Beginning from their tender age, they must be taught to comply with their duty toward God, themselves, and their neighbor; by so doing, they are setting out on the right path toward their eternal salvation. Everything passes away, but since the human being was created to be eternal, each Christian must always keep in mind his last goal, which is his eternal salvation (Vol. 2, page 73).

Thirty years ago I began gathering, educating, and providing orphans with a good future. Ever since I have been holding and experiencing that the steady base of any civil education is religious education! I have learned from experience, reason, faith, learned people, and common sense: that to form a civil human being, an educated good citizen, it is necessary to form a good Christian! (Vol. 45, page 469).

Good Christian means a fervent, practicing Christian committed to living the vows of his baptism, therefore the Servant of

God wanted both Religious and orphans to be saints, not simple Christians. The Second Vatican Council has reminded that holiness is not a privilege of a caste, or of a social class, but it is a duty for all (L.G. no. 29).

When the Father insists upon the salvation of the orphans, he means first the eternal salvation. He preached to the sisters, "The world is full of souls who get lost: snatch as many of them from eternal ruin as you can. Collect, instruct, and feed the abandoned orphans. Each soul you save will be a seed of eternal salvation for many others; all of them will beautify the crown of your glory in heaven." He wants the hearts of his daughters to widen out as to hug and save the whole world through their charity. "Long for, be always hungry and thirsty for the salvation of the souls you cannot save with your work. Be not indifferent to the ruin of one soul, because one soul is worthy of the blood of Jesus Christ and is as precious as all souls" (Vol. 45, page 398).

How warmly he begged us to see the image of God in the features of children and the suffering, and to consider that taking care and helping them is like serving and thinking of God during the mass, or the meditation. How he exhorted us to beautify the human creatures with education, clearing them from eventual faults. I still feel the grave, but kind warning he gave me when I suddenly said of a boy, "how ugly he is!" The Father told me, "Please see the soul created by God, not the body!" So says one of our Religious.

## **10. The educators the father wanted**

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The Father wanted the educators fully aware of their tasks and qualified for their duties. For this reason he sets them in an environment stowed with spirituality.

"Educating children, he writes, is a work of continuous sacrifices requiring great self-denial: one must undergo annoyance, want, boredom, difficulties. Let us face and offer

everything to the adorable our Lord Jesus Christ" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 197). The sisters "will work and suffer everything for the sake of Jesus, supreme goodness... being loving souls. Love will make them strong in their suffering, in their work, in their immolation" (Vol. 3, page 77). The Father attributes the good results of a formation house to the sacrifices of the ruling staff. "Our community of Trani is a very blessing. The girls are ingenuous, docile, humble, and laborious. It depends on the smart, open, holy dedication of their master who works very hard day and night" (Vol. 35, page 134). Because the educator should be the living example for children, the Father insists upon this subject in the rules for the Rogationists and the Daughters of Divine Zeal.

To succeed in this holy enterprise and to make children attain good results, we have to edify them by setting a good example in everything. We must keep in our mind the terrible threat of our Lord in Mt. 18,7: "What terrible things will come on the world through scandal!" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 197). The sisters and the assistants will endeavor to radiate observance, piety, zeal, charity, union of hearts, and holy fervor as examples of virtues and holiness for the edification of the orphans. The sisters' action more than the words must penetrate and edify the tender souls! (Vol. 1, page 245). First of all, the sisters will give good examples to the girls in speech, love for work, religious practices, obedience, mutual respect, etc. avoiding intimacy and confidence with them. Woe if they induced the girls to speak ill or refer or exchange mutual gifts or give secret messages. By doing so they would lose their own dignity ruining the girls. The sisters are warmly exhorted to use fine manners and civil demeanor according to the principle of a sound education, because the true education is sister to the true devotion (Vol. 2, page 91).

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In those days, the novices were the assistants of the girls, and the Father wrote to them,

To train the children to be docile, obedient, and disciplined the sister will give good example. She will arm herself with patience, meekness, and charity talking almost always with gentle, mild voice, because such a behavior keeps children quiet more than any invective or hard reprehension... A mild educator makes the pupils mild (Vol. 2, page 27). The Little Retreat novices will consider themselves like maidservants of the girls and the poor, especially of those who belong to the pious institute. For God's glory, the most holy Heart of Jesus' consolation, and the souls' sanctification the novices will give good examples to children, edifying in everything through the exercise of virtues (Vol. 2, page 33).

Children follow the educator's pattern; their behavior depends on the educator's behavior; therefore, the prefect of the boys will be flawless

in morals and religion making it appear in his actions, gestures, words as well as in his way of acting, talking, and thinking (Vol. 3, page 111).

As little as they may be, children have a natural power of perceiving by intuition the goodness inherent in their superiors' behavior. If their examples are bad (which God forbid!) the children by intuition will form their own judgments and scorn what they have been taught. As sound as the teachings by words may be, in the presence of actions contradictory to the teachings, they fade away like smoke under the wind's force (Vol. 1, page 246).(4)

In the world, the ruin of souls which occurs in families is a hecatomb. Education in the world has been defined, "The most difficult art entrusted to the most inexperienced hands." People act, talk, and speak in the presence of children as if they do not understand what has been said or done. On the contrary, children understand very much, even if they are unawares of it; in fact, babies learn to speak a language at about the age of two years (Vol. 1, page 246).

Another duty of the educator is praying for the pupils. By faith we know that we can do nothing without the grace of God. The educators have to implore this grace to succeed in their task. Listen to the Father.

Because everything starts well with God, the sisters who are committed to the orphans' direction, education, and service will combine good example with prayer in order to educate them in a holy manner (Vol. 1, page 247). We have to pray every day to our Lord Jesus Christ and Immaculate Mary for our orphans so that they may be docile, profit by, and grow in the holy fear of God (S.C. Vol. 10, page 197). To succeed in everything, the prefect will pray to the Lord for help and enlightenment every day, because educating the youths is the art of the arts and no one can succeed in it without the Lord's help and enlightenment! He will also pray to the Lord and Our Lady every day so that his pupils may succeed and save their souls (Vol. 3, page 112). Separately from the orphans,(6) they will pray in common with zeal and fervor every day at the assigned time so that our Lord and the most holy Virgin may give them enlightenment in the performance of their duty toward the orphans; and give the orphans docility and grace to cooperate faithfully with the sisters' instruction, direction, and motherly kindness (Vol. 1, page 247).

Besides the prayer in common, the Father recommends the private prayer "during the mass, the holy Communion, and in other circumstances during the day" (Ibid.)

To make people understand well the necessity of prayer, the Father insists on recalling the difficulties of the educators' work.

It was well stated by Saint John Chrysostom, "Education of children is the art of the arts; no human art, painting and sculpture included, can reach the merits of those forming the children's soul" (Vol. 1, page 246). Educating children is the art of arts, the science of sciences, and only a few have it, because one should be a philosopher and a theologian and a great expert of the human heart and a saint to be a perfect educator of a child. As for us, let us do our best by work and prayer to Jesus and Mary, imploring enlightenment about education of children (S.C. Vol. 10, page 198).

An episode regarding the first orphan of the house in Rome, in 1925, is typical. It gave the Father the opportunity to insist on the necessity of prayer in the education of children. I do not know what the child had done, but the sisters presented him to the Father in order to beg pardon. The child, however, was not shaken; instead, he remained stiff, cold, and staring defiantly as much as his five years allowed him. The Father wrote, "The sisters presented him to me to beg pardon: he stood before me like a fish saying no word despite the suggestion and the insistence of the sister. He did not seem to be wrong." The Father concluded, "Therefore, let us pray, because without divine grace it is impossible to bend a human will, not even that of a five year old child."

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However, the Father does not want the difficulties of the enterprise to overcome the courage of his children. "And yet, those who left the world to dedicate themselves to God in religion, seeking their sanctification, are able to lead the tender souls toward a sound, moral, and civil education if they are helped by divine assistance and keep in mind the importance of education, rules, and these exhortations" (Vol. 1, page 246).

When a person works with a good will, divine grace helps her to succeed. He writes, "Thanks to the Lord, these girls are quiet, and, what matters more, the assistant is becoming a good educator. She is pious, prudent, meek, far-sighted, trusting in the Lord and the most holy Virgin, to whom she recommends her pupils warmly and daily. Some people happen to form themselves by forming the others" (Vol. 31, page 50).

## 11. Educational method

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To educate children, the Father follows the preventive method known as Don Bosco's method. Don Bosco acknowledges that such a method is of old (see Braido, *Il sistema preventivo di Don Bosco*, page 34). It is known as Don Bosco's method because no one applied and spread it with such a perfection as Don Bosco did to achieve the best results. The Father prescribes, "We point out again, we must follow Don Bosco's system, the preventive method, which wards off children's faults by watching over them in such a way that they have no opportunity to commit faults. Formed in a Christian spirit and devotion, they will feel the holy fear of God, and avoid committing serious faults" (Vol. 1, page 266).

The secret of the good results of the preventive method is good assistance, or surveillance. Don Bosco insists upon this subject, and the Father as well.

To watch over children is a strict precept and a duty of ours. Directors and assistants will keep a watch on them in the church, in the laboratories, in the school, in play-time, and in the dormitories knowing that children have a keen instinct to escape from surveillance; therefore the educator must be smarter than they are. The devil seeks depravity of children constantly, but the assistant must elude Satan's snares by preserving the children immaculate, for the sake of the Lord! (S.C. Vol. 10, page 198).

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For the sisters:

Continuous, accurate surveillance is an important factor to keep the institute's orphans in perfect order. Watching over them is the master's, the vice-master's, and the assistant's duty, but the major responsibility is that of the master. Continuous, accurate, and careful surveillance is the great preservative from any defect, hence it is called the preventive method. From the sisters' watchful care the orphans understand the



importance and the aim of surveillance, and learn to accustom themselves to discipline and the practice of their duties.

The master, either personally or through the vice-master, who should be fully aware of his high mission and responsibility, will never leave children abandoned to themselves, otherwise they quickly and inevitably become negligent and inactive. The sister who oversees the orphans must keep close vigilance over them, aware of all of their actions and conversations (Vol. 1, page 247). Most watchful will be surveillance during play-time. The sister will be most alert as she leads the children to the recreational area annexed to the institute where their play activity will allow them to let off steam; all of which improves their health, as well as their physical and emotional development. In their play she will be attentive to prevent rough and rowdy actions, which could result in harmful injuries. In order that good habits in working and playing together be developed, quarreling and poor sportsmanship will not be tolerated. No one should separate them from the group, either alone or in pairs, but all should be within sight of the person presiding (Vol. 1, page 250).

For the prefects:

To perfectly fulfill his duty, the prefect will watch over the boys with careful attention.

Surveillance consists in keeping guard on their actions during work, prayer, and especially in play-time because it is then that the boys try to escape his supervision. When the boys are playing, he will not be carefree, but will supervise from a place whence he is able to see all of them; if they are walking, he will be in their midst hearing their talk even though they speak in a low voice. While playing, he will let them cry aloud and jump at their liking, but without laying hands on each other or beating or insulting the fellows or damaging the community's things or damaging their clothes by falling down on the ground.

During work time, he will watch over in the factories seeing that the boys are not idle, do not gossip nor play nor struggle against the boss.

Also in the Church he will be most diligent, helping the boys enter composed and recollected. To be of help, he will stop them at the church's entrance till they are calm and silent. Then he will lead them, recollected and reverent, will sign himself with the holy water, and genuflect in the middle of the aisle, teaching the boys to do the same while going to their place; the vice prefect will enter last. The prefect will also see to it that the boys sit down or kneel at the proper time as well as follow the liturgy, composed and silent, answering the prayer all together with a moderate voice.

In the refectory, he will demand fine manners of the boys, and observance of silence.

Personal attention will be given to each boy that he be provided with clothes and footwear every week and bed sheets every other week.

The prefect will see to it that the boys take care of their clothes, having them repaired as soon as possible, and that they observe bodily neatness in the hands, face, neck, ears. If necessary, he will have the boys wash themselves in his presence.

The boys are not allowed to do anything without permission nor to go to the parlor to talk with external persons nor to act as door keepers. While giving permissions the prefect will pay careful attention to prevent two boys from meeting alone far from surveillance. He must be careful because boys are skilled in asking permissions which give them the chance to meet alone (Vol. 3, pages 110-111).

The accurate and continuous assistance of preventive method has nothing to do with the methods of the police, because its soul is love.

For God's sake, both superior and teachers will be affectionate and respectful toward the orphaned children, holding them as souls who are dearest to the Lord, perhaps dearer than themselves, because they are innocent and poor. In their affectionate care of the orphans, the sisters will never make use of offensive or harsh words, especially when dealing with those marked by anger and impatience, not even when it is a matter of correcting, reproaching, or punishing them.

That the orphans may develop the same virtues, the sisters' relationship with them must be marked by meekness, charity, and holy zeal as well as by a pinch of sternness, which will prevent children from taking advantage of them or from becoming excessively familiar. The sisters will beware of partiality, because it can be detrimental for all: instead they will love all in God dealing prudently with all in order to avoid the orphans' taking advantage. Such treatment does not prevent them from rewarding the best, humble, obedient, and observant children (Vol. 1, page 260).

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The prefect in the midst of children:

He will show that he is warmly interested in their good, and the boys will be charmed by perceiving and understanding it. This is the education's real secret!

When the educator is really interested in the pupils' good, loves them in a holy manner, and is concerned with their future, if they do not succeed, he can be strong enough to punish them when they are at fault, and the pupils will never feel offended, on the contrary they will love and fear their educator (Vol. 3, page 112).

The Father insists on the love topic:

We must love children with pure, holy affection, with deep understanding of charity, tender, Fatherly charity in God because this is the secret of the secrets to win and save them. We have to deal with affection and meekness as well as with reserve, which prevent children from intimacy and confidence through reverential fear. Children must never be insulted. If necessary, punishment must be given in such a way that children know it is for their good. Children must never be reproached for private faults in the presence of others, especially the little ones who might run risks of scandal. In such a case, the warning or punishment must be in private. The superior will never become vexed with children nor show a grudge or lack of confidence against them. It is better to conceal some faults instead of disheartening or making children grow weak.

Punishments or strong warnings must be avoided when they may provoke reactions; it would be like destroying a building. Because each educator needs God's enlightenments, he will ask them from the Lord and the mother of good counsel every day, even with tears and internal prayer in the daily occasions (S.C. Vol. 10, page 198).

## **12. Educating the whole person**

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Pius XI specifies the field of education, which "regards the whole person, individually and socially considered, according to nature and grace. We should never lose sight of the subject of education, i.e., the whole person, spirit and body, along with his natural and supernatural faculties as we know him from reason and revelation" (Encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*).

Let us begin from the body, specifically from the care for health.

"In dealing with children, the sisters will teach them hygiene and cleanness, both of which confer and preserve their health, while the lack of hygienic habits deteriorate their own health and endanger that of others. By receiving the orphans, the sisters are bound in duty not only to educate them procuring their spiritual good, but also to keep, preserve, and improve their bodily well-being" (Vol. 1, page 242). "While educating their minds and

hearts, we won't leave out our duty of taking care for the youths' strong constitution" (Vol. 43, page 14). And to the people's unwarranted charges that the Father did not keep well his children, he responded, "As to how we are taking care of the orphans, ladies and gentlemen, please come to check for yourselves. As a tutor, I somehow know my duties. It is not only with the salvation of souls and religious education that I am concerned, but I also take great care of my orphaned children's bodily health and civil education. Good nutrition, hygiene, cleanness, and good manners are main factors of the educational system in my institutes.

As for nutrition, please look at children to see how rubicund and healthy they are" (Vol. 45, page 460). Then he talks about the food specifically. It must be sound, sufficient, and various (cf. Vol. 1, page 243).(5)

Recreation is to be "lively, animated, in the open air. The sisters will pay diligent attention to the child's complexion, knowing that a pallid complexion and the lack of interest in play activity are symptoms of illness, fever or indigestion; in such a case a remedy must be applied" (Vol. 1, page 243).

In those times, when only quite a few workers were graduated from elementary schools, the instruction of our children was confined to the elementary ones.

The Father likes best our own teachers. "As to the school, we have to resort to lay teachers only when it is indispensable and after praying and gaining reliable information" (Vol. 1, page 251). We have to exclude, as much as we can, the outsider teachers in our elementary schools" (Vol. 35, page 263).

The Father held the theater as a means of education. Therefore, he promoted performances in his institutes. He writes, "Besides teaching and educating the orphaned girls, performances attract, edify, and dispose people to be favorable to the institute and the orphans" (Vol. 1, page 164).

## 13. Educating to piety

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"If attentive and motherly care of the orphans' health is important, more important is their education in religious principles, which must be the basis of their education and of their temporal and eternal happiness" (Vol. 1, page 251). The Father says of the orphans, "They will be religious not only in the external practice of their duties, but also in their inner spiritual life, always having the holy fear of God, the surest guide to success" (Vol. 2, page 75).

Therefore, it is necessary to form a Christian conscience in the child and in the youth, which "consists in enlightening their minds about the will of Christ, his law, and his life, helping them to freely perform the divine will. This is the highest aim of education." So says Pius XII (March 23, 1952).

The enlightenment of the mind requires religious instruction. The Father was an apostle of teaching catechism, and prescribed to teach it daily to children "according to the best methods to be complete and fecund" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 197). To foster emulation, he encourages the giving of rewards for catechistic competitions, and exhorts to properly explain the truths of faith in such a way that the teaching of catechism be not a pure exercise of memory.

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"To teach Christian doctrine mechanically to children is nearly useless. To better impress the mysteries of faith in the children's tender minds, they will vary the instruction through careful wording of the catechism and the use of lecture, projecting pictures from slides and explaining the truths of faith. Teaching Christian doctrine to the orphans will be a matter of great concern for the sisters, who will devote themselves to it in order to develop the spiritual life of the orphans" (Vol. 1, page 253).

If human will is not fortified against the snares of evil, whose roots go deeply into our nature corrupted by original sin, instruction is not enough for a complete education. The Father calls our full attention to this subject when he writes, "While educating children we shouldn't make them do, but will to do" (Vol. 1, page 266). Will is fortified "by the supernatural truths and by the means of grace without which we are unable to overcome our bad inclinations, nor achieve moral perfection" (Pius XI, *Divini illius Magistri*). For this reason the Father insists on religious

education through the practice of the virtues, penance, retreats, spiritual exercises, and Pious Union, such as Luigini children of Immaculate Mary for the boys, and Daughters of Mary for the orphaned girls. The Father is charged with making people say many prayers, but this was the method of the educators of those times, such as Don Bosco, who stands out among them. Braido says of him, "The environment of piety created by Don Bosco is so intense as to impress and amaze the outsiders" (quoted work, page 281). Now we remember the holy suggestions aiming at "instilling faith in the divine things," as the Father said. Besides talking of God, Jesus Christ, the Madonna, and the saints, they lift up the children's minds through the contemplation of nature.

"The marvels of creation such as the sun, the moon, the stars, the fine days of spring, the fields, the trees, the flowers, the food they eat, the water they drink are topics to be talked about frequently. The sisters will make children understand that all things are the work of God and everything has been created for our good... To succeed in everything, the sisters first must be deeply convinced of the holy truths; they must be spiritual souls giving holy examples" (Vol. 1, page 252).

## 14. Education to work

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The education of children is implemented by work, which is a main factor of education and a source of gain. The Father exposed his ideas on this subject in a speech when a committee of ladies went to visit his orphanage for girls in Messina.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have always deemed that an institute for the education of children and youths cannot pretend to keep going on alms only; it would seem like a strong young person who would like living on begging instead of working. A charitable institution is allowed

to ask help within some bounds, only when the inmates are unable to work such as the blind, cripples, feeble old persons, or little children. But relying mainly on alms to maintain an institute for youths jeopardizes the educational system.

The youth must be trained in a salaried work from the time of their childhood. For an institute of education, work is a main factor for building morals because it keeps order, discipline, life, and guarantees the future of the youth by teaching them how to earn their living through the sweat of their brow (Vol. 45, page 44).

The Father installed several laboratories for his children: typography, tailoring, shoemaking, carpentry, machine-shop. The orphans were assigned "according to their vocational skills" (God and Neighbor, 1925, page 11). For the orphaned girls he set up a laboratory for embroidery in white, silk, and gold, as well as crochet, pillow lace, spun gold, old fashion lace, and knitted goods. To foster emulation among the children, the Father organized the award days, the exhibition of the works, and a sharing in the profit so that at their going out of the institute, the orphans could get their money" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 80).

Let us see how the Father insisted on a certain work with a mother superior of another congregation.

As to the lace goods, I cannot accept the excuse that the outside girls dislike it, etc. It happens because you do not know, or are unwilling to lead such a work. Teach at least two of the outside youth, the most poor, telling them and their parents that you are going to pay them; as soon as they hand a work of theirs, even ill made, pay two or three liras for that in order to allure them. I myself will pay. If you continue doing so, the other youth will come to work. Recommend yourselves to the most holy Virgin, because prayer is needed for everything. Lead the orphans to this work and send their first embroidery good to me; I will buy it. I think that I have made myself understood! To get things going on well, we must put up activities, work, and sacrifice, without trusting in alms only (Vol. 38, page 6).

## 15. Punishments

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Brother Louis, who was a prefect of the boys for forty years, summarizes the Father's thought on this topic. "The servant of God appointed me to the office of prefect of the boys in 1908. He demanded absolute surveillance and understanding of the juvenile soul, which needs enlightenment. He disliked to punish children shortly after their faults, and suggested to give some gift to the repented ones."

Attentive surveillance and the formation of the children's conscience are main factors of the preventive method. Usually, they avoid grave faults. The Father writes, "However, since human nature is inclined to evil and some people are bad-natured, especially those born in poverty, it is sometimes necessary to combine religious and civil education with some punishment to compel them to behave" (Vol. 1, page 266).

As we have related before, the Father calls the full attention of the educator on this subject (Ch. 17, no. 6). He writes:

1. Punishment will be never frequent nor disproportionate to the fault. Punishments are like medicaments: if used frequently, no benefit is received from them, and, therefore, people feel compelled to increase the amount; but the more the medicaments are used, the less is their beneficial effect, and other medicine will substitute them. An institute of education under the sisters' direction cannot adopt this course, using punishments as to reach such a degree that the pupils become unconcerned with them; should it happen, the institute would become a house of correction, the children's community would go to ruin, and the spirit of the sisters who are devoted to education would come to an end because they would find themselves in difficulties, would become annoyed losing internal peace, etc.; everything would be in disorder. Punishments, therefore, must be rare, or better yet, very rare and moderate.

2. Punishments must be proportionate to the faults. When they are applied in excess, like medicaments they harm the patient, sometimes even killing. Hence, the sister will never punish out of resentment, but when she is compelled to punish, she will act according to reason punishing less than it is due (Vol. 1, page 267).



3. An excellent method of education that the prefect of our institutes will adopt is persuasion. Either in the case of correction or punishment or warning, the prefect will strive to persuade the pupils of their fault through Fatherly, but resolute words; after disproving their excuses, he will sometimes require their assent, as for instance by asking: are you persuaded of your fault? Do you agree with what I have said to you? And the like. He will use persuasion to condition children to accept punishment favorably and profit by it" (Vol. 3, page 113). He warns the sisters to make the guilty accept the punishment before giving it, persuading her with good words that she herself accept it to atone the Lord for her fault and then carry it out with humility of heart and docility (Vol. 1, page 267).

We have a good example in a letter of the Father. To alleviate the poverty of a large family, the Father had sheltered a boy in the institute of Oria. The boy, however, did not submit to be parted from his family, and wrote to the Father. He answered,

I have received your letter. You tell me that you want to return home, because your character tells you to do so. Since the obstinate is your character, not you, we should have pity on you. Please, what is this character? I do not understand. Is Alfred one thing and the character another one? In this case I would like to know who is the obstinate, Alfred or the character? If the obstinate is the character, whereas Alfred is docile and reasonable, Alfred should scold his character. Besides, we are not concerned with the character, it may go to ruin. instead, we want to save Alfred, despite his rascal character wants to lose him. What does Alfred think of it?

Let me explain what is the character of Alfred. It is the unfortunate custom of living, doing his own will, free without a guide until the age of thirteen. This is a worst custom, because the Holy Spirit says, "Happy the man who carries the yoke since his teens." Character is natural bent. Your bad natural bent must be corrected. It would be a nice thing if an unreasonable, or ill behaving person could say, "It is not me. It's the character; have pity on me!"

Dear Alfred, the character is our will, nor more, nor less. You have not the age to do what you want. You ask me the favor of letting you return home. Your request shows that you are an unreasonable boy. I did the favor when I took you to Oria for your education and instruction. This is my character: doing good for the boys like you. When are you going to get wise? I assure you that if I were your father... I supposed that you were able to understand what is your good and what is your evil! Pray, pray, pray to the Madonna for enlightenment!

In the postscript the Father adds, "The character you are talking about is the devil with horns, which tries to ruin you, and for this reason he tempts you" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 104).

4. Prayer. Before imposing a penalty, even a light one, the sister must ask the Lord for enlightenment, so that no one is mistaken (Vol. 1, page 267).

5. Simulated subtraction of affection: driving back the approaching child, showing a sullen face, and showing no love are moral punishments. When friendly relations of pure, holy affection between teacher and pupils are well-established, simulated withdrawing of affection is the greatest punishment, which may be emphasized and prolonged according to the faults.

When a sister approaches the child who is being punished, she may be of great assistance by helping the child to reflect upon her fault and the punishment, and exhorting her to go to the teacher who imposed the punishment. For good results, it is indispensable that punishment be used very seldom. Its frequent use becomes abuse. In fact, the wise educator strives to prevent having to punish faults (Vol. 1, page 268).

## Notes

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(1) Lawyer Angel Toscano (he was not a relative to the Father) was a qualified journalist and a poet of classical taste. He died young under the ruin of the 1908 earthquake. A right man, he appreciated the philanthropical institution by the Father, even though he had no relation with him, nor he supported the Catholic field. We did not succeed to find those verses. The Father confined himself to saying, "They have been published in a non Catholic newspaper. But, that is how it is, everyone in Messina loves these orphanages." Perhaps the newspaper was Lucifer, founded and edited by Toscano. Obviously, the Father disliked to boost it. We have sought for it in Messina, Palermo, and Naples, but in vain. Someone could find a copy in the libraries.

(2) A surgeon of international fame.

(3) The theme has been treated by a Rogationist priest and a Daughter of Divine Zeal in two theses for doctorate.

Father Louis Di Bitonto, Annibale M. Di Francia e seu metodo educacional rogacionista, Faculdade de filosofia, ciencias e letras, Bauru' (S. Paolo - Brasil). Sister Teresa Loviglio, L'opera educativa e il pensiero pedagogico di Annibale di Francia, Istituto universitario pareggiato di Magistero "Maria SS. Assunta," Rome, 1968-69.

(4) It is of help reporting some of the Father's examples, in which he reveals himself a smart psychologist:

For instance, a sister making the sign of the cross before little children in a careless or irreverent manner is implying to them that the sign of the cross is unimportant. She may be unaware of the impression she is creating. A sister or assistant who in the presence of even three year old children, speaks to the superior disrespectfully, diminishes for them the principle of divine authority, which is shared by the people who are in a position of superior. A sister or assistant eating or drinking greedily in the presence of children, teaches them gluttony in a masterly manner.

We could give many examples which would seem trifles, but which have the power to waste the orphaned children's soul because his pure, tender mind is able to feel in the innermost the bad qualities that a teacher nurtures tacitly or temporarily. For instance, if a sister or assistant is troubled by a voluntary grudge against another, she is unable to conceal it. Even the least perceptive child perceives it as though he were penetrated by a magnetic influx (Vol. I, page 246).

(5) The Father wrote some rules about how to eat. They were read twice a month in the refectory:

*Moral precepts:* 1) Say the prayer before and after eating. 2) Eat to obey the natural law, to keep yourself in good health, and to live according to the will of God, not for gluttony. 3) Listen to the spiritual reading at dinner so that the soul may be nourished. 4) Think of so many poor who are hungry, and resolve to help them as you can. 5) Think of the eternal celestial table, where Jesus our Lord is waiting for us in his kingdom to give us the food of eternal glory, if we deserve it.

*Hygienic precepts:* Eat slowly, and chew well the food. 2) Do not eat too hot food because it ruins your teeth and your digestion. 3) Do not drink cold beverage soon after eating because it ruins your digestion and your teeth.

*Fine manners precepts:* Eat what you are given without complaining, and get used to eating any food. 2) Eat with fine manners and take your time. 3) Do not dirty your hands, your face, and your napkin. 4) Do not rest your elbows on the table. 5) Eat in silence without making noise (S.C. Vol. 10, page 160).



# 19.

## PRUDENCE

1. The virtues' regulator
2. Always prudent
3. Prayer to the most holy Virgin
4. Prayer and advice
5. ... Were light to his steps
6. He never went to excesses
7. The new foundations
8. He accepted human means
9. People did not succeed in cheating him
10. The government of a daring
11. Simplicity
12. Notes

# 1. The virtues' regulator

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After treating the theological virtues which unite us to God directly, we move to the moral virtues. They help and perpetuate our union with God by regulating our actions in such a way as to aim at God continuously despite the internal and external obstacles.

Prudence is the first among the moral virtues. It is considered the queen because no virtue can achieve perfection without the guide of prudence, which leads the human faculties toward their end. Prudence is also said the driver of the virtues, because it regulates them according to reason, persons, place, time, and social relations; as well as inclines the human intellect to choose the best means in order to subordinate the particular ends to the last end. In practical terms prudence is defined the virtue that decides what we have to do or to avoid in order to reach the supernatural end, following the principles of faith.

Let us listen to the Father speaking about the superior's prudence.

Prudence must be one of the superior's chief virtues; it regulates the others and consists in understanding well and in being aware of everything, either spiritual or temporal. It prevents the members of the community from rushing, from going to extremes, leading them to take the happy mean. Prudence dissimulates, is forbearing, patient, cautious, wise, vigilant, experienced, and always watchful.

However, the superior must distinguish between holy and profane prudence. As a matter of fact, we find prudence coming from the Lord's spirit and false prudence coming from the world's. The former acts for God's glory and for the good of the souls, controls itself, dissimulates, and counsels; human prudence instead, acts for human aims and earthly interests. It puts aside God and the good of the souls for human respect and personal attachment. The superior will detest human prudence as a pestilence and shall not seek, think of, or dissimulate for human respect, personal regard and liking. It does not mean, however, that we have to pay no special courtesy toward the people of high rank, because prudence

is not a rough virtue and doing otherwise would be imprudence. The prudent superior will never come to terms with his conscience for anyone and for whatever reason, and in dubious cases will resort to prayer and advice. To spare the community serious damages coming from imprudence, the superior will pray for prudence every day to the adorable our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the most holy Virgin Mary, who is called Virgin most prudent. He will often read the wisdom books to know how the Holy Spirit praises the virtue of prudence (Vol. 1, page 203).

## 2. Always prudent

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The Father's government was prudent, full of discretion, strong, and in the same time tender. He was resolute and well-balanced.

Even when he reproached, he did so without bitterness. Instead of stressing our malice in our faults, he made us perceive the grief of his heart, and above all the grief of the heart of God, thus achieving good effects. None of those who abandoned the institute bore grudges or hatred toward him; he always remained the Father, because he sought the good of all.

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He was clear-sighted in the understanding of the spirits, and involved himself in the good both to defend it and to avoid evil. To avoid that disagreement grow worse, he considered the parties in the right and in the wrong with supernatural prudence, leading them to harmony. And when he happened to moderate debates either in our communities or outside he acted with very refined Christian diplomacy.

His teaching, actions, and aspirations were always according to the gospel's saying, "Seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness" (Mt. 6, 33). Through his fervent words he helped us see hell and paradise, hate sin and be enamored of virtue, but he never went to the extremes. Rigor was sometimes noticed in others, not in the Father; he rather restored the balance in awkward situations.

The sisters point out that when the Father had to dismiss a daughter, he acted with all caution providing her with money and something else in order that she might easily face her new

situation in the world.

He remedied the private faults in secret.

A Religious who was an assistant of the orphans for several years reports, "When someone was at fault, the Father talked to him in private so that no one knew of it. For instance, one day I projected a movie to the children without informing the Father who was out of Avignone, in Messina. Even though I was in charge to show the movie, the Father admonished me because he demanded not only obedience, but also tact. But, no one knew of that caution."

### **3. Prayer to the most holy Virgin**

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Let us consider a few details.

The virtues are a gift from God, but also the fruit of our cooperation to grace. Humble, fervent, constant prayer is the first cooperation. We quote a 1888 prayer of the Father to the most holy Virgin to achieve holy prudence. By reading it we come to know his program of life at the sign of prudence, which he insistently implores from Immaculate Mary.

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He begins praying by making a protest of humility and by confessing that he is imperfect in such a virtue.

Virgin most prudent, pray for us! Pray for me! Model of perfect prudence, pray for me because as a priest at the head of so many souls, I am obliged to practice this virtue! I have come to your feet, holy Mother, to ask you for this virtue. For the sake of your divine prudence, hear me. You are abounding with this great Christian virtue, let me share in it because I am very needy of it!

The various tasks of prudence are specified this way:

Holy Mother, enlighten my dim understanding by perfecting the exercise of my faculties through prudence. Give me copious and effective



grace so that in all my actions I propose an honest aim for the greater glory of God, my sanctification, and the sanctification of my neighbor. See to it that I undertake no enterprise before pondering it wisely, taking advice, and praying. Give me copious and effective grace. May I choose and proportion the means to the end, decide and work with care, patience, magnanimity, holy haste, expectation, and decision according to cases and circumstances. I ask you the grace of keeping silent or speaking, of knowing how to show or to hide my inside, of coming to terms or being firm, of understanding and knowing things as they really are.

Prudence is connected with past, present, and future.

Virgin most prudent, remind me of my past and see to it that experience guide and govern me in the future, being attentive and cautious in the present. May I ponder my thoughts, my words, my actions, what I listen to, and judge everything properly. Make me provident for the future, foreseeing the consequences of any action, thought, words, and omissions. Whatsoever I do or omit be not against Christian prudence.

There is also a profane prudence, the prudence of the flesh, which is against Christian prudence. The Father entreats the Madonna to keep him from such prudence.

Virgin most prudent, let me abhor the false prudence of the world and of the flesh. Give me the prudence which shone perfectly in your adorable only-begotten son, our Lord Jesus Christ. You were a most perfect mirror of him, whereas the saints were perfect imitators. I ask for the prudence of the serpent which is joined with the preeminent simplicity of the dove; the prudence which is diametrically opposed to the false maxims of the world; the prudence which is a gift of the counsel and makes people esteem as nothing the things of the world such as pleasures, honors, and satisfaction; the prudence which makes me appreciate the heavenly things and the holy virtues; the prudence which does not weigh things in the prospect of time and the senses, but eternity, faith, and spirit. Virgin most prudent, keep me from imprudent behavior for the sake of the most holy Heart of Jesus; keep me from acting hurriedly or by temerity, by impulse of affection or imagination, by rashness or thoughtlessness. Above all I entreat you to give me prudence as a guardianship and a latch of my tongue and mouth! For the sake of your motherly charity, may I come to an end with speaking imprudently! Virgin most prudent, keep me from extremes, from negligence or slowness when I carry out your divine will, my duties, and the works of charity.

He concludes with a very fervent entreaty:

O very compassionate Mother, you are very powerful and merciful! You can grant such a great favor, this beautiful grace even to a most imprudent man like me! I am like a little donkey at your feet! Virgin most prudent, make me prudent, see to it that I practice prudence this year(1) to console the most holy Heart of Jesus in everything, and to edify the people. Amen, amen. For the sake of Jesus and St. Joseph, hear me. For the sake of the angels and the saints, hear me. For the sake of the most holy Trinity, hear me, amen (S.C. Vol. 10, page 9).

This prayer perhaps makes reference to the picture we drew by lots in 1888, which had prudence as the virtue to be practiced. But, the father had a predilection for Our Lady of Good Counsel, to whom he often appealed. Furthermore, he had written five small prayers for his daily recitation. In fact, we read in his notes, "My particular prayers to Our Lady of Good Counsel" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 38).

Later he makes reference to the poet Arici, whose verses probably ended the prayer, which begins with: "Virgin Mother, smiling image..." The reference dates back to the difficulties which hindered the institute in the early times.

The elegant, lyric poet Arici from Brescia, one of the chosen group at the beginning of our century wrote beautiful verses in honor of the most holy Virgin under the title of Good Counsel (our padre was writing on October 14, 1900). I often called them to my mind when the storm grew so furious that I saw no way to escape it. Through those delicate verses I exclaimed:

As the pilgrim on his way saw you clearing  
The sky of clouds by blinking your eyelash,  
Mother, clear and save my ship for sailing  
Send me a flash!  
(S.C. Vol. 10, page 212).

## 4. Prayer and advice

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The Father's exhortations to his children to do everything with prayer were mainly directed to himself, or better yet, they echoed his practice. In fact, even though he acted in the light of divine presence continuously, still, before undertaking any enterprise, he felt the need to pray as much as the importance of the matter required. Furthermore, he made people pray also for his counselors that they might know the will of God.

He once wrote to Father Vitale, "I agree upon the fact that prudence is needed; however, because this virtue has various degrees, such as prudence of pure reason, reason and faith, ordinary faith, extraordinary faith, etc. we must combine it with prayer and counsel. Ecclesiasticus says, "Make up a heart of good counsel; it will be your best counselor." (The Father tells us to take this saying with pure intention). And elsewhere, "Before taking advice from men, take it from God" (Vol. 31, page 12). The Father followed this revealed teaching.

When Mrs. Jensen retired, the burden of the orphanage and the religious community fell on the shoulders of the Father, who wrote an offering of the mass, in which he prayed, "My Lord Jesus Christ, I beseech you to show me the counselors to whom I have to resort. At the same time I beg you to enlighten them so that they behave according to your will. You are omnipotent. For the offering of this mass of endless value see to it that the hellish enemy may not prevail over in this affair, but everything come to your greater glory, your will, and satisfaction" (Vol. 6, page 1). While waiting for Msgr. Guarino's decision, he asks Saint Joseph "to give copious enlightenment to the archbishop so that his advice, warning, manifestation, concession, reprimand, and action be a perfect manifestation of the divine will, and divine will be done regardless of our passions and intentions." Then he delivers everything to Saint Joseph: his mind, heart, tongue, and above all his right hand. "Deign to guide it when I write; may it write what your divine spirit and right reason suggest, regardless of passions and the suggestion of the hellish enemy" (Vol. 6, page 11).

On another occasion he appeals to Our Lady of the Letter. "I entreat you to enlighten me in this circumstance in order to behave according to divine will. Free me from my foolish opinion

and guide me according to divine grace... Holy Mother, enlighten me and my counselors so that you yourself counsel me through them" (Vol. 7, page 16). Perhaps the Father wrote this prayer when he asked for renouncing canonry, because he added one "Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be" to Saint John Baptist De Rossi, whose devotion was recommended by Msgr. Guarino in 1883, when the Father presented the renunciation.

In a particular case he asks the Madonna, "If you want me to appeal to M. A. (Msgr. Archbishop) or to P. E. (Padre Eugenio of Sortino, a holy Capuchin) or to others, let me know! While appealing to these holy ministers, make me ask their advice with simplicity and truth, and you yourself enlighten them so that they guide me according to the most holy Heart of Jesus" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 7).

On another occasion he makes the orphaned girls pray to Saint Joseph. "O holy patriarch, for the sake of the child Jesus and Immaculate Mary enlighten the Father so that he may behave in everything according to justice, charity, prudence, and equity" (Vol. 8, page 21).

In 1910, when the institutes of Francavilla were battled and those of Sicily were running the risk of being involved, the Father offers the holy mass to the most holy Trinity through the intercession of Our Lady of Good Counsel. He asks for enlightenment on how he should behave.

Grant me a particular help and the gift of counsel in these circumstances, perplexities, past, present, and future events, as well as in the coming anguish, uncertainty, tribulation, and persecution. For the sake of this most precious offering of the mass, enlighten, guide, govern, regulate, and advise me. See to it that the gift of counsel be effective in me through your enlightenment and inspiration! Enlighten also my counselors, letting me know who they are and how I have to take advice. May both of us please your most holy will and the most holy, compassionate Heart of Jesus, for the sanctification and salvation of souls, your greater glory, and the defeat of Satan (Vol. 4, page 120).

He combines prayer and advice. We know some of his counselors, such as Don Cusmano, Father Ludwig of Casoria, Don Bosco, Msgr. Pennino, his confessors, his own Religious, and after the 1908 earthquake Don Orione.

He wanted us to imitate him. "When the mother superior and the sisters must take advice from spiritual directors, they have to pray in advance for their enlightenment and the enlightenment of their counselors. By so doing we trust that our Lord and the most holy Virgin will let us have the right advice from wise person, from a pious, learned, and wise priest" (Vol. 1, pages 195-96).

## 5. ...Were light to his steps

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Prayer and advice were light to the Father, all his life long. Writing to the Capuchin Sisters of Citta' di Castello, he says, "I do everything by taking advice from the wise, seeking the pure glory of God, at least in my intention, because I am so miserable in my actions" (Vol. 38, page 1).

How prudent he was in giving the name to his congregations! He waited until 1901, and in October of the same year he mailed a circular to the bishops sacred allies, to whom he revealed his anxiety for getting the final names of his ideal (Ch. 5, no. 9).

The Father did the same for the garb of the Rogationists. We read in his notes, "On September 7, 1909, I began celebrating 33 masses for the Rogationists garb" (Vol. 6, page 109).

While writing the rules for the sisters, at a certain point the Father asks himself, "Should the mother superior obey someone of the sisters in anything?" Being in a state of uncertainty, he wrote, "I will answer this question after taking advice and enlightenment" (Vol. 1, page 180).

Even the names of the sisters should be inspired in prayer. For instance, a probationer asked the Father to be called Crocifissa at her taking of the garb, but a few days later the Father told her, "I have prayed. I don't feel to call you so." He gave her the name of Marcellina.

Transfers of persons were prepared and accompanied by prayer. He wrote to Mother Nazzarena, "Pray and make people pray, because any transfer of persons must conform to the will of the divine superiors" (Vol. 35, page 264).

When the sisters of Taormina were ending the building of the funeral chapel, the mother superior asked the Father for an inscription, and insisted to have it quickly. But he answered, "You do not understand the importance of the matter. This must be a memoir to posterity; therefore, we must invoke the enlightenment of heaven with prayer and mortification." He delivered the following inscription after three days. "They lived united - in the love of the celestial spouse Jesus - Daughters of the Divine Zeal of his Heart - each of them lays here - the mortal remains, to put them on glorious - on the day of the universal resurrection" (Vol. 43, page 89).

He "faced grave difficulties in founding his two congregations and several branch houses. But he overcame them with patience and faith, because he always prayed and made us pray to Jesus, Our Lady, the saints, especially Saint Joseph, and the archangels patrons. Furthermore, he took advice from the wise, the holy persons, and above all from Archbishop Guarino." He used to say, "Do everything after taking counsel, and you will have nothing to repent of... As to the main matters of his communities, he gathered his priests for advice." "Owing to his prudent government, the female congregation was not dissolved." Says Brother Louis, "Father Bonarrigo confided to me that the Servant of God often went to him for advice. In fact, in the funeral oration for Father Bonarrigo the Servant of God called him 'his first counselor'; and he carried out his advice, even when Bonarrigo was not a priest." Before acting, the Father meditated, prayed, took advice, and asked for our prayer. He often told us, "Pray today, and above all tomorrow during the holy mass for a business of ours." The next day, he used to say, "Pray, because the will of God is still unknown to me!" A Religious writes, "I never noticed the Father acting imprudently, all the more because he often took advice from the Servants of God and made us pray, especially when important matters were at hand. He also gathered his nearer cooperators to find out the best means for the guidance of our communities. I never realized any inappropriate decisions. He was also moderate in his exhortations."

Outstanding persons, such as bishops, appreciated his virtue and took advice from him. For instance, the bishop of Oria often said, "Papa Hannibal gave and will give us advice." I myself saw outstanding lay and ecclesiastical persons approaching him for advice.

At the end of this topic we quote a Daughter of the Sacred Side. "On the whole he carried out his matters with great prudence, and he did the same in advising and governing, even though his zeal was sometimes judged a little strong. He taught us to govern ourselves, foreseeing his demise."

## 6. He never went to excesses

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While examining the Father's activities, we meet facts and evidences which bring to light his supernatural prudence.

An employee remembers: "When a person was at fault, the Father was severe and mild in the same time because he was always prudent and lovable. It also happened when he had to reproach. One day I touched upon a colleague as a sign of hugging, but the Father hinted at disapproval with a gesture. However, when he met me alone he almost begged pardon, yet saying that getting the habit of greeting the way I did was imprudent." Even though he practiced the virtues heroically, he did not demand heroism from others; on the contrary, he hardly granted the permission for it...

He warmly recommended bodily health, and like Saint Bernard called exaggerated penances of youth craziness. Evil was to be prevented: if a sister entered the bakery wearing stuck pins or needles, which could fall into dough, she had to abstain from receiving Communion. "Even though he exhorted people to practice virtue in high degree, he almost never granted permission for heavy mortification." For instance, a sister asked him to eat only bread on the Lent Fridays. The Father responded, "It is not possible, because bread is expensive now: fast as in the other days, Good Friday excepted; on that day you can eat bread only." To another sister, "I do not let you sleep dressed on the plank-bed all nights. Because you work all day, you should go to sleep at 10:00 p. m. on a normal mattress, sleeping calmly at the feet of Jesus, our supreme goodness. To please you, however, I grant you the permission to sleep on the plank-bed for one night a week; but, lay a blanket on the plank and cover yourself" (Vol. 34, page 34).

To point out how a mother superior should behave when the sisters want to do voluntary penances, we quote.

The mother superior will moderate and control the voluntary penances, keeping in mind:

a. The sister's health, work, and job. b. The mother superior will also look at the improvement in the virtues of obedience, humility, zeal, and accuracy while the sisters perform their own duty or when they renounce their own will and opinion, etc. Some souls happen to deceive themselves through bodily penances; they are able to do hardest bodily penances without hesitating to break holy obedience, humility, charity, fulfillment of their duty, etc. These souls consider themselves saints for their bodily penances, but persist in the bad practice of the virtues becoming obstinate, somehow stubborn, negligent, angry, etc. Depriving them of their voluntary whimsical penances and inflicting other penances, helps them. If they are willing to amend their vices in order to achieve holy virtues, they may be allowed to perform voluntary penances with discretion; they, however, must be told to offer their penances to the Lord with the aim at amending their bad habit and improving religious virtues; otherwise, they will be forbidden to perform voluntary penances (Vol. 1, page 217).

Read how a sister judges the Father's prudence while correcting. "He corrected and remedied the faults as the circumstances required, but I often saw him silent by prudence. Either counseling or correcting, he never went to the extremes. I once referred things of the house to outside girls; the Father patted me on the head and wrote this warning for me, 'Never talk with outsiders of things of the house'."

People relates of the Father as confessor. Says a sister, "I went to the Father as an extraordinary confessor, and realized an angelical prudence, as prudent he was in the government. The glory of God and the salvation of souls were his aim, whereas prayer and meditation were the means." Other sisters: "I confessed to him once, noticing his discretion... He only confessed in exceptional cases, when people insisted for spiritual direction. He used to say that he was a superior, and therefore he could not be an ordinary confessor." "I once confessed to him, and realized no rigor." "Quite a few of us asked him for confession, but he refused because he was the superior of the institute." Someone pointed out, "The Father was never imprudent: he wanted a short confession."



Let us read the Father's letter to Father Moramarco, a confessor of the Daughters of Divine Zeal in Altamura.

I warmly recommend that the confessions in my community be relatively short in the ambit of the sacrament. The rules and the customs of the institute, as well as perfect conformity to the orders of the superior and the master in the external discipline must be observed. Woe, if the confessors do not conform to the external discipline while treating the forum of conscience! Inconveniences and insubordinations come out upsetting the communities, as experience teaches.

When a female community is lucky to have a confessor from the twin male community, it is a guaranty! But it is the same when the outside confessor is wise, prudent, cautious, and experienced. He hardly believes the complaints and the subterfuges of someone who interweaves a vent against the superiors instead of confessing her faults humbly. She can do such a thing so naturally and skillfully that an inexperienced confessor can tell her that she is right, to the prejudice of her soul and the community's discipline.

I beg your pardon for this warning, but I remind you that the Lord dislikes the despising of the elders' admonitory words. I have a long, painful experience on this subject!

Make use of Saint Augustine's saying, "Your talk with women be short and harsh," especially with the devout ones! Lead each soul to obedience, respect, love, and holy fear of her own superior! Refuse any talk of curiosity, etc. By doing so, you will realize how the souls grow better. Avoid long confessions, cut the extras, and accustom the penitent to short confessions: yes, yes, no, no. A person accustomed to spending half, three quarters, or an hour for confession, gives a bad example to the community. I hate it! I used to hear confessions of seventeen Sisters of the Charity in an hour; nor could I stay longer, because they themselves made it impossible! Those are souls! Thus we must educate the souls, especially the ones belonging to a nascent community! (S.C. Vol. 5, page 302).

Wise rules of docility and submission are also valid after the Second Vatican Council. Ample and exhaustive as the dialogue may be, obedience is always obedience, and after all we know that "superiors... retain their own authority to decide and to prescribe what is to be done" (P.C. no. 14).

One day, a young Religious in Oria committed some faults which ended in a soldier-like outburst in the presence of two brethren, and the day after he received Communion without making amends. The Father was informed. He wrote from Messina to the prefect asking him to relate "his fatherly warning to the guilty; to exhort him to confess as soon as possible after

making a spiritual retreat; and to find out a confessor who declares him guilty. The point is, if the confessor will declare him innocent, because he is too indulgent or because the confession is not integral, the Religious will be lost! Many persons ended unhappily this way!" (Vol. 30, page 52).

When the superior general visited a community, she manifested little trust in the mother superior of the house. The Father warned and instructed the superior general.

That superior is somehow to be pitied, and you did well by informing me about everything. But I cannot approve that the sisters understood your disapproval for the superior's faults. You should have avoided the sisters' attention on her faults. At least exteriorly, you had to appear indifferent and support her. She wrote from Oria very humbly. After all, she is a good sister and we should listen to her justifications. You did well to establish the actions in common, but I don't think that everything was in a jumbled confusion. Also, we cannot give credit to everything the youth say of a new superior, especially when she is somehow curious to ascertain the truth. It is also possible that they pushed her to some excess, and now charge her with that. This sister edified this community in many things! (Vol. 35, page 98).

To make sure of the secret, several sisters appealed to the seal of confession while writing to the Father, but he responded, "Do not say seal of confession, because we are out of confession, and also because the directors cannot be given seals. You should rely on their discretion" (Vol. 34, page 88).

## 7. New foundations

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How prudent the Father was in the foundation of new communities!

He requires at least a month of particular prayers and celebrations of masses. Then, he suggests to check the place and the buildings to see whether they are suitable, hygienic,

etc. "The opening of a new community in an unsanitary house or in an unsanitary place, or having no electricity, air, and water must be refused" (Vol. 1, page 183). First, we should consider the availability of the Religious, who will be certainly available if we take proper care of their training. "When the spiritual, intellectual, and domestic formation is well done, our Lord continues sending good vocations, because the institute becomes an ark of salvation and of sanctification for the congregants" (Vol. 1, page 182).

The Father disliked to work in public bodies, and to keep absolute independence and freedom of action, he always refused to erect his orphanages as public bodies.

The maintenance of the communities should not be assured in full. "Fixed income for the whole maintenance of the orphans cannot be claimed, because we have to fulfill the gap by work and divine providence, in which we have to trust. On the other hand, we won't tempt God by founding orphanages in places where, humanly speaking, there is little or no hope to succeed" (Vol. 1, page 184).

To consolidate the existent houses, sometimes Father Vitale tried to slacken the Father's fits. The Father wrote, "I too would like to have only a house, but good; and if the events urge? Perhaps there is also my pride or irresponsibility, and I pray to the Lord to let me open no house, unless etc. However, if a too good opportunity offers, I have no courage to refuse it! Let us pray!" (Vol. 31, page 9). In 1910 the cholera broke out in Trani. Was the Father able to leave the orphans in dire want? Not at all. Therefore he opens an orphanage for girls on the side of the laboratory he had opened a month before. The holy man Msgr. Carrano was puzzled... The Father wrote to the mother superior general,

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As usual, Monsignor declaims, reproves, approves, wants, dislikes, censures, praises, does not look in the face, and gives me money. He gave me 300 liras and is ready to give 950 more for the equipment, because we have to buy everything for the orphans who are poorest! Long live Jesus!... Monsignor nearly reprimanded me because I receive the orphans without having any means; at my answering that I am sheltering only five of them, he kept silent. Later he sent people to tell me that I should take thirteen orphans in honor of Saint Anthony! (Vol. 35, page 48).

As in everything, the Father's wishes for foundations were subordinate to God's will. In 1912, the sisters were ready to give

their service to the Carmelites' parish in Padua (cf. Vol. 34, page 94). The pastor, however, made very harsh conditions, and the Father renounced his project by writing,

It is true that we wish to form a community in Padua; our wish, however, is moderate and submitted to the will of God, who wants us to act prudently. You demand of the sisters to live at the expenses of the institute and to give to the pastor anything they earn such as the money from personal work, kindergarten, laboratory, etc. Father, this is against justice. The gospel says clearly that "the laborer is worth his wage!" (Lk. 10, 7). If we cannot enter Padua at better conditions, the time to enter has not come yet for us; we renounce and continue praying.

And we prayed until 1948!

He was very demanding that our communities keep to the terms agreed upon with the pastors. The sisters sometimes had a few dissensions with the pastor of Torregrotta, and Father Messina urged our founder to provoke measures from the chancery office. But he answered, "I sent the sisters to rise no rival organization; were such a situation to happen, I would take back the sisters immediately."(2)

On February 11, 1927, the Father opened his last house at Novara of Sicily under the auspices of Our Lady of Lourdes, but he did not intervene because of illness which brought him to death. He wrote to the sisters who were moving from San Pier Niceto to found the new community, telling them how they should behave with the high priest of Novara. "He will welcome you, and you must understand your important mission... Bear in your mind that the high priest will take great care of you. respect and take advice from him, behaving according to his counsel. Save our rules and your perfect dependence on the superior general" (Vol. 34, page 71).

He disapproved that outsiders, benefactors included, live in the community. He wrote to the Daughters of the Sacred Side, "Even though that miss is a holy soul, still it is unsuitable that lay persons live with the Religious... The inconvenience of living together comes with time." As to the advantages one could hope from it, he adds, "Let us seek God and work righteously without placing our trust in creatures, nor in earthly goods, and God will help us" (Vol. 38, page 60).

The Morning Star Sisters had opened a new institution in a house dependent on a church, and the Father suggests how to behave.

As to the Rev. Father rector, hold him in great regard, make over what you can, keep silent, pray that Jesus give him mild and reasonable feelings. Restrain yourselves from criticizing, disapproving, etc. while talking with the outsiders or the oblates. You should know that every word you say is referred and exaggerated, and the devil profit by it to trouble the waters. Listen to none of the outsiders, nor others, nor the oblates who speak ill of him; on the contrary, cut their speech by saying that you believe no word against him, making them keep silent. More than often they happen to play two parts; on one hand, they speak ill of him; on the other hand, they speak ill of you. By acting with prudence, prayer, respect, and meekness you can trust that the Lord will help you win. As Saint Paul says, we must win evil with good. I would like to warn you of another thing: never speak aloud among yourselves of the rector, because there are always ears hearing, which refer your imprudent words! ...Pay attention! Prudence and prayer! Be wise! Give no weapons to the devil, all the more because your situation is very delicate. You are not entirely in your house, but are living in the midst of persons who may be better than you, still they may be used by the devil to trouble you, even without any reason. Imagine if you give any reason!

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He concludes with an exhortation to trust. "If we are persecuted without being at fault, and we respect and pray for our persecutors, and return good for evil to them, the Lord will defend, look at, and help us triumph" (Vol. 39, page 36).

When a new house was opened, the Father asked the other communities to help it at least by furnishing the chapel, or in other way. Once the house was settled, it should buy things from the others. Treating some affairs about God and Neighbor, the Father wrote to Mother Nazzarena, "The rule is that the have-not houses must be helped by those which have; but when they have, they must pay for exactness and regularity. Therefore, send the periodicals to them, and enclose the bill" (Vol. 35, page 147).

## 8. He accepted human means

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A sister writes, "The Father's leading motive was trust in God and his providence, and almost contempt of human means." The word almost points out that trust in providence stood out, while human means were accepted with prudence. The Father said that "Jesus would have not multiplied bread if people were able to buy it." After appealing to supernatural means, the Father exploited licitly the human ones. For instance, in the trial of Avignone he used his title of rank because the judge had a weakness for aristocracy; he approached one by one the counselors of the city hall to have the Holy Spirit convent; he avoided the execution of the sectarian plan in Francavilla by taking the orphans to Messina one day before.

When the Father perceived that the enemies aimed at destroying his institution under the pretext of Francavilla trial, he wrote to Father Vitale, "I must do what I can to avoid the risk impending on us. Needless to say that first we pray and trust in the Heart of Jesus. But we must cooperate... the institute for boys in Francavilla runs the risk to come to an end. Let us adore the judgment of God! The Lord draws good from evil! Let us trust, and if we have to work, let us do it" (Vol. 31, page 6). And he did so effectively. By night he took the boys to Messina and shortly after went to Rome to clear things, approaching the minister General Spingardi, who had been the officer commanding the fort of Messina.

In the controversy with Msgr. Razzoli about the Daughters of the Sacred Side, one of the sisters charged the Father with the pretension to healing the sick through pieces of papers having written the name of Jesus. See how the Father exculpates himself from the charge.

This is a distortion of things. I never replaced the work of the doctors with the pieces of papers of the most holy Heart of Jesus. It would have been a grave act of imprudence, temerity, and superstition, which I never

did, thanks to God. Ordinary doctors and specialists in various diseases such as for eyes, throat, and ears serve my institutes. They are paid yearly. Recently, I took a Daughter of the Sacred Side at the clinic of Doctor D'Erchia, in Bari, for a surgery which ended with happy results, thanks to God, and for which I paid more than 1,200 liras. However, besides using human means we resort to pieces of papers of the most holy Heart of Jesus and more frequently of his most holy Name in grave cases. We have experienced wonderful effects. Two Daughters of Divine Zeal were healed from inveterate, grave sickness by the use of such papers. The report was made in Naples by the periodical of Don Paoloni, The Zealot of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, who specified which human remedies were used and that the Name of Jesus made them effective (S.C. Vol. 7, page 212).

Writing to the Morning Star Sisters he recommends trust, and above all good behavior. "We must double our trust in God, prayer, and holy behavior to move the heart of God!..." (Vol. 39, page 38). Another time, after suggesting to the sisters how to be energetic in order to develop their institution, he concludes, "Pay full attention to my words! God is infinitely rich and can draw money from the rocks, but he wants your cooperation!... 'Help yourself that I will help you,' says the Lord. The older sisters should pray, and the young ones should work, walk, and tire themselves!" (Vol. 39, page 64).

The Father wants always to combine trust in God, prayer, and cooperation according to one's own capacity. Talking of the appointments, he insists upon this subject.

We have to receive any task from God and the most holy Virgin's hands with faith and love, resolutely minding to fulfill it with attention, intelligence, and care....We have already said that each person has to accomplish her task not only diligently, but also intelligently, understanding and performing everything well. Dull, idiot minds will never fulfill even the simplest task well, whereas an intelligent mind may always open to the light of grace. For that reason, please do not accept dull persons in the community. However, those who for lack of intelligence do not know how to cope in singular cases, must learn to help themselves through remote and present prayer, which will be of great help if they have received the task with joy and a resolute mind to succeed. Each one has to help herself with prayer. When one finds herself in doubt or perplexity, besides calling upon Jesus' name she should resort to the Mother of Good Counsel, by saying for instance, "Mother of good counsel, for Jesus' sake, your beloved son, please enlighten me on how to behave, how to resolve," or the like. The invocation to the Mother of Good Counsel has been always effective beyond belief because it opens even the dullest minds. Some people do not fulfill their tasks exactly

because they have not received the assignment from obedience with joy, a resolute mind, and faith, but also because they neglect remote and present prayer. For that reason, they cannot lay the blame on incapacity, but on their negligence (Vol. 1, page 123).

Obviously, the person appointed to an office must be somehow prepared and skilled, otherwise everything is based on presumption.

During the 1915-18 war Brother Maurus died in Oria, and none replaced him as an internal combustion engine expert. It was a misfortune because a few Religious of ours would lose the exemption from military service if the shoe factory stopped working. Father Palma appointed another brother to that job, but when he began working he was unable to make the engine start, Father Palma's prayers notwithstanding. At a certain point the Servant of God said, "Father Palma, prayer is good, but does the brother know how to keep the engine going?" "Father, he is a beginner!" said Father Palma. "Then," the Father concluded, "send for the instructor; we cannot pretend miracles!"

At the beginning of the war, the Father mailed a circular to the communities instructing them how to behave with correspondence submitted to the board of censors. After stating beforehand that the letters are opened, he points out that if the news about war may cause danger, the law intervenes against the authors of the letters. Then he warns, "The undersigned director warmly exhorts this community to abstain from transmitting news which could be censured by the board of censors and could cause penalty." Then he asks them "to acknowledge receipt of the letter and to follow the rules." Finally he writes, "Keep this document in the archives" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 31). To Father Vitale, "We must pay attention to how formulating telegrams, because today even the most innocent words give suspicion" (Vol. 32, page 73). After the breaking of the front at Caporetto, the Father renews his exhortation to the sisters in Padua. "I don't know whether the letters will be submitted to the board of censors in Padua. However it may be, it is the same for us, because our mutual writing conforms to the religious, civil, patriotic principles. Needless to recommend you to write clearly in order to avoid any misunderstanding about innocent wordings. I hope that I am understood" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 251).



The correspondence with Saint Anthony's devotees, who were waiting for grace from the saint through the prayers of the orphans, was entrusted to the sisters. The Father recommends great prudence to them. "Pay attention on how to write to the devout; do not promise graces and miracles, but give them hope that if the matter is according to the will of God and to the good of the soul, etc. Be careful!" (Vol. 34, page 38).

## 9. People did not succeed in cheating him

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Let us see more details.

We read in a report, "On the whole I noticed no imprudence in the Father". Another relation says, "I am under the impression that he had not much human prudence. I heard saying that he was often cheated in his affairs." This is the impression of a person, but owing to other evidences and deeds we can count on, I think it is not justified.

The Servant of God made his major purchases after hearing the experts and above all the ecclesiastical superiors. Says Father Vitale, "One day I showed my disagreement to him, who responded, 'I did so by advice of the bishop'." A Daughter of the Sacred Side reports, "Before founding a new house, even of our congregation, he acted very prudently, reaching an agreement with the ecclesiastical and civil authorities."

Says Lawyer Crisafulli, "I knew the Servant of God since I was a child and admired him for his virtue. When I became a lawyer, I often welcomed him in my house because he felt to consult me any time he had to perform an administrative deed, even though he had already consulted other lawyers."

While treating affairs, the Father did not act with complete confidence.

For instance, when the Father was going to rebuild the church of the Holy Spirit after the 1908 earthquake, he made the decision to keep the walls of the church safe against the opinion of the engineer and the contractor, notifying the matter to Father Vitale in these terms:

I inform you that both the engineer and the contractor were planning to raze the walls of the church. The latter said that the walls had nothing artistic, but I opposed their scheme so they agreed upon chaining the walls. Please tell them to avoid the practice of the Civil Engineers who by nature are inclined to demolish and to reconstruct everything at whomever's expenses! What a good job the engineer would like to do! Protest on my behalf! The walls are artistic. If we raze them, the Ministry of Education has no reason to help us financially. Besides, the director of monuments wants to save the walls! (Vol. 32, page 38).

Let us quote Msgr. Farina's opinion about the purchase of the house for the Daughters of the Sacred Side at Spinazzola. "On that occasion I admired the prudence of the Servant of God, who eluded the exaggerated pretension of the sellers who aimed at taking advantage from the urgent purchase on behalf of the sisters and the bishop."

A very simple case shows the Father's far-sightedness. The September-October 1911 water bill seems to be high, and he writes to the mother-superior, "How does it come if we are using the old water since August first? They say that the water meter of the engine reads it. But, did we have the engine for water in those months? Was it exact? Or did people introduce new water in the pipes of the old one? Check everything before paying the bill" (Vol. 35, page 84).

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In the purchasing of the Avignone houses the Father was taken by the throat, but he was not cheated. The institution was born in that cursed land, and that land the Father had to redeem; therefore he had to buy it. Aware of the situation, the owners claimed a sentimental value. The Father had to play with them, but he knew of their speculation.

Finally, the Father succeeded to buy the little houses "at a very high price, a thousand liras each, when the normal price was about 300" (S.C. Vol. 1, page 271).

At a certain point the owners showed an interest in the auction sale. The Father appealed to prayer, and wrote to Father Vitale,

Make people pray the six novenas to ask the Lord for enlightenment and help... prayer and sound advice of experts are needed if we are obliged to participate in the auction... Pay very careful attention that they make no fun of us. Because this place is in the very center of the

new Messina, people could easily converge to the auction, and buy it at a high price by mutual consent with Ando' and Pino (the owners). They wouldn't care about upsetting us (Vol. 32, page 96).

In such cases one must accept things just as they are, and the Servant of God wrote to Father Vitale, "Give him what he is asking for! Never mind. What we buy for the Lord at high price yields very much spiritually and temporally!" (Vol. 33, page 137).

Some days later he insists, "Buy the little houses without minding the price" (Vol. 33, page 141).

The Avignone houses worried the Father until his last years. Marquis Bruno Anthony built them in several rows on his land around 1840. The Father bought all of them step by step, paying very dear. After a peaceful possession of about twenty years, one of the heirs claimed that the streets were not sold, and he took legal action. The case reached the supreme court. Finally, the Father's right to the ownership of the streets was acknowledged definitively.

Let us see how the Father behaved in this case.

First of all, Avignone acted in bad faith. I was told that he had said, "Even though I lose the cause, Canon Di Francia will make me pay nothing." He was speculating. In fact, because Avignone was in bad financial situation, the Father helped him during and after the cause.

To defend himself, the Father resorted to natural and supernatural means. Beginning with the last ones, he appointed a celestial court, whose chairman was Saint Michael the archangel. Judges, lawyers, counselors, etc., were chosen from angels and saints. The souls of purgatory were the assistant, praying, hoping, and influential public. We said particular prayers to them (Vol. 5, page 108).(3)

Obviously, the Father did not pretend miracles; therefore, he chose the lawyers to whom he submitted documents, information, and explanation. Lawyer Romano remembers, "I was a counselor for the defense in the cause against Avignone. The Father was so imperturbable, having all his trust in God. But in this circumstance he also took advice from other lawyers of Messina."

## 10. The government of a daring

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We glean some judgments upon the Father's government from various relations. "The government of the Servant of God was a government of a saint, or better yet, of an imprudent person. He was a daring who trusted in Providence limitlessly."

The Father's charity stood out over everything and made him overlook some human expedients while practicing this virtue heroically. He was like an eagle with the charity's golden feathers, and he was held and revered by the citizens as such. Human prudence was lacking in him because it was overwhelmed by faith and charity. "I never noticed any imprudence in his behavior because his endless trust in God cannot be called imprudence." "He was not at all cut out for financial administration; his arithmetic was not human." "I think that he was always well-balanced, doing everything according to the means at his disposal. But when the will of God was known, he threw himself in God's arms running his way." "His heady actions depended on charity; if he met an abandoned child in the street, a vacancy in his institute was to be found."

To value the charges of imprudence against the Father, we have to value the above evidences.

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"Now and then imprudent, he undertook enterprises surpassing his means; but since he confided in God, the impossible turned out to be reality. I still remember Canon Vitale once exclaiming, 'Holy Father! Holy Father!' because of a charitable pledge of the Servant of God which seemed to be absurd, but for the Servant of God was nothing, or almost nothing. In fact, the same Can. Vitale by experience added, 'The Lord remedies everything!' There were no limits to the Servant of God's charity, and he would have faced any work, even the building of Milan's major hospital in Messina."

The find of means for maintaining an institution is of a great

importance, and we know how the Father sweated for it; that, however, is not the main problem. The Father opens his mind on this subject while writing to Msgr. Zimarino, bishop of Gravina. "In these institutions the problem of the means is third on the list. First we need the spiritual work, i.e., the pure intention, the spirit of faith and sacrifice, the love for our Lord and our neighbor. We must work to make these things reign in the institution as much as we can, because human failings are always with us. Second, we need the ecclesiastical approval, i.e., we must act in conformity with the ecclesiastical authorities, with their blessing, and depending on them. Third, is finance, viz., the means, administration, works, industries, etc. It goes without saying that we must work. "Pray and work." If we look after the kingdom of God and his justice, working to earn our living with the sweat of our brow, means cannot fail. Everything can fail, but the word of God." He confesses, "My little institutions went forward without cash in hand for about 30 years, and we have seen the providence's miracles" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 162).

Msgr. Razzoli described the Father as an impressionable, impulsive, over-hasty decision making person. Msgr. Farina responds, "I think that necessary fortitude and quickness of decision was mistaken for impulsivity. The Servant of God was a reflecting prudent man who also took advice from others."

A specific charge was about the number of children he sheltered. One of the older sisters remembers, "Sheltering orphaned boys and girls in the early times, when facilities and means were lacking, is an example to be avoided. It was our despair. Only when the sisters began attending to it, the inconvenience was remedied."

If the Father should have made things perfect at the beginning of the institution, the institute wouldn't have been born. The Father responds to this charge:

The people say that I shelter children too easily. They do not know the moral pressure under which I find myself more than often. Today it is an high ranking person pleading for a child, tomorrow a representative of the public press interceding for another child, then it is a benefactor pretending to shelter an abandoned little girl. Ironically, the same person who has criticized me for accepting children too readily, is the one who will later insist that I take one that he recommends. To refuse is embarrassing, for who can refuse a bare-footed, sad-eyed child who seems to be saying to the sister, "I have no mother, take me with you!" (Vol. 45, page 447).

On a certain occasion, the Father wrote to the mayor of Oria,

"Quite a few persons told me that I throw myself into accepting orphans without calculating income and expenses. Perhaps they are right. That's the sort of man I am. I am so deeply concerned with saving the abandoned or unsafe orphans that I cannot always refrain myself from sheltering them, nor can I take the compass of the cold wary person!" Then he appeals to providence. "Finally I think that the sanctity of the institution requires a divine and human providence, on condition that we do all our work" (Vol. 41, page 93). It follows that the last resort was always the help of the Lord.

Sometimes circumstances were demanding, as in the case of the house in Trani. In the presence of the archbishop's anxiety the Father refrained from accepting the orphans of the cholera; but later, it was the same archbishop who asked to increase the number of the orphans.

Another charge concerned the prayers. "I think that the Father went to extremes in the prayers, which were lengthy during the day. For the remnant, he demanded what we were able to do, as I realized from his soothing Melanie's harshness. Perhaps, she was testing our vocation."

When we treated the topic of prayer, we have specified the Father's thought. When I was a student of high school in Oria, every day we said the long form of the prayers to win good workers, and it was somehow heavy for us students. Father Vitale submitted the case to the Servant of God, who immediately substituted it with the short form, leaving the long one to Sundays and feasts. He himself revised the prayers, shortened them, and informed the communities:

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From the beginning of the Pious Institution we have abounded in saying prayers. Due to the labors and engagements of our houses, as well as to the idea that some prayers may be replaced by meditation and spiritual reading for a better formation of the spirit, we have deemed to exclude some vocal prayers and to shorten other ones. We did so not only to avoid lack of recollection in saying them, but also because novenas, triduos, and spiritual readings sometimes fall in the same time. To pray all of them, we would have to rush (Vol. 34, page 183).

The last charge concerns the administration.

"Even though his administrative behavior may be excused by his endless charity and his simplicity in believing in the

kindness of people, I don't think that he has been prudent in administering money. In the early times he directed the two institutes and their houses, and things didn't go well because of his simplicity and kindness... I specify that the wrong consisted in running into debts, as well as in exploitation from laymen and not-laymen, who baffled his sacrifice for long ." So states a witness.

Let us read how the Servant of God defended himself from this charge in the 1906 speech.

This grave detrimental charge urges me to answer. First of all, the accountant of my institute records in detail the income and the expenses every day. Everyone is free to check them! What more do we have to do? I know that we should improve, and with the help of the Lord I aim at achieving the ideals of my institute, which began from nothing in the slums of the poor by saving abandoned children and suffering people. We have already two orphanages which draw the liking and the admiration of Messina citizens. Why do they speak of bad administration?

When a household or a factory goes bankrupt, its good income and revenues notwithstanding, we say that it's due to bad administration. On the contrary, quite the opposite happened to us. Without almost any means, we have always gone ahead, holding orphans and poor, and improving our private and public undertaking. We heartily love order, system, and regularization of everything because we know that order comes from God, who arranged the chaos in weight and measure. In spite of that we have faced for years the charge that we have no administration in our institutes.

The Servant of God did not confine himself to defending his administration, but launched an attack.

Let me now retort a charge. Even though they are said to be well administered, how are many houses doing? What are the miracles of certain administrative minds? Why is bankruptcy on the daily agenda, even for persons having ledgers and accountants in order? Why are superfluous expenses to the prejudice of the budget? Why does greed to increase riches push the people to risk big capitals? A few years ago, a gentleman of Messina made heavy remarks on my administration, and opposed the increase of the yearly contribution to my institute by the city hall by saying that I do not know how to administer. Was that a good means to help my institute's inmates and to remedy my bad administration? It is a simple way to give me no money. So, my incapacity to administer remains in potency, and cannot be put into practice. Well, shortly after, through a fit of administrative mind that gentleman got mixed up in a contract, losing 200,000 to 300,000 liras! I could say the full name of the late gentleman, but I don't, out of respect

for his family. And then, woe if Canon Di Francia spends five liras to prepare a soup for poor people who are starving! Should I spend that money on luxury articles, in such a case I had nothing to respond..." (Vol. 45, page 463).

When the Father confines himself to "the holy virtue of prudence in its degrees of reason and faith," his reasoning makes sense, but when he enters the field of "extraordinary faith" (V. no. 4) we must acknowledge that the common sense has no go. Besides, the Father himself writes to Msgr. Parrillo (Ch. 16, no. 5) that his behavior is somehow strange, because he had the presumption to financially help others, without waiting for tomorrow, trusting in this divine promise, "If you give one, you will receive a hundred times more," and "give to others, and God will give to you: you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands - all that you can hold" (Lk. 6, 38). Who can condemn a man who lives in full this page of the gospel?

One relation hints at the Father's financial behavior. "I think that the Father lacked prudence while helping his neighbor, because he was generous with everyone knocking at his door, making no discrimination. I once took the liberty of telling him my point of view, because the petitioner was a drunkard and a gambler. He responded, "I know nothing of that. They ask and I have to give!" The witness did not catch the strength of "I have to give." Charity almost compelled him to give.

Father Carmel realized the Father's soul on this subject more than once.

I often submitted the ledgers to him, pointing out that expenses were higher than income. Consequently, we had to balance them to avoid bankruptcy. But he responded to me, "That's fine, my son. Mathematics is right. But, if we had to follow it, we would do nothing. Therefore, we have to follow the mathematics of faith. With that, we'll never be in trouble!". A sister concludes her relation with this short significant statement, "As to charity, the Father did not follow human prudence: he trusted in God only, and achieved his goals through him." Whoever trusts in God, will be never confounded!



# 11. Simplicity

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The gospel combines simplicity with prudence. Read how the Father combines them in his rules:

The principles of religious virtue requires that one practices simplicity of heart and avoids simulation, duplicity, and hypocrisy toward God and neighbor. Avoidance of rash judging anyone and the disposition to justify or regard the failings of others with indulgence also belong to holy simplicity. This virtue does not lead one to disapprove of the orders of obedience or to condemn the actions of others, but disposes them to look on everything as good through a child's belief.

Simplicity is also characterized by prudence to which our Lord Jesus Christ pointed: "You must be as cautious as serpents and as gentle as doves" (Mt. 10, 16). This celestial, purest prudence differs from the worldly prudence and the human respect. Even though it sees everything with simplicity, still it judges between good and evil as they really are before God.

Holy simplicity abhors lies. Behaving frankly and sincerely according to the divine oracle "yes, no," each congregant will avoid the spirit of falsehood as if it were a pest of the soul. Not to expose simplicity and sincerity to risk, the congregants will almost never make use of compound mental abstraction, preferring to conceal through silence what is useless to manifest (Vol. 3, page 22).

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Unintentionally, through these words the Father gives us a portrait of himself.

Father Francis Fazio, S. J., profiles the Servant of God in a few lines.

Canon Di Francia was really animated by supernatural principles. He was a man of God, imbued with piety and devotion, always acting supernaturally. His characteristic features were: first, a great simplicity, like that of a good boy who is unable to think ill of anyone, but prone to see everyone good as himself. The second was a sovereign one: a heartfelt charity which was the source of his works. Third, love of many prayers. In short, he was a saint of inner, simple life very connatural to him, which he lived in the charity for the unfortunates. One day, he told me with the candor of a child who smiles without pride: "I am in the heart of everybody."

Father Anthony Di Coste, a Redemptorist, wrote,

"The spirit of the Servant of God was the spirit of simplicity and infancy, which animated the Seraph of Assisi, the saint of Sales, and Saint Teresa of the child Jesus. Ingenuous and enemy of any double-dealing and falsehood, he was open and meek like a child... that was Canon Di Francia."

In 1945, when a street of Oria was dedicated to Hannibal M. Di Francia, Msgr. Di Tommaso recalled some of the circumstances which followed the purchase of Saint Paschal convent, 36 years before. The business was cared by the bishop and the owner Don Nicholas Salerno Mele'. The owner reserved the hunting to the thrushes in the convent's garden as an indispensable condition to the selling of his property. After a long insistence, the bishop succeeded to eliminate such a condition, but at the end of the dealing, the Father came in and the owner renewed his claim to the hunting by saying:

"Everything is fine, but his Excellence does not want to give in to a condition.

- Which one? Said the Father.

- The hunting to the thrushes in the garden of the convent.

- But we don't care the thrushes, you can do that.

- But the canon does not know of the huntresses, said the bishop.

- Huntresses? Exclaimed the Father.

- Yes, huntresses, said the bishop, because his wife and daughters along with their friends would come...

- That is not possible, remarked the Father, who added with simplicity, "We can do that... We catch the thrushes ourselves, and will send them to your house..."

Don Nicholas was interested in the trip and the hunting, not in the thrushes. And yet, amazing at the Father's simplicity, he renounced the condition (Per l'inaugurazione della Via A. M. Di Francia, page 49).

Father Vitale writes:

Wanting everyone in his communities to seek God alone after his own examples and teaching, it was much to his satisfaction when he met simple people who did not care about worldly things. He thought that

these people attracted God's blessings for the foundation.

The Father taught: "He who seeks God, is humble, simple--docile; he does not deceive, nor simulate; he is not a liar, but rather he stands in the superior's hand like warm wax to be molded" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 310).

The last time the Servant of God was in Oria, a probationer asked him for a reminder, and he answered, "Yes, yes; no, no."

It is understood that the Father liked the meeting with simple souls.

In those days, Brother Joseph Ghezzi (1872-1955) of the Friars Minor lived in Apulia in humility, simplicity, self-denial, and love. He accepted from God suffering of the body and soul, building his sanctification in peace and silence. The people held him as a saint because of his extraordinary virtues sometimes substantiated by miracles. The Father too held him in high esteem, and used to call upon him in Manduria to enjoy the conversation of his simple soul enamored of God. Even though he was of the very noble dukes of Lecce, and the bishop of that city had invited him to join the clergy, he entered the Franciscan order as a lay-brother, after his graduation from liceo. He worked as a mendicant friar in favor of the Franciscan missions for several decades and edified the people with his work.

A significant episode of a different kind is narrated by Father Franze' of the Friars Minor, who made the Father laugh. Father Franze' related how he converted Mecio, a university porter at the anatomy theater. He was a good man deeply attached to his family and office, but very ignorant in religion. Father Franze' was a medical student and for a year he instructed Mecio enough to make him receive holy Communion. Let us hear his relation:

The piety of Mecio in his first meeting with God in the Eucharist exceeded my expectation. Contrite and absorbed in prayer, he thanked the Lord by reading in the prayer book that I had given him that morning. I was amazed and satisfied. I left him in prayer and went to prepare a rich breakfast for him. After about an hour Mecio did not appear yet. Now and then, I checked in the church and saw him always in prayer, but I did not disturb him. When the masses were over and the faithful went out, the man came in, his eyes beaming with joy. "Why did you stay so long in the church?" I asked him. His answer made me gape at him. He had received holy Communion at every mass and had read the most he could in the prayer book without any distinction whether he was reading the novena of the dead or the blessing of Saint Brigid's scapular.

When I recounted the happening to the Father, he laughed and said, "To be lodged, the Lord found a very simple and innocent soul! These ignorant souls gain more than we do with our science!" (Bulletin, May-June 1947, page 72).

However, the Father's simplicity did not refrain him from defending his ideas.

For instance, when the Messina chief police officer asked the Servant of God to shelter the fatherless boy of his maid, the Father answered that he was unable to shelter the boy in Messina because he had surpassed too much the age required by rules. However, "for the great esteem in which he held all the authorities" he would receive the boy in Oria. The officer felt offended and called the Father by telephone, talking vehemently and angrily. The Father wrote to him, "Mr. Chief Police officer, I think I can do no more to show my deference to you. Besides, you must consider that I am a priest who cannot be weak in matter of conscience. On this subject, I would say the same thing to his majesty the king, who would admire and praise me" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 193). The officer kept silent.

To help his children improve in the way of the spiritual infancy, the Father wrote during the 1919 Christmas novena Proposals and Prayers to the Child Jesus to Become Again Children. By examining 25 main features of children in honor of our Lord's birth, the Father writes that "children believe everything, have no grudge, do and think of what their parents want, love their relatives, etc." Then he addresses a prayer to the divine child to adorn the souls with the children's virtues and to strengthen them with perseverance.

## Notes

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- (1) Perhaps prudence was the virtue that the Father had to practice that year.

(2) I have read both the letter to Father Messina and to the pastor of Padua. However, we don't have any copy. The quotations are from the notes I was keeping since long.

(3) We report a witty remark of the Father. The lawyers of the celestial court were Saint Francis of Sales, Saint Alphonsus M. Liguori, and Saint Francis of Paola. Father Drago made the humorous remark that Saint Francis of Paola was not at the right place on the side of Saint Francis of Sales and Saint Alphonsus, because they were teachers of law... The Father responded, "Saint Alphonsus represents the law; Saint Francis of Sales, meekness and persuasion. If law and reason are not enough, Saint Francis of Paola comes in with his stick to put things in order..." It was an allusion to the Roman dialect wisecrack, "Quanno ce vo', ce vo'..." (What is required, is required).



## JUSTICE

1. To each, his own
2. He was upright with God
3. In the house of God
4. The sacred furnishing
5. The day of the Lord
6. Thanksgiving
7. The Blessed Sacrament in the new chapel
8. He was upright with his neighbor
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11. Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar
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13. Toward the benefactors
14. Notes

# 1. To each, his own

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Justice is often synonymous of holiness in the sacred Scripture, as in the saying of the Lord, "Blest are they who hunger and thirst for holiness; they shall have their fill" (Mt. 5, 6). Justice encompasses all the virtues. When we say "The saints are just," we mean that. Here, however, with the word "justice" we mean the supernatural virtue infused by God in the soul, which inclines the will always to give the people what belongs to them.

After prudence, justice is the most excellent among the cardinal virtues. But it is inferior to the theological virtues and to some others which originate from them, such as religion, because they have a more immediate and noble object.

Justice regulates our duties toward our neighbor; religion, our relationship with God. The virtue of religion is very near to justice, but is not justice in the strict sense of the term since justice requires that each receive his own. Because a creature is unable to give God all the respect he is worthy of, religion does not realize all the conditions of justice. It is, however, a potential part of it, like gratitude for the benefits we receive, and obedience, which regulates the duties toward the superiors.

We have already treated the Father's virtue of religion; therefore, we refer to the chapters in which we have written about his piety, devotion, spirit of prayer, attention to avoid the least defects, and engagement to fulfill everything perfectly. He did so to perform the will of God for the greatest consolation of Jesus' Heart.

Now let us listen to new evidences which disclose the Father's soul on the subject of justice.



## 2. He was upright with God

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The virtue of justice requires first the observance of God's law. We can realize the Father's faithfulness to divine law in the chapter about his love for God, hatred for sin, and care to avoid it at any cost.

Those who have known the Servant of God form a choir of praise with their bearing witness on his uprightness with God. "He was very observant of God's law." "I never saw him failing in his religious duties." "The Father's life was a continuous immolation for the Lord, and he pledged himself always to fulfill the commandments in the best way he was able to." I have no doubt that he fulfilled the precepts and the counsels of the Lord very faithfully all his life long, because I verified in him the purest intention in everything. He served God with all his strength."

We have said that when he visited our houses, we welcomed him with clapping of hands, and the first thing he did was inviting us to go to the chapel with him to greet the "Owner of the house." He never considered himself the owner of his foundations. The Lord and Our Lady were the absolute owners.

When people go up the main stairs of Saint Paschal's in Oria, they see on the wall the pictures of the most holy Heart of Jesus and Mary. The Father exposed them the same day we took possession, on September 28, 1909. He wrote under both the pictures, "I am the owner of this house and of those who dwell and love me."

On a cover of documents of the house of Rome, he wrote, "Papers of our building, which belongs to the Heart of Jesus and Mary, Saint Joseph, Saint Anthony, Saint Michael the archangel, and all saints, in Rome" (Vol. 43, page 914).

### 3. In the house of God

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Coming to details, we point out the Father's very great respect for the holy place.

He wrote:

I recognize that I must be a model for everyone everywhere, but above all in the church because it is the Lord's house.

Before entering the Lord's house I will remember the Holy Spirit's saying: "When you enter the Lord's house, take care of your steps." I will not enter it hastily and rashly, but at a sedate and recollected pace, making the sign of the cross with holy water. Then I will genuflect, adoring the most Holy Sacrament. When I pass before the holy tabernacle, I will genuflect reverently and recollectedly.

While kneeling in church I can rest my hands on the chair or the pew and my forehead on my hands in order to concentrate my thoughts, but without leaning against the chair or the pew. Calm and recollected, I will not engage in conversation with anyone; only when obliged by necessity I will speak in a low voice and briefly.

During the prayer in common I will pray with a low, contrite voice; when the rule or necessity lets us sit, I will do so decorously and modestly.

So that my external behavior in church be well-regulated I will strive to be recollected in the divine presence offering praise, thanksgiving, petitions, and love to the Lord (Vol. 44, page 121).

When the people enter the church or the sacramental oratory they must pay reverence with faith, considering that they are in the presence of God, our adorable, beloved Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal king surrounded by the angels and the saints along with the queen of heaven and earth, who adore him deeply. Before entering, each in an attitude of faith, will think of what she is going to say to the supreme goodness in the sacrament while adoring and praying. It is written: "Before entering God's sanctuary, take care of your steps and avoid to be like one tempting God." They will be recollected and devout in the presence of God in the sacrament, will increase their respect, recollection, devotion, and faith during the exposition of the holy host (Vol. 1, page 99).

Writes Father Vitale:

In God's house, the padre was at home.

What memories! What dignity! He expected the same type of behavior from us. Our eyes should look down, our hands should be clasped, and we should not make noise. More than once, he stopped children before entering the chapel, getting their attention, urging them to recollection, and with living faith reminding passages from Holy Scripture: "When you enter the temple of God, watch your steps; before prayer prepare your soul."

In the evening of holy Saturday in 1919, a Religious could not help laughing in the chapel. The padre pointed out that there was no temptation stronger than laughing before the Holy Sacrament (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 278).

He demanded greatest respect and silence in the church. He was totally of God and absorbed in him. Obviously, he made us distinguish between the presence and the absence of the Blessed Sacrament in the church. In the last case, he allowed somehow to speak aloud, especially in the days preceding July first, when we made a radical cleaning. He did so to make us feel the difference between the presence and the absence of Jesus in the tabernacle.

How he loved decorum in the house of God! Someone went up to say that he was exaggerated! "He perhaps decorated the house of God to excess. Saint Anthony's church proves it, because it was heavily decorated by his will." Another critic says, "Did he provide decorum for the house of the Lord? For my taste, a chapel should have a pretty crucifix between two candles on the altar. For him instead, who had a soul of a simple child, an altar full of pictures and paintings of any size was fine. In fact, the walls of his room were covered with such things of piety." Others judge differently. "He provided the house of the Lord with the magnificence of the decorations. The churches of the Holy Spirit and Saint Anthony in Messina prove it. Even though poor, he was not concerned about cost when the decorum in the church, or the worship of the Eucharist was involved. Our sisters inherited a scrupulous care for the cleaning of the sacred furnishings." "He was so fond of poverty, but lavished everything he had for the house of the Lord. Our church in Messina proves it." I came to know that during the building of Saint Anthony's temple, he showed his wish that it should be the most splendid. To tell the truth, the Father wanted the temple so beautiful, rich, and pleasant to help the praying soul talk with God. He wanted the chapels of his houses decorous to the utmost.

"He loved so much the decorum of the house of God! When he appointed me to the office of sacristan, he told me, "My son, remember that this is an angelic office. Care for cleanness in everything, as we use in Messina.' Woe, if he found the lamp of the tabernacle extinguished! And how many times he warned me on this subject!" "He wrote some rules on how to take care for the cleanliness. He himself used to teach the sacristan how to take away the wax spots." "He disliked seeing even a smut, and everything was to be bright. We ourselves were to be clean when we entered the church. A boarder girl dusty with flour received holy Communion; she was warned about doing so again: else, she would be deprived of Communion. "He was keen on taking care of the chapel, and often admonished the sacristan about lack of cleanness, linen, etc. He used to say, 'We have to economize, but never in the things of the church.' In the opening of a new house, he himself prepared the chapel."

## 4. The sacred furnishing

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To perform the worship properly and decorously, the church requires articles of linen, vestments, and sacred furnishing. Let us begin with the flowers on the altar. The Father prescribed, "Endeavor to put on the altar elegant vases of natural, fresh flowers. The houses having a garden will cultivate the flowers for this purpose. Before placing them on the altar, they must be cleaned from the insects" (Vol. 1, page 53).

A former orphan of our institute who was also a floriculturist, testifies, "The Father was pleased with me, when I brought flowers on the altar. The church should always have clean, natural, fresh flowers."

"The chapel is the house of the Lord," he said, "therefore, everything must be worthy of him." "He himself took care of the liturgy's performance, teaching us its meaning so that we

might participate with full understanding." The vestments should be rich. Nothing escaped him, and he called our attention even for a candle out of place. "As to the church's decorum, he was very accurate, almost scrupulous. The corporal shouldn't be used when it had a little spot. The purificator should be used twice at most, by the same priest. He said, 'As it's impolite giving one's own napkin to another person at table, so it is at the altar...' The key of the tabernacle was a matter of care. He related sadly of another institute where a boy opened the tabernacle in the night and ate all the consecrated hosts." To avoid the profanation of the Blessed Sacrament, the Father prescribes, "The church will never be unguarded when it is open, and the key of the tabernacle will be kept with care even when the church is closed. The sacristan is bound by a duty of conscience about that --and the superiors as well" (Vol. 1, page 56).

In Chapter 9, no. 11, we talked about the Father's meticulousness about bread and wine for the mass. Let us glean again from the various relations. "He examined the wine for the mass frequently, and in case of doubt he made it analyzed. To avoid that someone of the children drink the wine from the cruet, replacing it with water, the wine had to be prepared shortly before the mass."

For the mass he wanted the liturgical candles of bees' wax.

"To have liturgical candles of bees' wax, he acted without thought of expenses. I often witnessed his warning to the sacristans. He said, 'I cannot forgive that!' After writing in the rules 'to be regardless of expenses for the candles of the masses,' he prescribes, 'Avoid the candles which bend by heat. They are indecent, may cause risk, and an inconvenience during the liturgy'" (Vol. 1, page 41).

"He used to say that we should be unconcerned about expenses for the following: worship, charity, and orphans." Brother Raphael, a sacristan at Saint Anthony's church, recalls the Father's care for the church. "He wanted everything of luxury. As soon as we asked for something, he provided it quickly so that our church lack nothing."

When he preached or celebrated in other churches, especially in Calabria, he felt humbled and sad at sight of the altar's sacred furnishing, if decorum was lacking. Shortly after, he himself provided the necessities. "When celebrating in other churches, if he saw a lack of cleanness, especially in the corporals, he was grieved and exhorted us to be generous with the poor churches." Even though poor himself, he sent big alms for the furnishing of

the churches lacking means. Once, he was given two surplices on his saint's day. He gave them up quickly...

"Any circumstance was a good occasion for him to foster religious services, triduos, novenas, etc. The sisters in charge of the religious linen followed his teaching, and were faultless. Lay people instead took care of cleaning the floor and the pews. Everything was in order, and the Father had no reason to admonish them." To tell the truth, the Father once happened to reproach... but the fact is unknown to the above reporter. When the Father celebrated mass the first time at Saint Paschal's, he was very grieved because the carpet was not on the predella. When the liturgy was over, he pointed out that the candlesticks were old, but he did not forgive the absence of the carpet, because we had it. "The sacristan was at fault," he said, "at fault were the others who did not perceive the absence of the carpet, the more at fault was me, who celebrated." As a penance, at lunch time he ate kneeling.

A Daughter of Divine Zeal reports,

I once forgot to change the vestments of the previous day. The Servant of God realized that the color of the vestments should be another one when he was already on the altar saying the introit. After mass he complained about that and told me that he would fast by eating bread only, to atone for it. I knelt saying that I should do so, and he concluded, "Well, both of us will do it."

Another sister relates: "I was a sacristan for several years. He always recommended me to provide the richest vestments and furnishing. He used to say, 'The vow of poverty is for us, not for the Lord.' When I succeeded to have them through work and wits, he was very glad."

Also in the the week days the vestments were to be decorous. He remarked, "It is true that we have to dress better on Sundays; however, because the mass is the same, the vestments are to be beautiful every day." The Father also looked at the chevrons. He liked best the ones superimposed on the fabric, because they are more striking.

## 5. The day of the Lord

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Sunday had to be the day of the Lord, for everyone.

On Saturday, at refectory, after reading the calendar and announcing the practices of piety for the following day, the reader added, "Sanctification of the feast through more prayer, and spiritual reading." In the female communities, the mother superiors reminded the people that the sacred feast should be observed as the day of the Lord and that some of the weekly activities were not allowed on that day.

The Father was so rigorous about holiday rest that he made people change their personal clothes between Friday and Saturday. By doing so, the linen personnel had enough time to pick up and book the clothes in the week days. Cooking excepted, no other work was allowed on Sunday. Sunday was the day of the Lord. We couldn't even clean the chapel. But he wanted more frequent and longer prayers on that day. "Sundays and holydays had to stand out both for dressing and personal freedom in order to have the ease of paying private visits to the chapel."

Beginning with clothes, we had to respect the feast. "He demanded of us to dress in new clothes, to adorn the chapel, and to rest perfectly on Sunday." A Religious specifies, "He wanted a kind of uniform on holydays, which made the difference between the week days and the great solemnities. One day he noticed that Father Palma's brother was going to the church without wearing the tie. Approaching him, he remarked that so dressed, he wouldn't go to the mayor, and added, 'Our Lord is greater than the mayor...' "He loved the great displays of ornament in the solemnities, and some sacristans were reprimanded for having left out the ornament."

The feast was for the body and the soul, and we had to take care of both. "Sunday belonged to the Lord totally, and the solemnities had to be also striking in the refectory." Sisters and orphans had to sing, the recreations and the walk were longer, and the food richer. He himself checked it."

But there was something that he promoted for the main feasts, or special occasions, taking into consideration the good of souls: the performance. He fostered the performance in our communities on holydays, and invited the people to prevent them from running the risk of sin in other places.

He writes, "Performance must be very moral." The script was to be approved by the superiors, who should eliminate any unbecoming expression to keep the serenity of children. He was very strict on this subject, and wrote:

For instance, sometimes the devil is called in interjections; that is improper, because we must always detest his name; or the most holy name of God is called out of purpose, in vain; it must be corrected. Also the passages in which the characters tell lies must be corrected in such a way that they raise no sense of disapproval from our children, but seem like a joke. Likewise, curses which prepare to no repentance, nor to triumph of virtue, must be eliminated (Vol. 1, page 159).

In his spare time, the Father wrote little works for the performance of the orphaned girls.

He was keen on declamation, and when available he supervised its rehearsal. Sometimes he also played the prompter.

## **6. THANKSGIVING**

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Potential part of justice is also the virtue of gratitude that somehow rewards the benefactor. What, and how many benefits has God given us? Hence, he expects our gratitude. "Render constant thanks; such is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1. Thes. 5, 18).

The Father prescribes peremptorily:

Please do not neglect this highest duty, not only because it is a great means to win more graces and mercies, but all the more because the great donor of all goods deserves the greatest, universal tribute of gratitude from each creature. Gratitude shall be a predominant virtue of this least institute, which is consecrated to the sweetest Heart of Jesus! Following the exhortation of Saint Paul: "In all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart" (Phil. 4, 6), we will never cease giving thanks to the Lord (Vol. 1, page 70).



Continuing, the Father urges us to see a great benefit from the Lord in everything:

For instance, if you get a pin you need, please say in your innermost, "Thanks, God; how great your goodness is!" or the like. No gift is a little one when it comes from God, or from the divine Heart of Jesus that shelters the infinite, eternal love of God for human beings. If we have faith, we will not think of finding a pin by chance, by coincidence; on the contrary we will see Jesus as handing it to us! If we do that, no thing will be underestimated. If we had the spirit of the saints, we would be enraptured by the consideration of God's goodness who prompts the object we need. Let us acquire at least the spirit of meditation through our efforts and the divine grace in order that we may thank the divine goodness for anything, without underestimating even the small things (Ibid.).

The Father continues writing wonderfully on the divine benefits, either material and spiritual, dwelling upon the fatherly care and love of God, who provides us with bread. He develops the thought of a renown French prelate, Msgr. De Segur.

For instance, let us pick up a bit of bread. Made of flour and water, it is cooked in the oven. Flour comes from the harvest's seeds of wheat. But the harvest, on its turn, is produced by other seeds of previous harvests, and so on back through sixty centuries since the creation of the world. Providence kept fructifying the harvest, which gave those seeds of wheat, which made the bit of bread, which you are about to eat. If it is possible, let us number the millions of people who worked through the centuries to produce these harvests, considering how many times the sun, the earth, and the rain fecundated them; how many wooden or iron tools, which imply millions of people and minds working to form them, were used! Flour, which made the bit of bread that you swallow and consume in a moment, was produced in the mill...(Vol. 45, page 518).(1)

We are talking not only of bread. "The Lord provided us with innumerable kinds of food, linen, clothing, houses, and comforts of life." Touching upon the marvels of grace, the Father reminds us of what our Lord did and suffered for each of us. "Each person would say: "The divine Word became man for me, suffered 34 years for me... is dwelling in the Holy Sacrament for me. He created the angels, his most holy mother, and the saints for me. He formed the holy Church, and its treasures of grace for me." Then he points out: "O soul, please see how each person is bound in duty to always thank God, the most holy august Trinity, for the benefits he receives as though he were alone on earth!

Also the suffering coming from the Lord is an object of our thanksgiving.

We also add that the events or things or opposition or suffering that are unpleasant to the senses or to the spirit are worth our thanksgiving, because everything, even God's punishment, depends on him and is for our good. Owing to these considerations, we must thank God.

Happy the person who goes deeply into the science of gratitude we owe to God for everything, great or small, prosperous or unpleasant, always thanking God for all things not only when they happen but also when she remembers them (Vol. 1, page 71-73).

First, the Father asks the Lord for the virtue of gratitude. "O Lord, we pray to you that among the virtues coming from your Holy Spirit you also grant us a pure, holy gratitude for your graces. We want to express it through frequent thanksgiving" (S.C. Vol. 9, page 66, no. 13). Thanksgiving will always precede our petition for new help and divine mercies. "While making the supplication, we have to premise before each petition an affectionate thanksgiving for the graces already granted " (Vol. 1, page 81).

Both in the fulfillment of the office and in the last prayers of the evening, we must thank the Lord.

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"Besides being prayerful, each will be mindful to give thanks to the divine mercy for the good fulfillment of the task, and before going to sleep everyone will thank God for the enlightenment and the graces he granted them during the day to help them fulfill their tasks, begging pardon for their faults" (Vol. 1, page 124).

At the end of the day, the Father offered to the Lord the Lord's merits along with the merits of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; as well as the masses celebrated on the same night, the masses celebrated before, and the ones which would be celebrated in the future. He also offered the Eucharistic Supper celebrated with the apostles, as well as the sacrifice on Calvary. He said, "I make this offering in thanksgiving for the mass I have celebrated and for the Communion I have received in the morning; as well as for so many aids, assistance, providence, preservation from evil, and good meetings you have granted to me. I also want to atone for my miseries and sins, willing to thank for your infinite patience in tolerating and helping me."

When the respect for God was at stake, the Father paid no attention to human respect. For instance, when the orphans who were fugitives from the earthquake entered Francavilla Fontana, the lay committee had established to go directly from the station to the city hall for the reception. The Father opposed the plan. He "required that the orphans go first to the Capuchin's church to thank God and implore the celestial protection." They did so. After the religious service, which ended with the blessing of the Sacrament, the people went to the city hall (S.C. Vol. 1, page 127).

For the evening meditation on the divine benefits, he prescribed the book by Sarnelli. "To foster gratitude and to frequently thank the Lord, the booklet by Sarnelli on the Divine Benefits is of great help" (Vol. 1, page 70). "On the last day of the year, he made us say after any prayer, 'thanks be to God'."

Once he prescribed: "Up to a new order, after each decade of the holy rosary we'll say all together, 'thanks be to God!'" (Vol. 34, page 155). We did so for several months. Father Vitale perhaps made a remark, because the Father wrote to him, "Thanks be to God. I too considered the matter of the indulgences. But the words of the preface, 'It is our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks,' made me prefer the fulfillment of this sacred duty to the indulgences of the rosary. However, we will take advice from the superiors" (Vol. 33, page 30). We deem that the advice was contrary to his opinion, because the practice of saying 'thanks be to God' ended.

He wanted each house to write the divine benefits in a special book. "The mother superior will pay careful attention that the historiographer record the special graces, the divine mercies, and the spiritual or temporal benefits concerning the house." These benefits will be remembered in the triduo of thanksgiving at the end of the year. Then, he exhorts to preserve the records.

The records must be preserved jealously in the archives to be at the disposal of our institute's future generations; thus, the present and the future houses will nurture great, continuous gratitude to the divine infinite goodness not only for the general but also for the special graces which were granted to each house. Likewise, following her devotion, each sister will record or keep in mind the memories of the special graces, for which she feels obliged toward the divine amorous lover, Jesus (Vol. 1, page 118).

## 7. The Blessed Sacrament in the new chapel

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The presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the institute was considered by the Father as one of the greatest graces. He wanted the institute to have an everlasting gratitude for it through the institution of the feast on July first and additional practices to which we have pointed out before. Now we remember the last public honor he gave to the Blessed Sacrament. We quote Father Vitale:

Because the chapel of the Holy Spirit was too small for the increasing population of the community, the sisters prepared a roomier, nicer one. When the altar and the tabernacle were ready to receive Jesus in the Holy Sacrament, the mother superior thought of doing something pleasant for the padre by inviting one of our priests to transfer the Holy Sacrament to the new chapel, according to liturgical rite.

But the padre's reaction to their good idea turned out to surprise the sisters. He burned as of sacred fury, and with heavy emphasis he said: "How dare you remove the Holy Sacrament from his dwelling without having a solemn thanksgiving for the innumerable graces that he has granted the community and our institution in the many years he has resided in that place? What coldness! What ingratitude!" Then thinking he would be in time, he went upstairs to stop the transfer which the sisters had already done. He turned pale as if he had been stricken by an inner wound, his eyes filled with tears, and he ordered the Holy Sacrament put back in his former place. Then he gathered the community together, made them understand the indispensable duty of thanking our Lord for the graces granted from the tabernacle, and commanded a solemn triduo of adoration, in which sisters and orphans participated in the thanksgiving one after another. In the evening, the padre, Father Palma, and Father Vitale gave appropriate speeches for each of the three days.

The padre preached on January 12; even though suffering from his illness, he seemed to become younger in the Holy Sacrament's presence. How eloquent he was that evening, the last time he preached in the church! To begin with, he made his audience consider that the first

dwelling place of Jesus in the house was that tabernacle that happened to be the bright center of all the graces for thirty-one years. He said:

"At the end of the year, we used to read the list of the divine gifts we received. Who can have the list of thirty years and count this great treasure, this river of continuous mercies that has sprung out of this source, i. e. Jesus in the Holy Sacrament? Here, Jesus has been as a loving Father, a helper, a comforter, a life-giver; here, we started Eucharistic Day on July first; here, we have presented petitions, vigils, prayers; here Jesus, in the silence of the Holy Sacrament, received and prepared the proof of his love through the holy communion.

People say that when Jesus came back from Egypt, he wanted to enter the Bethlehem stable. I would also say that we should leave here in tears owing to our dear remembrances. Eighteen years ago, some of you were safe because you were here during the earthquake. Besides, is it not from here that Jesus looked at, called, and told each of you He wanted to save you? Here, we had the taking of the habit; here, many souls, that are in heaven now, were formed in front of this tabernacle!

In addition, let us remember the particular signs that the Virgin Mary's motherly love gave from this place."

In the evening of the 15th, the five priests of the orders, the sisters, and the orphans transferred the Holy Sacrament in a procession to the new oratory. The act was accompanied by hymns and songs. Before the blessing, the padre urged the community to new fervor and love toward our Lord in the Holy Sacrament once again (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, pages 358-59).

We end the topic about gratitude toward God by remembering that the Father offered 33 masses to the Lord in 1924, "in thanksgiving for all the graces, the great, extraordinary, manifest, and hidden mercies; as well as for the preservation from evil, for the gifts, the vocations, charity, and blessings that you have granted to these institutes and to me, a sinner" (Vol. 6, page 102).

## **8. He was upright with his neighbor**

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Now we treat the virtue of justice as regulator of our relations with our neighbor.

We report some generic evidences about the Father's justice with his neighbor.

"As to justice, he was scrupulously exact." "He always

respected the rights of others. His creditors were always paid off, and he had a special bookkeeping for each of them." "As to justice, I know that he was always upright with God and men. "I always saw him perfect in his priestly duties." "As much as I know, he was always upright with God and men." "To my knowledge, he always respected the rights of God, and he did the same with his neighbor." "I exclude that he ever failed in his duties about justice." "Not only he met the rights of the orphans and others, but also helped generously the unemployed." "He paid off the rights of men; he also praised the workers and us for the fulfilling of our duty." "He didn't take away a hair from anyone. People told me that a worker at the Holy Spirit's mill was given a quarter of loaf. When the Father knew it, he ordered to give a whole loaf."

I have to clear a statement of a witness, who thought of human prudence, but others could interpret it as a fact of injustice.

Let us read the relation: "The Father lacked human prudence. When he was about to build the church and the orphanage, he occupied little areas of others' land which were necessary for the project, delaying the regulation of the affair with the owners. However, his unwariness never happened to be to his prejudice, it also turned to be pleasant to the owners. -- With Padre Francia, nothing to do..."

Let us specify the fact.

The Father commissioned the project as though all the land were his property, because he presumed that the owners had no difficulty to sell it to him. In fact, the witness says, "With Padre Francia, nothing to do." However, one of the owners, Mr. Puleo, holder of the mill and bakery of Gazzi, tried to put the Father in trouble because of political ideas. He could not suffer that his land be used for the building of a church... Father Vitale tried to approach him more than once, but he pretended to be deaf. When the Father was informed, he wrote to Father Vitale, "Let us begin saying special prayers, because the devil will try to play a dirty trick on us through this owner" (Vol. 33, page 20). Once, the Father sent Mr. Rosary Marchese to invite the man to give in, but he rebuked Mr. Marchese with rage, "I would rather give the land to the devil, not to Padre Francia!" As soon as the Father was told of this revilement, he said calmly, "This time I will become a devil, so I will have the land for the church." He had the donkey hitched up to the calash, hastened to Gazzi, talked

with Mr. Puleo for a few minutes, and returned to Messina. Then he sent Mr. Marchese to Father Vitale telling him to keep in touch with Mr. Puleo and draw up the contract.

## 9. His debts

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Treating about justice, Tanquerey writes, "We must have a horror of debts, when we are not sure of paying them off. If someone has contracted any, he will make a point of honor in paying them off, as soon as possible" (Comp. di teologia ascetica e mistica, no. 1042, b).

If the saints would have followed this rule, they would have been unable to do what they did... This does not mean that they escape the rules of morals, rather they apply them in the light of God. Reading the life of Don Bosco, Cottolengo, and Don Orione, we see that their debts are written in capital letters. These saints were up to their ears in debts, but were justified in their way of acting by their firm trust in God. They were sure of paying them off, and Providence backed their pledges. As a matter of fact, none of their creditors was disappointed.

After bartering the things of his house, the Father was compelled to run into debts in order to make the institution continue. Debts became an issue of his conscience to such a degree that the Servant of God Don Cusmano had to calm the Father's spirit. Writes the Father, "One day I asked Father Cusmano whether the charitable institution could run into debts. He answered in the affirmative, because we urge the people who give us credit to perform a work of charity" (S.C. Vol. 9, page 147).

Let us see the various relations on the Father's debts.

"He always paid off his debts, and when he was late by necessity, the interests grew up with usury. He used to say that his creditors did not get worried." "Especially in the early times, he bought on credit; but sooner or later, he always paid off. He did not trade on the price, sometimes instead he gave more." "He always paid his debts. When something was unpaid, it happened because it was remitted, as in the case of the baker Notturmo." The Father sometimes asked for a reduction from his

creditors, as we read in the letter of March 1889. "I remit 60 liras on account of the two bills amounting to 83.53 liras. I would like having some discount on the remnant, because it is a matter of orphans. If it is not possible, I will remit what you say" (Vol. 41, page 10). He ran into debts even with his sister Teresa. Her daughter says, "Now and then, he asked my mother for money, which he paid back little by little, until she remitted the remnant."

Knight Crupi, a printer, proposed the purchase of a typographic machine to the Father, who was unable to buy it in that circumstance. Still, the printer delivered the machine. Later, the Servant of God paid it off up to the last cent. More than once the Father complained when people asked more for their service, because, he said, 'he used to overpay them'." An old former worker testifies, "In my time, we were always in debts with grocers; but the alms-boxes and our begging (me and Father D'Agostino) always paid off our debts."

"When the Father was unable to pay his debts quickly, he overpaid them later." "He paid off his debts, and when he was unable to do so on time, he couldn't rest. He called upon me and the orphans to pray Saint Joseph in the church. The saint always heard our prayer quickly, even in circumstances which seem prodigious to me." Once, a 10,000 lira bill was over due. After praying to Saint Joseph, the Father asked and obtained a loan from the Brothers Sacca', forwarding agents. Gone to pay the bill, the creditor said that it had been paid off by an old man. The Father trotted gladly to the Brothers Sacca' to give back the loan. But when they knew that the Servant of God had prayed to Saint Joseph before asking the loan, they were amazed at the fact and refused to receive the money, because it belonged to a saint --they said."

Please read an original interpretation of a sister. "The Father always paid off his debts; when he was unable to, the Lord did it. I explain my statement. Anxious about how to pay the 14,000 lira bill for the mill and the bakery, we prayed continuously to the Lord for help. But the December 28, 1908 earthquake came in, and the creditors along with their heirs died. We were free from the debt. However, we said many masses and other prayers for the dead."

A sister reports:



One day the Father told me very gladly, "The Lord made me very happy. You must know that before the earthquake I went to Mr. Rotino, in Messina, to ask a loan of 2,000 liras. Mr. Rotino was out, but his son gave me the money immediately. With joy and humiliation I promised to give it back as soon as possible, but the earthquake came in and none of that family was seen any longer. A few days ago, while going to the Dominican Sisters I happened to run into a pale, meager, shabby young man at Salita del Grillo. 'Do you know me, Father?' He said. I did not recognize him immediately. He said his name. I was struck with wonder. I told him that I had a thorn in my side because I was in a condition to pay off the old debt, but I was unable to find the creditor. I gave him the 2,000 liras, provided him with clothes, and assigned a monthly help to him until he recovers himself financially."

## 10. His deep sense of justice

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Brother Louis, who was a prefect to the orphans for a few decades, reports,

The Servant of God didn't have any preference. Should an orphan be right, he would be judged right even against the opinion of Father Vitale. One day I deemed to dismiss an eighteen years old orphan in order to avoid the evil he had threatened. Both the Servant of God and Father Vitale were out. When Father Vitale came back, he was informed. Amazed, he said that I could have waited for him, even because the orphan was recommended by a person of high rank of Messina, who for sure had been offended. The Servant of God, however, after taking into consideration the things, said that I had behaved well.

The Father wrote to the Morning Star Sisters and asked prayers for the suit of Avignone. "I beg you to pray for a lawsuit, if we are right" (Vol. 39, page 67). When Msgr. Farina was appointed apostolic visitor to the Daughters of the Sacred Side, the Father recommended to the mother superior "to want and desire the triumph of the truth only. If we are wrong, we want to be declared wrong; if we are right, right, for the glory of God and the good of souls. Therefore, we must help ourselves with prayer" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 222).

Let us proceed to other things on the subject of justice. We

know that the Father "overpaid people because of his deep sense of justice."

We have already said that the Father took the necessary steps to buy Saint Paschal's former convent through the mediation of the bishop. Now we give further details of the business by quoting Bishop Di Tommaso.

The price of Saint Paschal's former convent was 25,000 liras, and I pledged myself to reduce it on behalf of Canon Di Francia, who wanted to buy it for his orphans. Yet, when he knew that the owner did not make a donation, but was selling the building because he was encumbered with debts, instead of expressing his satisfaction to me who had succeeded in reducing the price, he almost felt mortified.

Father Vitale specifies:

Msgr. Di Tommaso was gladly amazed at the Father's childish naivety and exquisite sense of justice with regard to the purchase of Saint Paschal's land, I think. For fear that the price was unfair because of an error of the owner, the Father proposed to give a sum greater than the fixed one by contract. But the owner too admired his finesse of conscience, and refused to accept any extra money. At the end, the bishop had to intervene to calm down the Father's conscience.

The Father bought other monastic buildings, such as Saint Benedict in Oria, the Holy Spirit in Messina, the Capuchins in Taormina. In each case, not only he did so with the ecclesiastical and the civil approval, but also offered masses and prayers for the people who had dwelt in those buildings. When the Morning Star Sisters were taking the steps to buy a former convent of the Carmelites, the Father wrote:

You ask first the most holy Heart of Jesus whether he wants to give it to you with his full blessing and enjoyment. The monastic goods that were bought by lay people, even with the approval of the ecclesiastical authority, sometimes involve expiation. Please begin saying special prayers for the holy souls of the Carmelites, especially for the sisters who dwelt in that building. May they intercede for you, and you may have the building with the full divine blessing.

Then, he makes a remark about the purchase he made in Messina:

By permission of Rome, we have been given the beautiful convent of the Cistercian Sisters, which was empty. And yet, for about a decade, sisters, probationers, and orphaned girls died continuously! Finally, the earthquake killed thirteen sisters and destroyed two thirds of the building. After the earthquake, things began proceeding normally. Every month we pray for the souls of the sisters departed (Vol. 39, page 12).

We often read in the Father's notes the masses he said for the Religious who dwelt in the houses handed down to us: sisters of the Holy Spirit, Capuchins of Taormina, Alcantarines of Saint Paschal, and nuns of Saint Benedict. He also applied masses for the "living Benedictines and Alcantarines, and prayed that the communities living in those houses have grace and health" (S.C. pages 67-77-78...).

We also point out that by his sense of justice the Father bewared of attracting to him the persons who were working in the apostolate. We read in his notes: "While traveling by trolley in Rome in the evening of October 26, 1925, I met Ms. Belloni Emily who is living in Nomentana Street, 191, Rome. She is a very pious zealous member of Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Can we hire her as a distributor of the Anthonian booklets? To keep her in the holy mission for the poor of Saint Vincent de Paul, I would say no" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 82). During the 1915-18 war, the typography of Oria was deprived of its workers by the calling up to the army. The Father writes to Father Vitale: "Let us praise and trust the divine will!" A worker from Sicily offered himself for that job, but the Father remarks "If this man is working in a Catholic typography very long, can we take him away? I don't think so" (Vol. 31, page 90). He hired the man a few days by emergency, then he sent him back.

He disliked bargaining on price. "One day Brother Joseph Anthony Meli was boasting before the Father because he had bought the fruit very cheaply, almost nothing, after bargaining... the Servant of God plainly observed that he did like doing so because the seller has his own rights; therefore, he preferred Brother Placid who used to say, 'The sellers are not demanding'."

On this subject, the Father had his own criteria. One day he asked a coachman how much he charged to take him to the station. "Two liras, my Father," he said. "Two liras? It's very cheap. At least three."

Writes Father Vitale:

"Among the innumerable acts of charity, I like referring to the following one. One rainy evening in December of 1915, while

coming back from Oria I stopped at Reggio Calabria because there was no ferry service. A porter helped me find a safe hotel because there were no vacancies around.

When the padre was told about it, he asked me: 'How much did you give the porter?'

When I answered that I had given the man two liras (which in those days made the man very happy), he said: 'Too little, too little. Do you know his name?'

'Vito Morabito,' I said.

Writing his name in his notebook, the padre said: 'When I go to Reggio, I will find him to make recompense.'

Later, he told me gladly that fortunately he had found the man and that he had repaid the obligation with more money" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 347).

But, the evident injustice made him indignant. A sister narrates:

After Easter, the Father proposed to us and the orphans a trip to a village near Messina. All walked, except me and four or five orphans who went by coach without stipulating the price with the coachman. Arrived at the village, I had an argument with him, because he charged too much. The Servant of God intervened, checked the taximeter, and told the man that we had to pay the fare due, not more. The coachman began cursing, and the Father responded that justice must be observed. If we had to give him any extra money, that should be given for extra reasons. However, the cursing of that poor man made the Father melancholy, his smile died out, and he left. When he returned in the evening, he mildly scolded me for my negligence and consoled us by saying that he had gone to calm and make the man acknowledge his faults. To atone for the blasphemies, he suggested a short pilgrimage to Our Lady of the Angels' church, on a nearby hill of the village. To raise the sisters' morale who were shocked by the sad event, the Father told us a few jokes during our walk.

Above all, the Father insisted on meeting the workers' rights. "He never disappointed the workers, nor us who had a monthly pay." A sister reports: "In the early times, our financial situation was bad, and few of us reduced the workers' wage on the sly. As soon as the Father knew it, he was amazed, and scolded, and threatened us, cautioning against doing so again."

He wrote, "The sisters will observe justice by paying the workers' legal wages; they will practice charity by avoiding

overworking the laborers; will be benign with them by abounding in consideration and retribution" (Vol. I, page 221).

It goes without saying that some employees did not produce as they should. More than once I heard the Father complaining about those who abused his kindness. He said, "Oh, human misery! They do not appreciate the fatherly government!..." He meant, "What can we do? I, however, will not change my system."

In fact, he was always very compassionate and helpful to everyone.

A former employee narrates:

One day I had to absent myself from the work because my wife was sick. The Servant of God happened to know it and during the day asked several times about me. Informed, the following day I approached him and let him know that I was a father for the seventh time. He gave me 500 liras as a present, more 200 liras for the baptism; furthermore, he placed the institute's calash at my disposal. He told me that he would be present in spirit and in prayer that day December 8, which was auspicious. After forty days, a typhous infection jeopardized not only my wife's life, but also my son for lack of milk. The Servant of God encouraged me by saying that he would pray and that Our Lady had assured him that my wife would be healed. As to my son, he was worried because the milk of several animals had hurt him. He gave me the milk of his cows for about one year. My son healed and grew up stronger than the other ones... On the occasion of a great feast, my wife urged me to provide my children with shoes. To avoid taking advantage of the Servant of God's generosity, when he sent me for an errand which required little time, I pawned my watch along with its golden chain at 'Cassa di Risparmio Vittorio Emanuele.' I concealed my banking transaction. No one was present. At my coming back the Servant of God asked me why I was so late. I told him the fact with reserve, and he kept insisting, "You must know that I am not like a brigand threatening a wayfarer in the forest with a dagger, saying, 'Your money or your life!' By normal mail I send money even abroad to people I do not know, why shouldn't I help the needy ones who are around me? On the other hand, you realize that I cannot prevent everything, nor can I take care of everything because I am busy with plenty of things; therefore, some of your needs can escape me." The content of his speech made a strong impression on me, so I asked myself "Does he have perceived my transaction?" I let him know the thing. "I should punish you," he said, "because you have concealed it. I will do so if you relapse." He gave me 250 or 300 liras to close my transaction at the bank,' and ordered the treasurer to raise my monthly salary from 300 to 600 liras.

James Cappadonna, a worker who lived in the community of Oria, after retiring decided to remain with us "to prepare

himself to a holy death in the house of God." The Father took careful attention to his needs, and wrote,

"I warmly recommend you to take loving care of the good old man Cappadonna. He has complained that children have taken away his walking stick. Provide him with another one fitting for his needs, and when he goes to the church up and down the stairs, go along with him. Since he has lost appetite. but eats sweets heartily, provide them from Sister Elisabeth" (Vol. 30, page 62).

The Father himself bought the fitting stick, one of luxury, very comfortable. At his first coming to Oria, the Father gave the old man the stick along with sweets, greatly embellishing the gift with his own smile. Later, Cappadonna was struck by paresis. "If you had seen the Father busy to serve and to wash him, when he was unaware of his own relieving! The little room of the patient was across the Father's room, and any time the Father came in or out of it, he visited and comforted the sick old man. Even though Cappadonna dispensed with our service, the Father demanded that we attend to him in shifts in the night. Once, he scolded us very severely because none had taken away the plates from the man after breakfast. "Don't you understand," he said, "that these poor represent better Jesus Christ? When we are sick, all of us are ready to serve; shouldn't we do it better for the poor that are the more expressive images of Jesus?"

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## **11. Give Caesar what belong to Caesar**

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Let us treat another potential part of justice: obedience. This virtue inclines the will to execute the commands of the superiors, acknowledging the divine authority in them (Rom. 13, 1). When we treat the subject of the religious vows, we'll talk about that. Here we confine ourselves to treating the Father's obedience and observance toward the civil authority.

"He was always obedient and respectful toward the ecclesiastical and civil authority." "Taking into consideration many things, he always acknowledged God's authority in the ecclesiastical and civil superiors." "For him, obedience toward the bishop and on the whole toward the superiors was a strict duty." "I never realized any fault in his duties toward God. As to the men endowed with authority, he told us to revere them because they represent God." "Even though they do evil to us, we must be subject to the authorities." "Visiting the other communities, he often paid his first visits to the archdeacon, the mayor, the religious and civil authorities."

He used to say: "The mayor may not be a good Catholic or a true Christian, but is always an authority to be obeyed."

He wrote to give due regards to all authorities:

When the sisters keep in touch with civil or state authorities in occasion of their visits to the institute or in any other event, they will pay the greatest respect by using the reverent speech which is due to their dignity.

Both in the cities and in the little towns, the sisters will foster among the pupils and the orphans the esteem for the king, the queen,(2) the prefect, and the mayor. When it is required by society, they will send greeting cards to them and their ladies on special occasions, such as their saint's day, birthday, and main feasts like New Year's Day and Christmas. It is always useful. In some occurrence they may send a gift such as devotions, children's small works, etc. It is excellent inviting them to attend performances or rewards after exams, etc. When a personality happens to fall ill, the community will be concerned, will get information, will let him know that the community is praying; during the convalescence a cake or something else may be also sent.

All this induces esteem and affection; we, however, have to do so not for human protection but by faith, confiding in God only. And yet, we have to use licit means to keep friendly relations with authorities because of the good results for God's glory, for the institute's good, and for the persons in authority, who are led to form a good opinion of the holy religion along with its institutions (vol. 1, page 221).

Leaving the moralists debating about the moral obligation of observing penal laws, in practice the Father required the exact observance of the authorities' dispositions.

"He observed exactly the laws. One day I brought some cheese I was given by my family. The Father asked me whether I had paid the duty, and I told him that I had concealed it. 'I am tempted to send you back, he said, to pay the duty; you have to confess it.'" A few months after the earthquake, a typographic

machine was sent to Oria dismantled into several boxes. Brother Joseph Anthony mailed a letter specifying the boxes along with their numbers as though they were containing salt, which is a monopoly in Apulia. As soon as the Servant of God knew it, he sent a telegram and shortly after a letter reprimanding the fact." "He was also scrupulous about the rights of Caesar. One day, after pointing out to the meat and the fodder in the calash, he made me hold three eggs and a bottle of altar wine before customs. The agent smiled and left us through. The Father said, 'We have to do so!' He was also scrupulous in paying taxes and recommended us to attentively observe the civil ordinances." "Questioned at the station by the customs officers whether he was carrying food, the Father showed some home-made biscuits to calm the pangs of hunger during the journey, and he paid nothing. But remembering that he had also two doughnuts in the pocket, he returned to report them. Obviously, the officers smiled at that."

Read how a sister avoided customs. "To avoid paying 300 liras to customs for fifty scarfs for the orphans, the officers suggested to me to cover the scarfs with two old ones. When I informed the Father, he reprimanded me saying that it was against justice and truth, and that I should return to remedy. I worked hardly to calm him down!"

"One day I told him that I used again a few stamps that were in good conditions. 'No, no,' he said, 'even though the saving goes to the missions, that's not right. Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar; give God, what belongs to God'."

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Brother Joseph Anthony was unable to buy the ticket for the tram in Rome because of the crowd. He arrived at the destination, and got out. The Father ordered him to catch up the man of the tram and to hand him the forty cents due. But the brother did not succeed.

In 1919 Mr. Giglio was going to Naples and the Father asked us to send sugar and spaghetti with him. He added, "On condition that there is no difficulty in the journey, and it is possible without any trick against customs. If the law prohibits it, leave it out; if you can pay the duty, do so" (Vol. 35, page 221). Then, he remembers that his uncle Chitti is blind, and his only hobby is pipe smoking, but there is a scarcity of tobacco in Naples." Therefore, he asks to find some in Messina. "Send it with Giglio, if he can do it without prejudice" (Ibid. page 222).



One day, in Messina we had to overpay the electricity bill because the typographic rotary machine did not work for two months, and we had not reached the minimum of contract. To avoid the inconvenience, the officer himself suggested in confidence to idle the machine, as everyone does in such a case. When the Father knew it, he exclaimed, "But this is a fraud! And the officer was scandalized because you kept silent. You had to protest!" Furthermore, he let the officer know that his suggestion was unacceptable "because the Religious don't defraud!"

I heard from Lawyer John Parisi who was an employee at the post office for many years that he had suggested the sisters to avoid declaring the total number of the 300.000 copies of God and Neighbor. As the Father knew it, he refused the suggestion, because it would make us commit two evils: lie and theft.

## 12. Love of his own country

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"Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar" includes love for one's own country. It is true that such a love "can degenerate and become excessive and dangerous nationalism," Pius XII remarked to the "Marchigiani" in a speech known far and wide; but we must avoid going to opposite excess. The Pope complains that "sometimes we meet people who are afraid of being particularly fond of their homeland... Some even avoid to pronounce the word homeland, and replace it with another one more fitting for them. But the decreased love for one's own country is one of the signs of the spiritual confusion" (March 23, 1958). The Second Vatican Council confirms these concepts:

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"Citizens should cultivate a generous and loyal spirit of patriotism, but without narrow-mindedness, so that they will always keep in mind the welfare of the whole human family which is formed into one by various kinds of links between races, peoples, and nations" (G.S. no. 75). It follows that "true patriotism is a Christian virtue" (Royo Marin, *Teologia della perfezione*, page 674).

Also this virtue must be pointed out in the Father.

First, for homeland we mean the native city.

The Father loved so much his Messina. He used to say, "My Messina, my beloved Messina." He sang the glories which made her famous. "Classic land of heroes... rose of the pretty Peloro... famous in the war-cry... When at the sound of the martial poems, Angioino abandoned Sicily..." But he exalted Christian faith the most. "The true glory of a people," he said, "consists in his faith, because faith consists in the intellect's respect for eternal truths. Thus, a human being becomes a servant of God, and serving God is like reigning" (Vol. 22, page 25).

In science and art of reigning  
You were second to none.  
Noble mother of noble geniuses,  
Your fame undying will be.  
No, Italy has not a land  
More fecund and pretty than this.

But more beautiful, great, and divine  
Than in any profane glory,  
You stand out among all, O Messina,  
For the faith enflaming your heart.  
The sacred treasure of the letter  
Surrounds you with sovereign glory.

(Vol. 47, page 214).

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From the native city we proceed to the nation. The Father loved Italy. He wanted it "great, magnanimous, and powerful," exalting it as the one "privileged among the nations" (Vol. 47, page 109). Unfortunately, those were days when the "Roman controversy" was alive and burning, and he was deeply grieved by the painful clash between the Church and the state, longing for a solution (See ch. 3, no. 5).

We confine ourselves to recalling two interventions by the Father on God and Neighbor, in a momentous point of Italian history: the defeat at Caporetto in October 1917. It drove the armies of the central empires to the bank of the Piave. They are two articles quivering with heartfelt patriotism.

The first reminds the Italians of the duties toward their country in the momentous events.

## THE HOUR OF DUTY FOR EVERYONE

The sudden, unexpected irruption of the enemy army in northern Italy, already halted by our valiant soldiers, imposes everyone to ponder on the supreme hour of our duty.

The army has the duty to valiantly battle and to make the enemy feel that the Latin blood is stirring in the veins of Italy's sons. Such a duty is felt by each battalion, or better yet, by each soldier. The strong resistance of our army along with its counter-offensives proves it.

Likewise, responsible are the politicians and the military who are at the head of the civil and political life. They have fulfilled their duty by sacrificing themselves at work.

Each citizen must cooperate to achieve the victory and to defend the nation, either by money, or by saving the orphans, or by cultivating the fields. The press and other means must encourage the soldiers and the civil resistance.

The believers, the Catholics, and the clergy must combine action with prayer to God and the most holy Virgin so that our beloved country may have its frontiers safe, and become great among the nations.

The most sacred duty of checking corruption, cursing, and profanation of holydays is incumbent on those who have the power to do so. We must be convinced that the God of the armies is above weapons and armies. The aspirations leading us to war may be legitimate, but we must weed out forgetfulness of God and anything which hinders divine blessing. Since the beginning of the war, War Office enacted laws forbidding the soldiers to curse. Why didn't it forbid all of the citizens? Why didn't it threaten and inflict a punishment? A Catholic nation is more responsible for it than a non Catholic one.

Therefore, each citizen has a duty to forbid cursing among his employees, to warn the blasphemers, to check corruption, and to observe holidays. Women should give up wearing low-necked dresses. When we fulfill our duties toward God, we render the best service to our dear country for its victory, improvement, and prosperity among the nations" (S.C. Vol. 1, page 195).

When the troops were withdrawing, some soldiers dispersed. Tiredness, hardship, and fear moved them to throw down the weapons and desert. While recomposing the army, the government invited the deserters to appear within a certain period of time, promising amnesty to all of them. Then the Father published the following:

## WARM CRY TO THE DISBANDED

We beg pardon to the Rev. priests if we appeal not only to our readers and Anthonian zealots, but also to the zealous ministers of the Lord, asking them to double their efforts in recruiting the soldiers who are not where they should be.

We do not say that the deserters number many. Their affection to the family, or an instant of fear (of which an Italian soldier should be ashamed) deranged their mind, making them desert their posts! Fortunately, the heroic resistance of our army proves how much solid and convinced the soldiers are, and their counter-offensive will make the Latin valor shine more. However, all of us must be interested in the soldiers who did not appear yet.

The royal government along with the War Office has promised amnesty to the deserters. It has already delayed twice the time of their appearance, and most of them have returned. Those who have not, are threatened with a shooting at their backs as traitors of their country.

Each Italian who endeavors to find and urge the deserters to appear, renders a patriotic and evangelical work. Let us find and make the deserters consider what a contemptible shame it is deserting the post at the front. It is a brand of infamy which will be recorded to the deserters' generations. They must be told that if all of the soldiers had done as they did, the doors of the Italian cities were opened and all of us were prey and slaves of the insolent enemy who changes our temples into barns.

The deserter must be shaken and brought back. He must be told that the shooting at his back is sure if he does not appear, and is more terrible than dying gloriously in the fields of honor. Besides, we have to die, and a beautiful death honors the whole life! But, who knows if he will die in the war. Do all soldiers die? Aren't there so many of them who shared in several campaigns without having even been wounded?

We have to teach the poor deserters that God protects those who do their duty and trust in him; that to suffer and to work in obedience to the chiefs in service to the homeland is a holy job worthy of eternal good. Still, taking for granted that the soldier is going to die while doing his duty submissively and courageously, he must be sure that he has eternal life assured. He will be a martyr. His memory will be honored and blessed.

Plenty of soldiers fallen on the battlefields defending our beloved Italy are in heaven and are enjoying the eternal beatitude in the bosom of God! Our Lord Jesus Christ sanctified our love for homeland when he cried over the unfaithful Jerusalem, foreseeing its destruction. His tears say, "Love your country. If your blood is needed, give it!" If our warm cry convinces one soldier to appear, it will make us happy for

having done a work of love for our country, and a work of charity for our neighbor. We, however, hope to convince more than one soldier! Such a satisfaction we hope for our readers, zealots, and Italian priests! Our clergy is already conspicuous for its heroism in the battlefields; we hope that it will add another glorious crown of patriotism by bringing back the deserters to their post.

Our war male and female orphans - innocent and glorious progeny dwelling in the Anthonian institutes - are praying to Saint Anthony. May he drive out the enemy who was reaching his sanctuary, and to bring back to the army the dispersed children of Italy!

We quote the verses that our sublime Poet Felix Bisazza wrote years ago, and we apply them to this war as though the poet were repeating them from heaven for our beloved Italy:(4)

Watchful spirit, to your sacred tents  
I will sing new, warlike odes,  
A coward is the man who sells himself to the foes  
And throws away his weapons!

Coward is the land that its pomp forgets,  
That does not shudder, nor grow pale in the shame,  
But you are Italy, and as you were before  
Still Italy You are!

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The article excited a reaction in those of the clergy who considered the Italian army as usurper of the pontifical state, and therefore they condemned the Father's patriotism. Father Vitale informed the Servant of God, who answered from Trani:

As to my article for the deserters: the bishop of Oria found it excellent, and praised it very much! I realize that people are divided by various opinions, and I acknowledge that it was patriotic. But it was also evangelical since preventing a soldier from being shot in the back and from infamy is a greater charity. People should take into consideration that. Nowadays, so many bishops speak out patriotically even in the church for matters less important, like the loan, etc. It is true that I reached so far as to assure the soldiers of the eternal salvation, etc. I follow the opinion of learned men and theologians, such as Ventura and Faber(5) who hold that most people are saved, and a few ones are lost! Well, if this happens in ordinary life, what can we say of the extraordinary expiation in the war? It is understood that the word martyr has been used poetically, not theologically! In theological terms, we cannot call one martyr without having evidence! (Vol. 32, page 97).

## 13. Toward the benefactors

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We have already seen how grateful the Father was toward God; now we see how grateful he was toward his benefactors.

"He showed his gratefulness to his friends not only during their life, but also after their death."

"He recommended us to be grateful toward our benefactors by praying for them, and toward our superiors by prayer and submission." "Coming back from begging, he often exhorted us to pray for the generous donors." "He recommended us to pray for our benefactors." "He overwhelmed his benefactors with blessings and personal prayers, also making other people pray for them." "We have special prayers, also daily ones for our benefactors." "He reciprocated the proof of friendship with prayer and sacred gifts." Says Prof. Gazzara, "He was a friend, and so grateful to me for my teaching in his institute. When the city hall transferred me far from Messina, he wrote to the prefect who stopped my removal." "Out of Christian friendship, plenty of people helped him in his labors, and he reciprocated with money or various gifts. He used to say the mass in favor of the benefactors." "When he was in a city or town and knew of a benefactor dwelling there, he felt obliged to manifest his gratitude by giving his regards and paying visits to him."

"For sake of gratitude toward his friends, he made us list the benefits from the friends in a special note-book so that we might reciprocate with temporal or spiritual return. At the death of Lawyer Picciotto, who helped me so much in my vocation, the Father told me to reciprocate with prayers and good works" "He reciprocated the benefactors with prayer, and also with gifts such as sweets on the main religious feasts and on their saint's name. Among the benefactors he numbered the confessors. As to the chaplains, he used to give them a more generous offering for the mass." "He felt obliged to manifest his gratitude to the persons who helped the institute in any way. When the

benefactors were rectors of churches, he often gave them sacred pictures or statues. He was very thankful toward the professionals who rendered their service free of charge to the institute, such as lawyers, or doctors. He sent them sweets, or other gifts. As a secretary, I was entrusted to write 'beautiful letters,' as he used to say, to the generous persons. In those times, now and then the chime of the bells reminded us of praying during our work for the benefactors who had sent more than fifty liras. I wrote from his dictation several letters full of respect to bishops and ecclesiastical superiors."

Lawyer Intonti of Trani was of great help to our institutes in Apulia, and rendered his service free of charge. The Father wrote to him: "The good services rendered with affection to a community, as you are doing long since for our orphanage, cannot be reciprocated with silver or gold, but with the deep, indelible feelings of the most sincere gratitude. Therefore, we implore graces and blessings from the Donor of all good." Then he urges him to accept a little flower as "a manifestation of the internal gratitude" (Vol. 42, page 74). After the purchase of Pappagallo palace, he insists to know his fee. "We must keep in mind that you are a professional, a father of family, therefore we must know what we have to do" (Ibid. page 84).

We also have evidences about his writing for benefactors: "He wrote some pieces of poetry for the benefactors." "He was delicately grateful to all his benefactors, as well as rich with words and even pieces of poetry sometimes."

Let us remember a few of them.

At the death of Grace Cucinotta, who offered the patrimony for his sacred ordination, the Father wrote a wonderful funeral oration.

Francis Ciampa of Piano di Sorrento (Naples), "a man of great religious, civil, and domestic virtues," had rigged 18 ships for his citrus fruit commerce, setting aside the proceeds of one of them for charity. The Father had experienced his great beneficence. When Francis Ciampa died, the Father wrote a beautiful play in verses. Three characters: Faith, Hope, and Charity celebrate the merits of the famous dead. The choir of the orphaned girls ends the play:

.....

How many and many times  
He broke bread on our desk,  
And through his children,  
He consoled our worries!  
Oh, render to Francis  
What he gave us on earth.

(Vol. 47, page 287)

Mr. Mariano Gentile left a legacy of 55,000 liras to the Father, who was enabled to install the mill and the bakery, whereas Mrs. Mary Pellegrino left her property. In a speech, the Father says, "Gentlemen, look at the portraits of our benefactors, for whom these orphaned girls pray every month on the day of their transfer to the eternal rewards" (Vol. 45, page 453).(6)

With deep emotion the Father remembers Prof. Louis Costa Saya.

He was a real lover of his homeland, a real citizen, a real friend, a brother of all, a father of the poor, a tender father of the youth, on whose perils he mourned. He was a faithful son of the church, a militant Catholic, a model of Christian life, an angel in human face (Vol. 45, page 115). His laboratory of chemical analysis assured him big profits, but one day he read in the gospel the parable of the rich who plans to increase his stores, and is told: "You fool! This very night your life shall be required of you. To whom will all this piled-up wealth of yours go?" (Lk. 12, 20). This reading renewed the miracle of detachment from earthly things in that candid soul full of divine love. From the beginning of the gospel, the saying, "If you want to be perfect, sell what you have, give it up to the poor, and follow me" changed the readers into heroes (Vol. 45, page 120).

Louis Costa Saya makes his decision. Because he is single, he will give up everything to the poor, making himself a poor. As to our institute, listen to the Father:

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My humble charitable institutions and my orphanages, especially at their start, found in him a great, generous benefactor. When broken hearted, I knocked at his door, I found him always cheerful and eager for helping me, sometimes more than I hoped. His beneficence was a main factor for the foundation of my institutes. He loved them with affection, helped them up to the end, and delighted in their progress (Ibid. page 121).

We end this chapter with the remembrance of Msgr. Francis di Paola Carrano, Archbishop of Trani. The Father says, " I loved him as my father, and venerated him humbly" (Vol. 45, page 160). On the golden anniversary of the archbishop, the orphaned girls made a performance, the Father had a speech, and praised the archbishop's merits toward the institute. He was like a founder. In fact, the orphanage began at the outbreak of the 1910 cholera. Says the Father:



Can I keep silent about the generous financing from your beloved archbishop? Not only did he give up this ample palace of great value, but he also contributed with 2,000 liras to the expenses of the installation. Besides, he gave up the income of the shops which are worth 20,000 liras; to increase the vacancies for the orphans, he built an ample second floor with corridors and dormitories. They are fit for decorously lodging 32 orphans, several sisters, and candidates for religious life. Despite having given up everything, he has shouldered the property taxes and has provided for the future of the institute in order to perpetuate it... Gentlemen, doesn't all this constitute the merit of the loving founder of this important house of salvation for so many orphans, and of the laboratory for the education of the poor children of this city? But I did not mention his love, his fatherly thoughtfulness, his careful attention to the well-proceeding of this charitable institute. It forms his glory and a new decorum for the city of Trani already conspicuous for religion and civilization" (Ibid. page 497).

On that occasion the Father inaugurated an inscribed marble tablet with the sculpture of the archbishop in low relief as a memorial of his great merits.

## Notes

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(1) In the rules, the thought of Msgr. De Segur is analyzed in detail (Rogationist Anthology, page 104 and following).

(2) In the Father's time Italy was a reign.

(3) The Father was thinking of the Turks who were allied with the central empires.

(4) The Father refers to Italy the verses that Bisazza puts on the dying Byron's lips (1788-1824). The English poet had gone to Greece to defend its freedom from the Turks. The original verses sound, "But you are Greece, and as you were before - still Greece you are!"

(5) Father Joachim Ventura (1792-1861) of Palermo, superior general of the Theatine Fathers, was a renown preacher, nicknamed the Italian Bossuet. Involved in politics, he supported the Guelph idea of Gioberti, acknowledged the Roman republic of 1849, and at its fall took refuge in France, where he died.

Father William Frederic Faber (1814-1863), an English ascetic writer and Newman's companion, became a Catholic and published very effective books on asceticism, such as:

*Tutto per Gesù', Il Creatore e la creatura, Betlemme, Il piede della croce, Il SS. Sacramento, Conferenze spirituali*, etc.

(6) In the notes after the speech, the Father appeals to public charity. "Each owner who is free to dispose of his goods, should not forget these orphanages." Since none should fail in justice, he specifies, "I have said, 'Each owner who is free to dispose of his goods,' because those who are bound to relatives or others, they must think of them first. We respect the saying: 'The soul to God, and the goods to whom they belong'" (Ibid. page. 455).

## FORTITUDE

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# 1. Definition

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While prudence and justice regulate the relations with our neighbor, fortitude and temperance put order within ourselves.

Let us see how the masters of spiritual life define fortitude.

It is the moral virtue that strengthens the soul in its aim at achieving the difficult good, keeping the person calm even in the presence of very serious obstacles. It overwhelms the fear of great dangers, labors, adverse criticism, and everything which could paralyze our effort in our achieving good. It keeps us from giving in when we must fight, and moderates the untimely audacity and excitement, preventing us from rashness.

This virtue shows up with our engaging in and our facing the hard things courageously. The Christian has to tolerate such things out of love for God, knowing that it is harder to tolerate them for long time than to engage in them in a fit of enthusiasm. When we bear the hardship of life with calm without complaint, we join fortitude with patience; when we tolerate things for a long time, we join longanimity; and when we persevere in the good, opposing the strong evil, we practice perseverance. Fortitude also implies the virtue of magnanimity, which drives the soul to achieve great things without cowardliness and weakness. It prevents it from falling into presumption, vainglory, and ambition (Garrigou-Lagrange, *Le tre eta' della vita interiore*, Vol. IV-V, page 150).

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Furthermore:

Fortitude urges us to foster Christian life and sanctification through the hardship, resisting up to the end. It implies a combination of things that make this virtue attractive. The person resolute to make progress must take the bull by its horns, he needs guts, and even some aggressiveness in facing the obstacles. He must dare with Christian initiatives and patience. To be faithful for a day is easy, but to be so for months, years, and all life is difficult. The time factor is a heaviest dimension of sanctification. Some people say, "Isn't martyrdom itself easier than

climbing the Carmel?" Fortitude implies to hold fast, to wait untiringly, to bear hardship, to face pains and drawbacks, to suffer scorn, opposition, and threats" (G. Thils, Santita' cristiana, Compendio di teologia ascetica, page 309).

## 2. He was strong

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Did the Father's fortitude shine? To begin with, we foretell our readers that for the details regarding several events, we sometimes confine ourselves to hints, referring to the existing or future biographies.

We start from the general evidences.

The Father "showed Christian fortitude by strongly facing the obstacles he met in promoting his important enterprises." "He showed his fortitude since his taking of the cassock, against the will of his mother." "His moral suffering was various and profound, but he never revealed it. Sometimes he hinted at its gravity when I submitted mine, and he asked me questions like this: 'Did you ever ask the Lord to die in these circumstances?' On another occasion he told me mildly: 'This is nothing!'" "I think that he feared the Lord only, and overwhelmed the obstacles in saving the people by trusting childlike in God." "He met plenty of difficulties in the foundation of his institutes and overwhelmed them by trusting in prayer, not in himself or in human means."

"He used to overcome the frequent physical and moral hard suffering with deep recollection and confident surrender to God. Joining his palms and bowing his head, he said, 'God's will be done!'" Let us read trenchant evidence. "The Servant of God was an oak, not a reel." He had to overcome great difficulties during his life, but he concealed them in his heart. However, he always asked us to pray to the Lord that he might overcome them. More than once we heard of grave news concerning the institute, but we never realized any worry on the Servant of God's face, because he welcomed and talked to us with his usual smile and calm."

"He showed an adamant fortitude in manifesting his religious ideas and in applying them to his institutes." "Hunger,

injustice, and opposition were the great obstacles he overcame magnanimously." "He did not pay homage to human respect; his strength was prayer." "The blooming institutes he founded show his fortitude."

"He was never irresolute... By only seeing him, we could figure out a Servant of God. His great trust in the Lord made him stay firm in the adversities; anyone else would have become discouraged."

Writes the Father's niece, "My mother told me that he never was disheartened; he rather bore everything with gladness, even when he was lacking bread for the orphans." Full of faith as he was, he faced the difficulties with trust and overcame them by prayer and patience. "He suffered so much, but always with a strong spirit." "He had to overcome great difficulties because both priests and laymen didn't believe him. Even his relatives opposed him. But he was strong and won the esteem of everyone." "Convinced of the good cause, he got to its bottom without worrying about difficulties. He faced plenty of them from men and circumstances in the foundation of his institutes"

### 3. The Avignone Quarter

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The great enterprise the Father undertook successfully, which made his fortitude shine, is the foundation and development of two religious congregations. Their hard origin in the notorious Avignone Quarter is realistically described by him in the preface to *Precious Adhesions* (1922 Edition). To confirm it, we report several evidences.

Professor Vincent Lilla stigmatized with harsh words the moral disorder of the quarter (Canon Di Francia and his *Charitable Institutions*, Messina, Tipografia S. Giuseppe 1902).

In a distant corner of Messina, a bunch of old hovels give a resting place to human beings! The beasts' resting place could be envied by that

quarter's dirty women bargaining their body and conscience... (page 11). In that patch of cursed land the absence of any principle of morals and religion gave room to indecent unions. They didn't pay any respect to decency, and the mating among relatives broke the rights of blood. Lust and obscenity appeared in the most filthy, monstrous, infamous form. It was a barbarian state without culture, and awareness of human dignity. Even the dim light of common sense had been extinguished from that tainted place... A herd of beasts dwelled in that place. Indeed, man without reason and light of faith is less than a beast. In this place, instinct existed in the place of reason (page 14).

Such a picture is implemented by relations. "The social and moral environment of the people was formed by illicit unions, scurrilous language, contagious disease, damp hovels, a sense of horror against the Christian religion, and by the contempt of the public opinion. It was an insult to say, 'You should live in the Avignone houses,' or merely 'Mignunaru!'"

"Avignone Quarter: a bunch of dirty, narrow hovels giving a nightly shelter at the price of ten cents to the homeless of the city such as drunkards, thieves, beggars, and prostitutes. The owner: Knight Avignone, who earned his living from the rent. The children of Avignone Quarter were the first element of Canon Di Francia's institutes'. It is unbelievable how the Servant of God overcame the natural, physical, and moral repugnance against that environment."

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It was over half a century since Messina was offering such a view of moral and material depravation, when Deacon Di Francia set foot in that place. There he began improving the conditions in order to plant the seed of his charitable institutions and two religious orders. But he had to spend plenty of time with patience, and heroic fortitude!

## **4. Difficulties**

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Listen to the Father making a synthesis of the difficulties he faced.

Everyone knows the serious difficulties opposing the Lord's works; humanly speaking, these difficulties sometimes seem insuperable

The person who starts such institutions has to fight four battles:

1. He has to fight against those who oppose him, and the external oppositions such as censures, persecutions, and disapprovals sometimes coming from good people. Some of them say that the person starting such institutions is mad; others say that the work will come to nothing with his death, while the lack of resources, want, defections, ingratitude, a hundred difficulties, and vicissitudes make matters worse.

2. The starter has to fight with himself. He grows feeble, seems to fail, sees the enterprise as though it were unattainable owing to his spiritual weakness. On the other hand, the enterprise requires strength, sacrifice, perseverance, faith, confidence, sacred enthusiasm, want, tolerance, prudence, longanimity, and dissimulation; in short, self-denial is to be practiced at any moment.

3. Meanwhile one fighter is battling by day and by night, extrinsically and intrinsically, by means of other human beings and our own passions: he is Satan! The battle against the power of darkness is so hard and tremendous that the apostle Saint Paul said: "For we are not fighting against human being, but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities and cosmic power of this dark age" (Eph. 6, 12).

Satan fears nothing else as much as the foundation of a charitable or religious institution which aims at God's glory and salvation of souls. Such a foundation for him, is like the foundation of the Church: the anger and the fury which blinded him at the Church's birth return. What doesn't hell try to preclude in the foundation of such institutes? To resist and overcome the hellish powers, people need to provide themselves with God's help, the weapons of faith, Christian wisdom, prayer, pure intention, honest conscience, and wise counsels.

4. But a very surprising battle defies the institute's starter: it is the battle Jacob fought with the angel, with God. Even though the founder is nothing else but a weak, useless tool, since only God is the author of any good work, still God works with this tool! But He wants immolation, and Jesus wants us to imitate him. Our Savior fought with the justice of his eternal Father when "he made his prayers and requests with loud cries and tears to God" (Heb. 5, 7). He did so all his life long, on the mountains and in the graves, immolating himself on the altar of his divine heart. In his terrible agonies, "he prayed even more fervently" (Lk. 22, 43); so did he while combining his blood with his burning tears until his last breath. The prophet had foretold: "Would anyone plead his cause? Yes, he was torn away from the land of the living" (Is. 53, 8).

God shapes the institute and its members through privation, wails, sobs, and sacrifice; with one hand he sustains the feeble tool, with the other he trains the tool for the fight; with one hand he gives the necessary help, with the other he bars additional help, often blocking the way with



cut stones as the prophet Jeremiah complained: "He has blocked my ways with cut stones, he has obstructed my paths" (Jer. Lam. 3, 9).

In the midst of these troubles man comes to know his inability, his nothingness; he begins to distrust, to humiliate, and debase himself; he realizes that he is an obstacle to any good, and as Moses, he perhaps implores, "Lord, send anyone you will" (Ex. 4, 13). All paths seem closed. Heaven seems defiant, a thousand doubts call in question the work, as an output of foolhardiness and over-confidence, even prayer seems useless. God seems to have withdrawn himself in order to punish infidelity, interposing a cloud so that prayer may not reach him. According to the prophet Jeremiah's saying: "You have wrapped yourself in a cloud too thick for prayer to pierce" (Jer. Lam. 3, 44). And yet, that is the proper time to wail and sob before divine mercy from the profound abyss of one's own misery, "for we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us, in groans that words cannot express" (Rom. 8, 26).

That is the time to uphold God's wise delays: "Cling to him and do not leave him" (Eccl. 2, 3); this is the proper time to endure the mysterious battle for self annihilation, the time of wails, sobs, petitions, and any sacrifice so that these words of the Psalmist, "put your hope in Yahveh, be strong, let your heart be bold" (Ps. 27, 14) may come true.

At last, the fight with the angel ends with a strong embrace, but Jacob states, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" (Gen. 32, 26). The event comes to terms with copious, divine blessings, which are as much abundant as long and hard is the mysterious fight.

It was God who was planting, not people (Precious Adhesions, pages 6-8).

What the Father says, is not a doctrinal teaching, nor a rule of ascetic theology, but is the story he lived in the foundation of his institutes. Listen to him:

"The four difficulties, which surrounded this little charitable institute since its start, have been growing, always with more complication of things and the interlacing of circumstances. The institute has been surrounded by a vortex of tribulations which brought it at the point of death a hundred times before being completely born. How many times I felt myself exclaiming, "The waters went over my head; I said, I am lost" (Jer. Lam. 3, 54). (S.C. Vol. 10, page 211).

## 5. Charity for our Lord, out of love

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Let us consider a few details.

The Avignone Quarter "had become an opprobrious name to the city" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 207), and "none dared to set foot in that place of abomination" (Precious Adhesions, page 5). The Father said, "When Father Ciccolo paid his first visit to Avignone Quarter, he was so shocked that he left troubled and pale."

The Servant of God was not satisfied by paying a fleeting visit, but "buried and immolated himself there. He "perceived that no better place could make him practice some charity out of pure love for our Lord Jesus, who loves so much the poor and wants them to be saved" (Precious Adhesions, page 15).

To tell the truth, not everyone could have the Father's heroism; therefore, people began misunderstanding and contradicting him.

Humanly speaking, his relatives, friends, laymen and clergy who left him and began calling him mad, were not utterly wrong... Even the relatives of Jesus who looked at his humanity only, began disapproving his apostolate and came to take charge of him, saying, "He is out of his mind!" (Mk. 3, 21).

The opposition of his mother to his clerical life was motivated by her wish to continue Di Francia's name. This opposition grew up when he started the mission in the notorious Avignone Quarter. It was unthinkable for his family that Marquis Di Francia end up to that cursed land. His complete commitment to the physical and moral redemption of the Avignone mob amazed the orthodox, the clergy, and the cathedral's chapter. Such difficulties were hard, but he overcame them by using his weapons: prayer and the archbishop's blessing.

Since the beginning of his apostolate in Avignone, friends, acquaintances, and quite a few of the clergy endeavored to convince him that his enterprise was queer and unfeasible owing to

his literary culture and oratorical gifts. But he was not terrified. He rather went to Naples to meet Father Ludwig of Casoria, as well as to a holy nun, who encouraged him by saying that his enterprise was from the Lord.

"I feel as though I am now listening to him confessing his great difficulties, such as lack of means, or relating the discussions with his relatives and other persons who disapproved his utopia..." After hinting to the obstacles, a sister continues, "He tolerated these difficulties with calm, mild smile, and trust in the Lord. When he was in trouble, he rang the bell and gathered all of us in the chapel to pray with him." "The obstacles were various, such as lack of money, cooperators, building... but even in the midst of such things his spirit remained serene... He trusted in God."

Lack of means was a great obstacle. But he was always calm, because his help was the Lord... More than often and suddenly, when circumstances were pressing, we youth were invited by him to pray in the chapel "

"The Servant of God faced contradiction and misunderstanding from his brethren, for the newness of his work." "Obstacles of any sort notwithstanding, he succeeded to evangelize Avignone Quarter and was always loved for his virtues, above all his charity toward the poor." "I was very amazed at seeing priests and lay persons whom he had helped, grumbling against and calling him crazy and imprudent. I think that the Servant of God was aware of these opinions, but he bore that in silence."

## 6. Dating back to the origin

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Prof. Lilla describes the pitiable situation of the Avignone people. He gives a hint of the Father's plan to free those wicked spirits from degradation and to plant the flag of Jesus Christ. Then he defines the Father's plan:

"A dangerous enterprise, a path strewn with thorns and afflictions. But the Servant of God did not lose his heart in the presence of

difficulties. The hand of the Most High, who pierces and shines through the universe, helped him. Full of strong faith and aware of the gospel's teaching that the man of faith can say to the mountains to move, and they obey, he became more inflamed with zeal. He overcame the obstacles and carried out his generous plan. But he hoped for the cooperation of the few good, in vain. Furthermore, his plan was considered unfeasible and the pious planner was scorned. Whoever places his trust in the mutable wills of men, is unable to lead such institutions.

Others considered the institution utopia, and such as to fail for lack of means. Even worse, the planner had to fight against the owners of those slums who by greed increased the value of their hovels, and dejected Canon Hannibal M. Di Francia in the execution of his plan. While the charitable persons should contribute to the expenses of this holy work blessed by heaven, the egotists who have erased the image of God from themselves dare to trade on the works of Christian philanthropy. Resolute to root out the vice and to plant the virtue in that place, the Servant of God overpaid those hovels and spent most of his estate to lay the foundation of his institute.

Even though the following comparison is inadequate, it still has a resemblance. Christopher Columbus defended his point of view with unshakable faith and good humor against the scientists, the politicians, and the population of his time. Unshakable, Canon Di Francia resisted dangers and fights by seeing things from above and very differently from common people. Through this faith, he firmly laid the foundation of the pious institute, which is reaching such proportions as to rise the admiration of the honest" (Ibid. page 12).

We glean additional evidences: "The institution started at Avignone with the evangelization of the poor. They met the Father with indifference, derision, and hostility. In the beginning, Canon Ciccolo endeavored to help him by inviting the aristocracy of the city to that place. They were amazed at the Father's heroism, and disgusted by the environment."

Says Father Russello, "When I came over here, I knew from the first priests that the Servant of God had suffered very much from various parts. Marquis Avignone said that he wouldn't give his slums; the poor did not accept the Father's material and moral plan; they rather strained a rope in the alley to make him fall. The Servant of God, however, was always subordinate to God's will. Quite a few people said that he was unable to administer the two communities, even though he may be a saint." Nevertheless, he always trusted in Providence, and was never deceived. As far as I know, he was always alone in the fight. "The bad finance,

lack of subjects, the departure of Father Ciccolo, and the criticism of his priests friends were a great test for him." "I know that at the beginning of the congregation he suffered so much for lack of personnel and for the departure of a few cooperators."

## 7. Penury

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To go ahead with the institution, the Father had to face hard difficulties.

First, he began facing the consequences of his work by depriving himself of his goods. His niece testifies, "He used his furniture and real estate at the beginning of the institution. I remember that he sold the lands of Saint Stephen and Contesse." But, they were a drop of water in the desert... Hence, the daily worry of the Father and his heroic fortitude. Despite coldness, misunderstanding, commiseration, and opposition around him, he never drew back.

The maintenance of the orphans and the institutes abundantly proves the founder's heroic fortitude. The Father suffered scarcity of means until the devotion of Saint Anthony's bread developed. For so many years he knocked at the door of the people, who more than once acted rudely, increasing the bitterness of their rejection. The sisters shared with him the begging and the rejection. One of them narrated that after knocking at the door of a lady, she opened and cried, "Still you tormenting me? Right now the crazy Father Francia came over here."

The poor lady did not realize that her torment in listening to Canon Di Francia who asked for help was less than the Father's torment. He, an educated man of noble family was begging.

The Father once appealed to Don Bosco for financial help. The saint answered through Don Rua that his debts were bigger of many zeros, but exhorted him to resort to the press. The Father followed his advice and said that Don Bosco was inspired.

Listen to the Servant of God himself, who makes a faithful representation of the institute in a petition to the child Jesus on Christmas 1889.

My sweetest Lord, you already know it, but let me state it to you. This pitiable crowd of children resides here in a place conspicuous for poverty which is so dear to you; but it is unfitting for institutes because of its narrowness and unsanitary conditions. It is moist, dirty, out in all weather, and unsafe. And yet, O Lord, how dear we pay for such poverty and misery! The price amounts up to 3,000 liras a year, besides maintenance and remodeling! You know, O Lord, if we have had income enough to pay off for the excessive rent. O very adorable child Jesus, on this night of your anniversary I place at your feet this humble letter begging you to consider the pitiable state of this Pious Institution! From the innermost of my heart I beg you, O Lord, "Speed up the time of your divine mercy!" (Vol. 4, page 40).

The Father was burdened with debts for so long, even though his creditors were tolerant with him, a few cases excepted. "I think that the Father had no occasion to forgive injury, because he was never insulted; even his creditors delayed his payment. When any of them was disappointed, the following day he made friends again understanding the Father's situation and the great good he was operating." "I knew that everyone was devoted to the Father, save some poor who inveighed against their benefactor because they were not satisfied in all of their demands." The Father had no enemies; everywhere he won esteem and affection. "I remember that he was often sieged by creditors, but he calmly assured them that he would pay off. Sometimes I noticed that a few of his creditors kissed his hand as though they were begging pardon for their request, even though they had received nothing."

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Creditors, however, did not dispense him from doing his duty. He tried all the ways. Untiring beggar for charity, he knocked at all doors to comply with his duty. Then the Lord had to supply the remnant! We quote from the petition to the "King of the Ages, King of Eternal Birth, Jesus, Supreme Goodness," on March 19, 1904.

I stay in the abyss of misery. I say "I am lost." Jesus very clement, have mercy on me! Troubles surround me from everywhere; a tremendous responsibility crushes me; financial means are failing; my audacity is crushing down on my head! Which way I turn to force my way up, I find myself knocked down... My Lord, save, save this institution! Powerful king, deal with us with sovereign and generous liberality because we are poor and oppressed! My debts amount to 48,000 liras. I am 54 years old and after a while I will appear before your tribunal. My Lord, have

mercy on me! King very clement, hear me! I have not the faith which moves your charity, nor have I the loving look that wounds your heart! I am surrounded by darkness of tribulation and misery. In my hands, everything dies out. God very clement, save me! My creditors urge me, 150 mouths ask for food, the sick need drugs, the lives perish, the sheltered must be educated in the civil, religious, intellectual, artistic life. Which way I turn is barred. Stunted and in need of help, we search for resources, but we do not find any. God very clement, King very merciful, Jesus, why do you close your ears to my wails? I am worthy of it, but to whom should I appeal? I hope, hope in your endless kindness...

God very clement, save us, grant us a source of means, a source of providence to pay off 48,000 liras, and see to the development of the institution, the purchase of the building, the formation of four communities, and the relief of the poor! My Jesus, we are in an embarrassing situation, but for you one hundred millions are like a cent! Please move the hearts toward us... I'm speaking like a fool. Forgive me, Lord. If this institution is not yours, nor of your glory, destroy it and your will be praised!

I would not ask you for money and terrestrial means; but necessity is crushing us, the institution is not formed, and paying off our debts is a duty of justice! (Vol. 4, page 72).

It was from prayer that the Father drew strength to prevail over any obstacle by divine help and human cooperation. To form the institutes, the Father addressed a very long list of petitions to the whole paradise, beginning with the most holy Trinity up to the holy souls in purgatory. He did so with unshakable trust and perseverance for years and years... After praying with intense fervor, imploring everything from God, he promises: "I must double sacrifices, labors, prayers, penance, spiritual industries, and practice of humility" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 49).

We remember the endless petitions to the most holy Virgin and Saint Joseph, to whom he prayed with childish simplicity and filial trust when he was urged by necessity and had no way out.

We would have a crazy desire to say, "But who urged him to do so? He could be satisfied by playing the canon, as his colleagues suggested to him... These, however, did not have the Father's character!

## 8. Synthesis

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We submit to our readers a synthesis of the remnant main difficulties which hindered the Father's institution, as we know from his biography.

"Opposition, calamities, and obstacles appeared since the beginning of the two institutes. The chief cause of opposition was the notorious Avignone Quarter that disheartened priests and volunteers who were willing to help him... Mrs. Jensen separated to found another institution, which does not exist any longer; while Marchioness of Cassibile delayed the institution's development for five years by promising to the archbishop that she would do everything." "The hard task of the institution and the Father's courage stand out in the fights from the city hall and the political sects of Messina, Francavilla Fontana, and Taormina."

The fight with the city hall of Messina was decisive. After the eviction from the Brunaccini palace, there was no way out for the orphaned girls. Writes Prof. Lilla:

The helpers of the institution and the good persons who had at heart its fortunes were dismayed because everything seemed conspiring against it. Only Canon Di Francia was undaunted, seeing the things in God and shining with perfect serenity. How could you keep calm in the midst of such a ruin? All circumstances conspired against you. No, the man inspired by Providence could not lose his trust in God; his institution could not perish. Infernal was the city hall's fight when the proposal to give Canon Di Francia the Holy Spirit's convent was put to the vote. Senators are good men, but the senate is a wild beast! All of them liked him, all of them promised their favorable votes, only to forget it in the Court Chambers. To clear themselves they said, "Padre Francia is a holy man, but he does not know how to administer" (Ibid. page 17).

However, he won this battle.

To maintain the house of Taormina, he fought several years. The city hall had leased the building to him, but the factious



threatened him more than once with rescinding the contract. Furthermore, to compel him to give in and dismiss the orphaned girls, they created obstacles. They even cut off the drinking water, forcing the sisters to draw water from the public fountains. The Father was undaunted. He rather insisted with more perseverance until he signed a long lease contract.

We have talked of the pastor in Torregrotta (ch. 19, no. 7). The Father demanded of the sisters to pay respect and docility to him, saving the autonomy of the religious discipline. He wrote to the mother general:

Pastor Magliarditi is abusing too much. I have respected him and made the sisters do the same, but he pushed things so far as to compel us to submit our reasons to the archbishop, who will be in Messina tomorrow, Tuesday. The pastor wrote to me: "Either the sisters go away, or you appoint me as a rector of their church." I let him talk with the chancery office of Messina, but now it's our turn to act in the adorable name of Jesus. Let us say the rosary to the most holy Virgin, and on the feast of Immaculate Mary we'll pray to her to settle the little church, the sisters, and the poor miss (the owner who gave the sisters her houses, the land, and the church). They are in need of help and comfort" (Vol. 36, page 169).

After the Father's intervention at the chancery office, things were settled.

Desertion of the clerics. A former cleric says, "I think that the desertion of the clerics was the greatest obstacle to the Father. Few of them entered the seminary, others, the religious life, someone else returned to the world. I remember when the Servant of God entered the refectory and said, "The clerics abandoned me!" His sadness was ineffable." Scarcity of personnel was always a greatest crux for the Father. He opens his heart to Don Orione:

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You wrote that love of Jesus is crucifying me, and I wish. The spirit is willing, but nature is weak! Pray for me. The cup of bitterness is incomprehensible because the Lord is picking up several persons from the institute with illness and death. They had to direct and guide the people sheltered. Thus, the useful persons decrease, and those needy of help and guide increase! It always happened since the beginning, but now it's worse. What does it mean? Does the Lord want to slip things out of my hands? For sure, my sins are the cause of everything! Oh, I wish I knew the Lord's will (S.C. Vol. 7, page 21).

"As to the Father's fortitude, I know that during the turmoil

of Francavilla Fontana he always kept a perfect calm, exhorted us to imitate him, and to pray. And yet, the civil authority closed the residence in Francavilla, and threatened the institutes of Messina with consequences." "I remember the crucial moment of the fights from the bosses of Francavilla against the Servant of God, who transferred the orphaned boys to Messina. The bosses in return almost carried off the orphaned girls, and handed them to the Daughters of Saint Anna who had a house under the interference of the city hall. The Servant of God was very grieved, but kept his calm. As a vengeance against the bosses of Francavilla, the institute opened a laboratory for poor girls, who paid a tuition of about fifty cents a month, or nothing."

The Father's fortitude shone "in the dramatic circumstances of the first world war, when several of the youth were called to arms, many of the financial resources failed, and he was almost alone in governing the institutes." "I never saw him afraid in the presence of so many difficulties. However, during the 1915 war he worried at the rumble of the airplanes, and was terrified by eventual spread of gas."

In 1919, a fire broke out destroying the beautiful wooden church donated by Saint Pius X after the earthquake. Such a fire grieved, but did not discourage the Father. "I think that one of his hardest enterprises was the building of Saint Anthony's church, after the fire at the wooden church. Father Redento told me that during the fire the Servant of God kept calm, seeing everything as coming from God. In the building of the new temple, money often failed, but he never disheartened." When the fire attacked the wooden church of Avignone, the people got frightened and cried, but the Servant of God kept perfectly peaceful, saying to all, "Let us adore the divine will!" When he informed Father Palma about the sad event, and wrote, "Let us adore God's designs!" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 86).

Writes Father Vitale:

"This event was grievous, but it did not destroy us. On the same night, after jumping up from bed at the sound of the alarm, we met the padre covered with a cloak. Warding off resentment of the disaster, he said:

Hush! Let us not ask, let us not inquire as to 'why,' but let us adore God's designs and trust in Him!"

A sister reports: "When the wooden church burst into flames, I was grieved and busy, but the Father told me: "Calm,

calm. Do you think that it happened by chance? Who knows what good God will draw from this disaster!"

## 9. The separation of his brother

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Specifically, we'll remember two of the Father's gravest tribulations which date back to 1897. First, the separation of his brother Canon Francis, and second, the threat from the chancery office of Messina to suppress the female order.

Talking about the separation of Canon Francis from our Founder, we leave the task of exhaustively discussing the painful event to the future biographer of the Father. We confine ourselves to outline it, with the intention of correcting what someone else wrote cursorily and gamboling.

In the life of Canon Francis (*Il Padre delle orfane*, Casa editrice Nova Lux, Rome), Icilio Felici gets rid of the subject with the story of Tobit and the fly: the world is wide enough for both, we do not need to bother each other (page 86). Stanislaus Rigano, in the life of Sister Veronica Briguglio (*Sorriso e Luce*, Capuchin Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Via Asterio, 55, Rome) looks at the subject from a specific point of view: the two brothers work together with the same charisma (they think so) Their providential separation made them understand that each of them had his own charisma (page 32). Without making any distinctions and sub-distinctions, we can accept this point of view on condition that we implement it. The realization of the personal charisma is carried out according to one's own nature, formation, attitude, practical care, and mentality; and also according to one's own humanity, because all of us are children of Adam!

The chief role in the separation was played by Don Francis and Sister Veronica Briguglio, in the world Natala (1870-1950), a youth of Roccalumera (Messina), who had entered the Father's institute. I think that Rigano's work is seriously documented, but the two chapters "At service of charity" and "The co-founder" regarding our case, are somewhat fancy or based on documents, which are not sure.(1)

First, we correct the dates. We are told that the youth entered Avignone on May 6, 1886, took the garb on March 18, 1887 with the name of Sister Veronica, and professed on March 18, 1889. Felici goes further and writes, "It is worthy remembering that in the taking of the garb the youth kept their Christian name; only Briguglio changed her name. She was called Sister Veronica of the child Jesus. Four youth had entered the novitiate a few months before, but they professed together with the group of Sister Veronica on March 1889. They were eight in all. These circumstances, which seemed of little importance, were signs from Providence to bring the matter to an issue unforeseen by human wisdom" (page 96).

We are in the presence of an old fashion staged fame: everything is extraordinary in the souls since the beginning. Time and trials will lead them to the height of the virtue.

An early list of the sisters states that Briguglio entered Avignone on May 6, 1888. On May 9, 1888, she joined the aspirants, and on March 18 entered the novitiate.

No one can say that Briguglio herself dates back her entrance on May 1886. If this is the case, memory failed her. In fact, she testifies that when she entered the institute, she found four sisters in charge of the education of the orphaned girls. She adds, "When I came in, the sisters were directed by Miss Arezzo." Well, the first four sisters took the garb on March 18, 1887, and Miss Arezzo replaced Mrs. Jensen, who went away in the first months of 1888.(2)

We do not know when Briguglio professed. A list of 1891 numbers Briguglio as a novice. The first sisters professed in March 1892, perhaps in the presence of Cardinal Guarino (Lilla, Ibid. page 15). Probably, Briguglio was among them. Because she is given some preferences without evident reasons, I say that things happened quite the opposite. In fact, Briguglio professed in 1892 together with Sister D'Amore and Sister Nazzarena who had entered the community in October 1889, and the novitiate, in March 1890. All of them professed in 1892. About the change of the name, Briguglio is always mentioned as Natala in the chronicles. The change of the names began in 1892; then she was called Veronica.

Sister Veronica was a begging sister first; then she took care of chores. The superior was Miss Arezzo even when the Father

transferred the community to Brunaccini palace. When Miss Arezzo retired at the end of June 1892, Sister Veronica was elected superior of the few sisters who were taking care of the assistance to the Rogationists in Avignone; she intervened now and then at the Brunaccini community because Sister D'Amore fell ill and went outside for treatment.

In 1895 the Brunaccini community moved to the Holy Spirit. Some time later, the sisters living in Avignone left the house-keeping of the Rogationists, and moved to the Holy Spirit to form one community. On that occasion Sister Veronica ended being a superior.

Rigano is misinformed about the situation of the Holy Spirit when he writes that it was full of insects "which attacked the poor orphans as with an assault..." Rigano describes Sister Veronica "busy in battling the insects with self-denial. This action manifested her charity, fortitude, and the high spirit of service to which she had committed her life" (page 27).

The author makes Sister Veronica stand out over the other sisters who were as much worthy as she was.

From the opening of the Brunaccini community, a sister began distinguishing herself in piety, activity, faithfulness to the institution, and self-denial. She deserved the trust of the Founder, and was entrusted to open the new house at the Holy Spirit. She was Mary Nazzarena Majone.

She went to the Holy Spirit together with twelve of the older orphans and lodged in a room near the parlor. The remnant rooms were uninhabitable, while the best of the building was illegally taken over by a family, despite the city hall's injunction to leave it free.

Majone revived the hardest days of Avignone. The former convent was in a sorry state: it was full of dirt and insects.

The young sister did not lose her time in whining, but met the situation together with the twelve orphans, worked, cleaned, and transformed what they could.

Bold as the souls full of faith, she gathered a few masons, white-washers, carpenters... The place seemed a building yard... Thus, step by step, as the rooms were ready, the community of Brunaccini moved to the Holy Spirit" (G. Pesci, *La luce nasce al tramonto*, page 37).

With regard to insects, which Rigano overdoes, we specify that usually they are present with dirt. When the sisters washed away the dirt, the insects disappeared. Therefore, the overrunning

of insects described by Rigano is overdone by him.

While speaking of the difficulties of the former convent, the Father always hinted at the ruined building, a victim of robbery; as well as at lack of glass, at frames of doors, broken or inexistent windows, and floor unpaved. If there had been the plague of the insects, he would have hinted at it as he did with Avignone. He said that the slums were so full of insects that a few people died devoured by them. Even the older sisters, while speaking of the Holy Spirit they never hinted at such a plague. The Father fought several years with the insects in Avignone, but when Briguglio came in, they had already disappeared. Nor can Rigano say that the orphaned girls "were derived from the dregs of society and were really abandoned" (page 27). That was true at their coming to the institute, but the orphans who went to the Holy Spirit were living with the sisters since several years; therefore, they were clean and well under way in their life.

I suppose that Sister Veronica narrated the story of Avignone, and her sisters of Roccalumera misunderstood. It is the same for the case of the leper. If there was a leper in the Holy Spirit, the fact wouldn't have slipped out, all the more because the disinfection of the building would have been hard.

Now, let us examine the facts which culminated in Sister Veronica's flight to Roccalumera.

## **10. Don Francis in the institution**

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The sisters' flight to Roccalumera was not the result of a sudden decision, but the epilogue of a plan prepared long since. It is here that Don Francis comes on the scene.

Don Francis Di Francia (1853-1913) was a priest of great virtue, who distinguished himself in the ministry to the sick in the hospital, in the missions to the villages, and countrysides in the diocese of Messina. Felici sees him in the hell of Avignone

working together with the Father since the beginning (pages 61-62). Historically, this is not true. The redemption of Avignone is a work of the Father only. In the beginning, Don Francis gave a moral helping hand to him now and then together with the Priests Ciccolo and Muscolino, but all of them withdrew shortly after. Don Francis committed himself to his favored work, and came back to help the Father during the 1887 cholera, before entering the lazaretto. Later he went over there from time to time. Only after the death of his mother, on January 1888, he took up his abode in Avignone, performing, however, his usual apostolic ministry. The statement of Rigano that Canon Hannibal was helped by his brother Canon Francis "by order of Cardinal Guarino" is an arbitrary interpretation" (page 28).

We also rectify Felici. He says that Don Francis helped the Father as a loving son more than as a brother" (page 81).

Things went in the following way.

Don Francis was very affectionate to Hannibal, but was of different nature. His ideas about government and direction, for instance, did not match with the Father. He entered Avignone as a brother of the Founder and second to him only, up to a certain point. When he disapproved the Father's criteria in the direction of the institute, he felt drawn to substitute them with his own criteria. He began a deleterious propaganda, especially in the ambient of the clergy, who was openly hostile to the Father's work.

Let us listen to the Father on this subject.

After the schism was over, the Father felt obliged to rectify something with Father Patane', a good pastor at Gaggi, to reassure him about the vocations he could send to the institute. On May 22, 1897, the Father writes:

"What happened in my little institution was exquisite proof from the Lord for me and its members. Today that the proof is almost over, I wouldn't like to speak of it, all the more because I did not speak when the proof was on. I always kept in my mind the saying of the Holy Spirit "Your strength will be in silence and hope." However, if the past events leave traces harmful to my institution, I sometimes feel obliged to make rectifications. This is the case which moves me to write. Therefore, I keep to the point.

A priest of spotless morality, very dear to me in several respects, formed a bad opinion about some youth of my community, whom I esteemed. It happened because of insinuation of other youth who have been expelled. Hence, several inconveniences followed which I foresaw and tried to avoid by keeping silent and by concealing them, but to no

avail. In fact, when the priest very dear to me realized that he was unable to change my way of seeing things, he was moved by excessive zeal. He sought help from authoritative priests of Messina, and later from ecclesiastical authority.

He had underhand dealings with the authoritative priests for several years. When someone wants his own way of seeing, he speaks passionately and infuses his feelings in other persons. So did that priest with the authoritative brethren. Excited by zeal, they neglected to hear my reasons in order to judge more exactly. And yet, they were learned and wise persons. I perceived everything, but I kept to the saying, "Your strength will be in silence and hope." However, today I dare to say something because things are bordering publicity.

The ecclesiastical authority residing in our beloved cardinal was almost surprised eight months ago not only by that priest, but also by the others in whom that priest had infused his excessive zeal. Hence, a greater complication of things followed.

The echo of these events was not confined in the institute but rebounded outside. As it happens in similar cases, the tongues get mixed up, things are exaggerated, the bad persons take advantage, the devil blows fire, and a pandemonium rises.

Today, the ecclesiastical authority is convinced that the institute faced a trial. Meanwhile, the authoritative persons who shared in the excessive zeal of that priest perhaps have not changed opinion, because I never had any reason to talk with them. I was satisfied that the ecclesiastical authority knew the facts. Both the cardinal and Msgr. Basile have talked in a very comfortable manner for me.

Thanks to divine mercy, my institute has entered a perfect peace now. That priest, who is esteemed by the ecclesiastical authority, has been told by the same authority not to concern himself about my institute, and has been appointed to an honorable office in the chapter of Messina.

Very Reverend Father, I don't want to shock you with these events. It is not the first case in the foundation of the orders, rather is a trial that the Lord permits at their beginning. The trial has been such that it proves that the merciful Lord protected the existence of the institute against the snares of the hellish enemy" (Vol. 37, page 24-25).



## 11. The hidden party

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The Father confines himself to referring the action of Don Francis near the clergy, but a man who cares his own way of seeing speaks passionately and infuses his feelings in other persons. Don Francis was not satisfied by his propaganda outside, but began working in the community to get on well with a few sisters who shared his ideas.

The leader of these sisters was Sister Veronica, and we understand the reason. Long ago, when Don Francis went to Roccalumera on Sundays and feasts to say mass and preach, he became the spiritual director of Veronica. She wished to become a Theresian and was taking the necessary steps to reach her purpose. Don Francis suggested that she enter Avignone. Obviously, she continued trusting Don Francis, shared his ideas, and spread them. In a short time a division happened in the community. They acted in the shade, forming a secret society which linked up with Don Francis and followed his direction. Writes Father, "Some of the sisters' latent discontent with the padre's choice for mother superior became obvious to the padre" (Ibid. page 130). "The sisters' lack of perfect submission to the founder created concealed opposition" (Ibid. page 134). Therefore, the female community was divided into two parties.

Rigano writes that at the Briguglio's entrance in Avignone "there was little order and discipline." The fact is, disorder and indiscipline came in when Briguglio began leading an opposition party under the protection of Don Francis.

Felici thinks of "childish trifles" (page 86); and for sure gossip did not fail in such a situation, which the Father tried to dampen. For instance, he writes to a sister: "Don Francis did not send the particular food to... Not at all. Perhaps it has been the sister superintendent who took such a liberty. My brother had told her to make the same food for all. I say this to make you understand how imagination and temptation cheat you" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 236). But not everything was trifle.

Mother M. Carmel D'Amore stood out among the faithful to the Father. Don Francis never succeeded to draw her to his own ideas, because she never gave in, rather she told Don Francis, "I entered the institute to follow Padre Hannibal, not Your Reverence; therefore, I don't want to betray and abandon him." Don

Francis returned blow for blow: "You are like an egg. The more the fire cooks it, the more it bakes hard." When I was a student, I heard this episode from Brother Mariano who endeavored to know the memories of the institute from the Father and other people.

If we acknowledge "persecutions, calumnies, and incomprehensions," as Rigano writes at page 32, it should be understood that the person persecuted is not Sister Veronica, but Sister Carmel. Things became complicated with time, the appeals to the archbishops multiplied, and Cardinal Guarino removed Sister Carmel from the office of superior through an official communication to the Father on August 3, 1896.

The Father sent her temporarily to Graniti, her native town, to make up; but she was also persecuted over there by anonymous letters addressed to her and her relatives to impede her return to Messina.(3)

How did the Father behave in that instance? Remembering the nine years that Don Francis spent at Avignone, the Father charges himself with weakness. He writes on January 10, 1907: "I was very weak during those nine years, seriously failing in my duty of director. After three months, when I saw the first strange flashes, I had to dismiss you inexorably." Father Vitale, however, points out rightly:

The padre knew what was happening; he noticed a certain reserve in them which manifested itself in tasks half done, a lack of conviction, etc. He would have liked to have taken the matter into his own hands, finding an immediate remedy. But if he had done so, scandal would have broken out, bringing into light confessors and clergy who took offense at the padre's uncompromising will. The ecclesiastical authority would have had the right to supervise the proceedings of the community. Therefore, he suffered continually waiting for Providence to bring peace (Ibid. page 134).

When Sister D'Amore took leave of absence, peace did not come in the community. So, Cardinal Guarino stroke at the root prohibiting Don Francis to set foot at the Holy Spirit.

Rigano's charge that the Father was unable when he writes that the Father was unable "to refrain the malefic current" because "he was recovering from a nervous breakdown" is irrelevant (page 30). The Father fell sick in 1893, but he was

already in perfect working order in the earthquake of 1894. The facts we are talking about instead, regard the years 1895-1897.

Things became worse. Don Francis and his initiates began thinking of a flight following the example of Blessed Eustochio. She left her convent of Basicò by night to start the reformation. This is perhaps the reason why Rigano dates back the flight of the sisters reformers to January 22, feast of the Blessed. We, however, know that the exact date is March 11, 1897.(4)

## 12. The reason for disagreement

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To know exactly the reasons for disagreement between the two brothers, it is worthy checking some details.

The first reason is the difference of criteria about spiritual direction.

Father Vitale told us that in discipline Don Francis was freer than the Father, who was more exact. In the letter we have quoted, the Father points out a wrong trend which can lead the souls to errors. Don Francis presented the things according to his point of view, but the Father states that is "a subtle, delicate question merely spiritual. It is a matter of direction of souls for the formation of communities and works, on the grounds of exact discipline, perfect observance, and practice of interior virtues" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 19).

Don Francis seems to be right by accessory reasons, which are external, and to which the people usually bear witness. The first accessory reason is the Father's administrative system. Don Francis wanted an administration like that of an accountant, the Father instead lived completely abandoned in the hands of divine providence. Consequently, the Father was always stranded, and when he was asked for money he was compelled to answer that he hadn't any, because he had given it to the poor. Meanwhile debts increased... Don Francis along with his youth thought that such a system had no chance to succeed, and sooner or later the institution would come to an end. Weren't they right? Humanly speaking, yes. But they forgot who the Father was and his mission. The people of Messina were right when they defined him as a

man like Cottolengo; and we know very well that Cottolengo could not be judged like a common person. We also acknowledge that to live with such characters requires uncommon virtue.

Another reason for disagreement was lack of a regular novitiate. At the Holy Spirit there was a farrago: orphans, aspirants, novices, professed. But it was the condition of things that spring from nothing and form step by step. It was the founder's duty to organize it in the proper time and in proper way. It is well known that at the beginning of the institutions, the founders care more the substance of the novitiate than its forms; these are kept within certain limits which allowed by circumstances. The forms of novitiate are perfected with time. For instance, The Little Sisters of the Poor were born in 1839, but they began passing through the novitiate in 1853 (Trochu, *Il primo sia l'ultimo*, page 243).(5)

## 13. At Roccalumera

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Let us see the beginning of the institute at Roccalumera.

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Felici wonders why Don Francis chose Roccalumera to begin his institute, and answers: "He must have done so for several reasons. First, because of the simple people of the town, who were like him, very simple. Second, because of the pleasant landscape in which his religious soul perceived the Creator's perfections. Third, because of the poor people among whom he and his sisters would be at their ease -- poor among poor. Finally, because it was far from Messina and it would be easier for them to avoid any contrast with his brother and his initiatives" (*Il Padre delle orfane*, page 99).

How true it is that history and imagination cannot get on well together!

The writer says that Don Francis and his sisters planned a new house with a regular novitiate always under the Father's government. They had no intention of creating a new institution or congregation, but a novitiate with members formed by a new

direction, who would return to the Holy Spirit to make the institute flower again.

But, this plan was unfitting. If the Father's generosity was the cause of extreme poverty, a new house under his direction wouldn't solve difficulties, it would rather make them worse by increasing debts. Don Francis did not consider that the charisma for specific institutions is given by God to the persons he chooses, and God had chosen the Father for the Daughters of Divine Zeal.

Thus, Don Francis and Sister Veronica had formed their plan of reformation, but they had established no time, no place.

Out of the blue, one evening Sister Veronica went to Don Francis announcing to him that she had decided to go to her native place, Roccalumera, to lodge in the house of Marchioness Fiorentino.

Left the house in the night(6) together with Sister Rose and the two sisters Marino (one of them was a novice and the other an aspirant), they reached Roccalumera in the morning.

From there, they wrote to the Father. He went to Roccalumera two days later to pick them up, showing them a letter from the vicar general who had ordered their return to Messina. Only Sister Veronica remained at Roccalumera, because she was sick. Meanwhile, she tried to convince the Father to accept the plan agreed upon with Don Francis. The other ones who returned to Messina did not resign themselves to do without Roccalumera, so the Father dismissed them and told Sister Veronica to give her garb back. A few months later Cardinal Guarino died. Don Francis, acting in agreement with Msgr. D'Arrigo, re-established the community and took over the direction in Roccalumera.

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I deem necessary to correct Rigano, who assures that Don Francis started his institution because he was "encouraged by the vicar general, and therefore he decided to start his activity with the group of the sisters who suffered so great incomprehension" (page 31). If the foundation of Don Francis was legitimate, why to start it in secret? If the vicar general had authorized him, why the same vicar imposed the sisters to return to Messina? If Don Francis had discovered his own way at Roccalumera, why did he insist so much to return to Avignone and to form again the community he had divided?(7)

Almost shortly after the separation, Don Francis began proposing to bring together the two communities. He insisted in saying to the Father, "Let us make a merger, making peace!"

The Father argued, "Between the peace regarding us brothers and the merger of the institutions there is a great difference.

They are two things absolutely distinct and separate. People of common sense understands it. As to the personal peace, I have always brought peace to you." As to the merger of the institutions, the matter is different, and the Father is averse to it because he sees no improvement in his brother's ideas (Jan. 10, 1907). But he wishes good to his institution. "I wish you to go ahead. May the Lord bless and make the house of Roccalumera prosperous, giving you the consolation of seeing it growing up in virtue and in providence, as well as a means for the salvation of souls. The God who draws good from evil and retorts the hellish snares against the author of them, Satan, be glorified in this institution" (Ibid. page 20). Then he reminds his brother of the disposition of Archbishop D'Arrigo, who "decided that the brothers be in perfect relation, peace, and union, but each of them be in his own institution" (Ibid. page 19).

Don Francis made the last attempt to merge the institutions at the end of 1909, when he was willing to accept the conditions the Father had made. But Don Orione, the vicar general of Messina at that time, opposed it. The Father writes to Father Palma, "Don Orione was averse to it: he wants those sisters to have a humble and complete submission to us. Me, Canon Vitale, and Father Bonarrigo agree upon it" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 45). Father Vitale confirms,

"I witnessed to the conversation of the Servant of God and Don Orione about this matter. Don Orione was decidedly averse to it, because the merger of the institutions in the spirit of Canon Hannibal Di Francia seemed to him morally impossible. Nevertheless, the Servant of God was morally and financially generous with them."(8)

Don Francis went ahead with his own institution. At his death, the Capuchins took over the direction, giving them the constitutions and the name: "Capuchin Sisters of the Sacred Heart." It is a beautiful, promising religious congregation.

## 14. After the separation

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The division of the institutions did not affect the two brothers' relationship. Sister Veronica declares,

"Apart from our departure which caused a deep wound, the brothers remained cordially united. As soon as Hannibal knew of his brother's sickness, he immediately went to Roccalumera and stayed over there as in his own house, smiling, amiable, and happy."

On the other hand, Don Francis went to Avignone. A Religious of ours reports: "When I was very young, I saw several times Don Francis coming at Avignone in the evening to talk with the Servant of God. I naively asked the Father, 'Why doesn't your brother work with you?' Smiling and calm, he told me, 'My son, the Lord lets each one follow his own way'." He wrote to Don Francis, "I always loved you sincerely, wishing that the Lord free you from any evil and overwhelm you with good" (January 10, 1907). After the death of his brother, the Father wrote to Msgr. D'Arrigo, "I loved my brother Francis with a very tender love, as a father more than as a brother! (Vol. 29, page 30). He sang his praise on God and Neighbor (S.C. Vol. 1, page 149).

However, because Don Francis encouraged the secession of the sisters with subterfuges, simulation, and intrigues, the Father was grieved. He thought that all this couldn't come without prejudice to his brother's spirit. For this reason he sometimes used strong words, charging him with taking "a false way very far from the virtue and perfection, and with rejecting the study of one's own sanctification" (January 10, 1907). He also wrote to Melanie, "Pray for my poor and dear brother that he be converted to God strongly and mildly, but more mildly than strongly" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 2). Writing to Don Francis he says, "I will never stop praying to the Lord, I will even offer my useless life for your sincere return to God, for your sanctification, and salvation." God did not accept the sacrifice of the Father's life, but heard his prayer. In fact, soon after the news of his brother's death, he wrote to Father Vitale, "Since a few years my brother had become holy, humble, recollected, prudent, detached, and pious" (Vol. 31, page 29).

The Father always had a special consideration for his brother's institution, because, says Sister Veronica, "he admired our

community, and his great heart reserved the best gifts for us... After the death of his brother, the Servant of God did not stop helping us sending flour now and then, and once a thousand liras." Sister Veronica was so happy when she received a beautiful statue of the Immaculate from Hannibal Mary Di Francia, the day after the death of the founder Don Francis. He addressed the gift to his brother and to the unforgettable Daughters of Roccalumera" (Rigano, Sorriso... page 85).

At the funeral of the Servant of God, the sisters of Roccalumera wished to follow immediately after our congregations, because they considered themselves daughters of the Servant of God.

Remembering the persons who rushed to the tomb of the Father, Sister Veronica says, "I too knelt before him, but I did not pray for his soul, because I think he is already in heaven. Besides, in our communities we use to appeal to him for protection, whereas we also say some requiems for his brother."

## 15. Suppression of the sisters

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The 1897 is a crucial year in the Father's life.

The flight of the FOUR sisters to Roccalumera had been the talk of the city; but when the sensation had cooled down, an unfortunate event created a new ado calling the attention of the public to the Holy Spirit's institute.

An orphaned girl had escaped the institute to go back home. The sisters searched for her all day long in vain, then, they informed the police who in turn addressed the ecclesiastical authority. It is a fact so simple and common for any institute! Are the institutes condemned to death for so little? But owing to the red-hot ambient created in Messina against the Father's female institute (and we know how it was created), the vicar general Msgr. Basile suggested the cardinal to suppress the institute and to put an end to it. He did so because he was governing



the diocese in the absence of Cardinal Guarino who was sick. Also the Father was absent from Messina. Therefore, Msgr. Basile sent for Father Bonarrigo, and told him to inform the Father about the order of the cardinal. Father Vitale says that the vicar general issued an ordinance stating that the sisters leave and go back their homes (page 137). Such an ordinance is unknown. In fact, the Father writes that the cardinal "dissolved the institute of the sisters, without issuing a written decree" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 165).

Where was the Father? In those years he was searching for a person who could direct the female community, because his dealings with the Daughters of Charity, the Daughters of Saint Anna, and the Sisters of Good Shepherd had come to nothing. Now he was thinking of Melanie of La Salette, who was at Galatina (Lecce). He had gone over there to pay a visit to her, in the hope that she would take over the direction of the sisters. Writes the Father, "I invited her to Messina, but she did not decide whether she would come or not. She spoke about Messina fondly, even showed a copy of the letter of the Virgin Mary to the people of Messina (the copy she had was written in French). But still she did not come to a decision" (Vol. 45, page 79).

Then the Father handed her a letter asking for prayers, especially "to obtain a good, holy, humble, expert, smart, fit directress" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 2).

Returned to Messina, the Father found that his institute was on the verge of death. In spite of the understandable breaking of his heart, he took courage, told the communities to pray, and went to Msgr. Basile.

"He showed that he was ready to comply with the ordinance with great submission, but he had one question: what would they do with the seventy orphans? Msgr. Basile was perplexed at this unexpected question; he said that he was compelled to issue the ordinance by the dissidents inside the community and by the appeals to the Chancery Office. However, he would grant a delay to find a person to whom the padre could entrust the orphans. Shortly after that, the sisters would leave" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 137).

It comes natural to ask ourselves whether Don Francis had something to do with this matter. Here it is what the Father quickly wrote to Melanie, "Back to Messina, I have found a worse persecution: my poor and dear brother entered the spirit of an ecclesiastical superior, who has already obtained from the cardinal the order to suppress my little religious community. They will fix a date to make the sisters put off the garb and leave.

It is a true oppression of the innocent... In such a situation we have no means, but prayer! And we have begun praying so much. Please deign to join us. We are in a critical situation. Our matter is the talk of the city, and the authorities want

to put an end to it by suppressing my community. We could find a remedy in a mature person expert in educating the youths and willing to take over the direction, in the hope that the ecclesiastical authorities come to terms." Then he concludes, "Couldn't you come and help my community, at least temporarily? If Our Lady doesn't let you do so, at least pray to her to send the elect person" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 3). Melanie "answered immediately in the affirmative" (Vol. 45, page 79).

However, the order to dismiss the sisters was still holding. Should he dismiss them after Melanie had come in? Providence had opened the way to fulfill its designs.

Father Bernard of Messina was a zealous Minor Friar, the confessor of the Father, and very near to Cardinal Guarino. He took a spontaneous interest in the matter. For health reasons, the cardinal was staying at Marullo, a great villa near the convent of Saint Mary of the Angels founded by Father Bernard. Profiting by his reputation, Father Bernard asked for a private audience with the cardinal. With great humility and fine strategy, he reminded the cardinal of the fruitless fig that the owner condemned to death; later, however, he deferred the execution of the sentence for another year at the farmer's request. Given the Little Shepherd of Salette's presence, new fruit could be expected from the religious community.

The cardinal smiled and agreed with Father Bernard, hoping for a better future with the friar's words.

With the utmost haste Father Bernard rushed to the padre and crying with joy said: 'Victory! Victory! Victory!' Then he related the delay the cardinal granted in order to set the community back on its feet. The Lord's mercy along with the protection of Our Lady triumphed!

We don't relate Melanie's work. The year Melanie spent in the community was "a year of blessing. Under her guide, the institute revived, and when the Lord called her somewhere else, the foundation of the female community was well laid down" (Vol. 22, page 131).

The Father's biography informs us about that.

## 16. He surrendered to the Lord's will

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It is a matter of great interest to know how the Father behaved during the 1897 serious trials.

He was intimately united to the Lord's will. When the trial was more urgent, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, "Thy will be done! Let us pray and trust in God... It is a test for us and the institute... If the institution belongs to God, he will save it... God uses so various means to purify the souls!... Lord, thy will be done!..."

The elderly sisters unanimously swear that the Father endured the secession peacefully. He forbade the congregants to speak of these events.(9)

He endeavored to show nothing of his intimate martyrdom and behaved with everyone calmly, and sometimes smilingly.

Father D'Agostino reports that he once happened to be in the sacristy of the Holy Spirit that year, and the Father told him,

- I trust there.
- Father, what does it mean?
- The host, my son.

The host gave him the strength to embrace the cross lovingly.

The Father's fortitude shone when he formed the spiritual union among the institute's energetic and affectionate members. Such a union was formed in September 1898, after the 1897 trial, when Melanie was leaving. The members pledged to persevere, difficulties and tribulation notwithstanding, "except the case that the Lord manifests clearly through the ecclesiastical superiors that he does not want the institution any longer" (Cf. ch. 6, no. 9, b).

## 17. Among the Sisters of the Sacred Side

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We have written a specific monograph on the Father's suffering for the Sisters of the Sacred Side. Here, we report some of those sisters' thoughts.

The dissension between the Father and the bishop of Potenza was caused by the Father's decision to dismiss a sister

who had no vocation, but was protected by the bishop. She, however, had deceived the bishop.

"The Father faced several difficulties in treating matters of souls. One of the greatest troubles was the direction of our institute. When he decided to remove a sister from Potenza in agreement with the bishop, he faced the opposition of the same bishop who had changed his mind. He issued an interdict, prohibiting the Father to set foot in Potenza. Despite the Father obeyed quickly and exactly the bishop's ordinance, the disorders continued. The Servant of God, however, fostered the peace in the spirits by trusting in the Lord only, in the hope that the truth would triumph." "I see the Father's fortitude in the misunderstanding with the bishop, as well as in all his life, which was burdened with physical and moral sacrifices." "He had to face various difficulties in the foundation and in the government of the communities; but he was strong and submitted himself to God's will. When I was the superior of the sister who caused the fight between the Father and the bishop, as well as the fatal scission that is lasting among the Daughters of the Sacred Side, the Father was outspoken and constant in his thought. But he was very obedient to the ordinance of the bishop prohibiting him to set foot in Potenza." "Founding and governing an order and its communities implies plenty of grave obstacles because of permissions, money, means, and variety of characters not always perfectly formed. And yet, he overcame everything without losing heart. The event of Potenza which happened when I was the superior of the dismissed sister, proves it clearly."

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## 18. Gleaning

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At the end of this chapter we report additional evidences of the Father's fortitude and serenity while suffering impediments.

"I never saw the Father upset because of physical and moral disease." "I saw the Father sick more than once. He

worried for the work in arrears, but he submitted himself to God's will." "I remember him sick with catarrh at Ritiro, where Archbishop D'Arrigo visited him and said, 'Cheer up, endure this suspension a divinis' (he was hinting at the impossibility of saying mass)... He suffered pains and privations with heroic fortitude." "He underwent with patience various and long diseases of body and spirit. I never heard him complaining. His last disease was a lesson for us." "He suffered serious physical pains, especially the nervous-breakdown in his mature age. His last disease was the apex. He often said to an assistant, 'Let us pray a little while to the Lord to grant me twenty minutes of rest this night'." "He underwent a hernia surgery unafraid and the extraction of water from his pulmonary pleura without hesitating. His only worry was about the expenses we somehow concealed. He also suffered the last disease valiantly, even though he wished to recover to serve the institute." But the topic of his last disease is treated in the biography, therefore we'll talk of the spirit with which he embraced the crosses.

"He seemed as though the painful events didn't regard him." "When he was opposed, a little smile on his lips revealed that his spirit rested in the bosom of God." "I never saw him upset when he was facing men and events. How imperturbable he was when fire destroyed our wooden church." When the government made the requisition of our house in Altamura during the war, the Servant of God wrote to Father Vitale, "We have cups of contradiction in Altamura! The building has been taken over by the soldiers! Long live Jesus and Mary!" (Vol. 31, page 91). As to Saint Paschal's, "I am going to Oria because of an eviction order. They want to make it a lazzaretto. Praised be the Lord! He knows what is good for us. Everything works out for good!" (Vol. 31, page 7). On another occasion, "Our loving Lord is visiting us with his holy cross. Let us embrace it as our support and fortitude!" (Vol. 32, page 33). "Cheer! The cross is salvation, strength, and everything!" (Vol. 34, page 98). "The cross is as sweet as honey. Happy are those who taste it!" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 113). "My dear son, I understand your spiritual and bodily pains, but isn't the cross the treasure of the elect? The cross sanctifies, strengthens, comforts, and saves!" (Vol. 30, page 102). "The Lord has visited your community with his holy cross. The cross is love and salvation!" (Vol. 42, page 123).

During the disturbances of the after war, he writes, "Time urges! Let us draw close to our Lord!" (S.C. Vol. 33, page 133). "The strikes because of the high cost of living are an excuse to overthrow the government morally dead, take over the nation,

and persecute the Church! We must draw close to Jesus, supreme goodness, and shelter in the safe refuge of the most holy Heart of Jesus and Mary. She is the propitious door of the divine Heart, and Saint Joseph is the celestial house-steward." (These were the titles of July first that year). (Vol. 35, page 217).

We end this chapter with two evidences of deep meaning. "Despite these sorrows, the Father always kept calm, and happy. One day he was sitting thoughtful, sad, hanging head down. I asked him, 'What's the matter? How do you feel?' 'Not well, daughter. Today the Lord forgot me, because he visited me with no opposition.' Another day, he was very happy, and when I asked the reason he responded, 'Today the Lord gave me many gifts. He remembered me, and sent so many oppositions.' In all the emergencies I witnessed to, the Servant of God was happier, and we used to say, 'Who knows what sorrows the Father underwent today!'" (125, 15).

## Notes

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(1) When I was sending this work to the press, I received the book *L'ideale non muore*, which is a remaking of *Sorriso e luce*, i. e., a more extensive biography of Mother Veronica. Rigano proves the uncommon virtues of the venerable sister through documents from the archive, while the people wait for the judgment of the Church. We join them. However, we point out that Rigano is substantially maintaining the same ideas he has written in *Sorriso e luce* about the dwelling of Sister Veronica at the Holy Spirit and her secession. He complains that "we have almost given a romantic story to the origin of Roccalumera institute." If there is any novel, it is easy to check where it comes from.

We follow the Father's writings together with Papasogli-Taddei, specifically the letter to his brother on January 10, 1907. This letter is decisive to interpret well the facts which caused the schism of Roccalumera, and the results are different from Rigano's. He is aware of it, and tries to solve the problem by getting rid of that letter by saying that it was written by the "disciples of Don Hannibal" (*L'ideale*, page 55). Well, well, it is too easy avoiding the value of a troubling document by simply denying its authenticity!...

Our quotations are from *Sorriso e luce*; when we refer to *Ideale*, we'll specify it.

(2) The first Daughters of Divine Zeal are Giuffrida Mary, Affronte Mary, Santamaria Josephine, D'Amico Rosa. They took the garb on March 18, 1887.

(3) The anonymous letters aiming at avoiding Sister D'Amore's return to the institute, prove that she was not dismissed, contrary to Rigano's assertion. Rigano adds that she "returned to the Daughters of Divine Zeal's institute, also through the good offices of Canon Hannibal" (*L'ideale*, page 46). I repeat, Sister D'Amore was never dismissed, but was sent to Graniti to recover. It is obvious that the Father encouraged her during the persecution, and when he called her back to Messina on May 12, 1897, he wrote, "If the ecclesiastical authority had dismissed you from the institute, I should have been told not to call you back. Thanks to God, it never happened. On the contrary, you can say to the people who doubt the truth of this story, that this morning I had an audience with the cardinal, talked about your return to the institute, and the cardinal agreed upon your return. You will be appointed to the office that obedience will give you" (Vol. 34, 10).

(4) Also the compilers of *Il ramo fiorito*, report the date of March 11, but they mistake the year. It was 1897, not 1895 (page 25). *Il ramo fiorito* is a special issue that the Tertiary Capuchin Sisters of the Sacred Heart published on the fiftieth anniversary of their founder (1963).

(5) Did the institute of Roccalumera begin with a regular novitiate? Sister Veronica appears so solicitous, but there is a many slip twixt the cup and the lip... We know that up to the death of Don Francis (1913), the novitiate was not settled yet. In fact, it was Father Salvatore of Valledolmo of the Capuchins that settled it. Can we marvel at that? We must consider the beginning of the institutions benignly, just as Rigano does for Roccalumera. "Because it was a little community, sisters and novices lived together in the fervor of a continuous novitiate" (*L'ideale*, page 119).

(6) Saying that Sister Veronica left the institute by night does not sound well to her, therefore she wants the people to say that she left in the morning. The fact is that they left on March 11, at three a.m., when it is still night. Rigano asserts that they went out from the house, not from the church. "It is true that the evening before Sister Veronica asked the sacristan to open the door of the church early in the morning, but the precaution resulted useless by the presence of the door keeper" (*L'ideale*, page 50). The presence of the door keeper at that hour, however, cannot be explained without an agreement. But these are trifles.

(7) Says Rigano, "It was January 22, 1897, when Sister Veronica of the child Jesus became the co-founder of the new religious family, after receiving the permission from the Ordinary of Messina" (page 34). Besides the wrong date, no permission from the Ordinary of Messina results.

(8) It is unfounded the Rigano's thought that when the Father went to Roccalumera he made some attempts to have back Sister Veronica as the superior of his institute in Messina" (*L'ideale*, page 56). Since Mother Mary Nazzarena Majone was appointed as head of the institute, after the 1897 events, the Father never sought to replace her, because she was docile to his directives and very faithful in everything.

This is also true for Miss Palermo, before she joined Canon Celona as a co-founder of the "Ancelle Riparatrici." Until she lived in Catania, she had good relations with the Father and sent some vocations to him. But the Father never sought her as the head of his institute "to give peace to it" (Ibid. page 1550). On the contrary, I have heard Father Vitale reporting the Servant of God's opinion on Miss Palermo, before she joined Canon Celona. He said, "She is not a vocation for us."

(9) To make the painful event of the secession fall into oblivion, the Father never gave the name of Veronica to any of the 300 sisters who took the garb.



# 22.

## TEMPERANCE

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# 1. An easy or a strong Christianity

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The fourth and last cardinal virtue is temperance. It controls our inclination to the sensible pleasures, confining them within the limits of reason and faith. Temperance is the last of the cardinal virtues because it regulates the individual's acts not related to our neighbor. But it is one of the most important virtues for the individual because it bridles the strongest instincts of human nature and directs man to God, preventing him from loving himself disorderly.

Temperance reminds us of the wide meaning of mortification, which is indispensable to achieve perfection in our state of fallen nature. With regard to this subject, let us quote a Father's talk with Father Vitale.

"One day walking in the garden of the Holy Spirit, our founder asked me which virtue the fundamental one was. I answered: 'Holy humility.' He said: 'That one comes from the main virtue that is the source of all virtue. I think that mortification is the foundation of perfection. And I mean mortification in everything: intellect, will, feelings, etc. But given our overbearing tendencies towards passion, how can we control ourselves completely?'" (Ibid. page 312).

This is hard to understand today. Paul VI points out opportunely, "If we really want to imitate Christ, we must accept his words as a binding program. His words are, 'Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps'" (Lk. 9, 23). The Pope continues, "Do we want an easy or a strong Christianity? The temptation of an easy Christianity enters everywhere today. It even reaches the Religious who are committed to austerity by making them break not only discipline such as the garb, the schedule, etc., but also the roots of Christianity, such as faith... How many teachers who follow more the world than the gospel dare to break the fundamental truths which are beyond our understanding? The school and modern pedagogy try to present an easy Christianity

by stripping it of its commandments, because they disturb people in theory and practice. These teachers intend to eliminate any obstacle to help people live spontaneously and autonomously in the fullness of life. They commit a great psychological mistake when they present an easy, comfortable Christianity to the youths, avoiding rules, weights, but sticking at nothing" (Osservatore Romano, February 18, 1972). These are old errors covered with modern fashion. For instance, Innocent XI condemned the following sentence, "The voluntary cross of mortification is an oppressing, useless burden, which we must get rid of" (Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, no. 1258). Paul VI instead calls our attention to this gospel, "May no one deceive himself, Christ is demanding. The way of Christ is the narrow one" (March 4, 1970).

## 2. The Father's teaching

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Besides referring to the Rogationist Anthology for the Father's writing about mortification, we quote the following page.

The Father holds mortification as a subsidiary subject of prayer.

Prayer and mortification are two wings of the soul flying to God. Practicing mortification is perhaps more important than praying, because the more a person is mortified, the more he is fitting for prayer. The more a person prays, the more he feels the need to mortify himself. So, prayer and mortification increase mutually and lead the person from strength to strength (Ps. 84, 8). What does it mean mortification? It means to sentence our passions and senses to death. It is carried out in the following way:

First, we must mortify our opinions and will. Being detached from our will and opinion, even in the slightest things, renders the soul docile and submissive to the divine will. God can dispose of such souls as he wants.

Second, we must regulate our natural affections, such as those toward our relatives and friends, directing them to the pure love of God.

Third, we must mortify our inclinations, desires, attachments, etc.

Above all, we must mortify selfishness, which is the great enemy of the love of God and of our perfection. Selfishness drives us to abhor the cross, to please ourselves even in the holy things, to long for our own

esteem and praise, to fear being forgotten and despised. Selfishness is so subtle and malicious as to deceive us inadvertently under the appearances of good. It makes us feel innocent, when we are guilty; it rises human respect, envy, anger, contempt of our neighbor, egotism, and plenty of faults. Selfishness is pride, the root of all sins, just as Scripture says.

If the congregants of this least order neglect to battle and mortify selfishness through actions, prayer to God and the most holy Virgin; as well as through the means of discipline and observance at their disposal, they will never be able to meet the holy aims of their institute.

Finally, the mortification of the senses is very important and efficacious. Without it we are unable to advance toward perfection, rather we are in danger of being lost. Saint John of the Cross calls this mortification "obscure night." The soul comes to the light of divine union through it.

We must mortify the sense of hearing by not listening to useless talk, vain novels and tales, and conversations nurturing curiosity; we must mortify taste and gluttony by perfectly fasting according to the rules of the holy Church and our order, and by eating moderately and without complaint, either we like or dislike the food. The Blessed Colombiere, the apostle of the Heart of Jesus, made a fine mortification by not consenting to the taste of the food.

Also drinks are subject to rules. The masters of the spirit hold that mortification of taste and gluttony is the first step in the spiritual life. For this reason the congregants will give up sweets, save when these are served by the community, a few times a year.

We must usually mortify the sense of sight, especially in the church or when we pray; we must mortify the sense of smell by accepting jobs implying unpleasant odor, and by never smelling flowers or perfumes for fun; we must mortify the sense of touch by patiently suffering any molestation, such hot weather, cold, rain, labor, hard bed, pains, and diseases" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 186).

### 3. The practice

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Let us see the Father's spirit of mortification.  
Writes Father Vitale,

Very brisk and inclined to energetic creativity by nature, he endeavored to restrain himself in opposition; in his notes he asked the

Lord "for silent patience, silence, calm, mortification of impulse, of anxiety, of solicitude, etc."

He handled mortification of his own will the way he did for taste and sleep. He submitted to ecclesiastical superiors and counselors. Once, seeing behaving quite the opposite of his way of thinking, I expressed my surprise. He answered: "My behavior has been suggested by that superior whom I sought for advice." Then he quoted the scripture: 'Do everything under advice and you will not regret anything.' As a youth, I was hesitant to submit my will to some superior for fear of making mistakes of conscience, but the padre said: 'Get used to submitting ordinary events that do not affect your conscience; mortified in this way, you will be ready to deal with harder things.' Due to this inner mortification, he remained silent in the troubles he faced for the foundation. Never did he say a word of contempt or of reproach against those who tried to make an attempt on the foundation's existence in either good or bad faith. Once, he said: "I feel sorry for the adversaries because they can hurt their souls."

When he was lacking temporal and spiritual goods for the community, he worried inside but conformed to God's will perfectly because he knew that He would lend help. The padre behaved the same in good and bad times.

He never went for a walk or treated himself to recreation, rest, or vacations: when he got back home tired and out of breath, he began preaching or doing a religious service; when he stepped down from the pulpit, he said the breviary, exclaiming: "How much time costs!" Our Father knew how valuable time was. He made his institutions so productive by utilizing time (Ibid. page 315).

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We still quote Father Vitale.

He never stopped mortifying himself. In his youth, he got used to severe fasting, which affected his health. He could not conceal it. One day while I was a cleric, I had a stomach-ache; the padre, in his simplicity, said: "You have abstained and fasted for a long time, as I used to. - Youthful insanity - as Saint Bernard called it. I was truly crazy!" Given assurance that I did not know such things, he repeated: "Falling sick, stricken by disease... these are the expressions that we read about almost all saints, who suffered as they worked; therefore, we must go on suffering and working. Our Lord Jesus Christ never ceased suffering inside." Because of his ecclesiastical status and because he was under the guide of excellent spiritual directors, he was forced to restrain from fasting (Ibid. page 312).

The apostolate among the poor engaged him to a life of severe mortification.

Reports a witness, "Not only the Father was temperate, but also mortified. It was well known to the citizens that he often

took a spoonful from the poor's bowls to make his dish, and more than once he ate from their bowls." A niece of the Father testifies, "In the early times of his apostolate in Avignone, my grandmother made the woollen mattress for him a few times again, because he gave it up to the poor and slept on the straw."

Usually, before doing anything the Father prayed, and so did he for mortification. He wrote a letter to the most holy Virgin to get it.

Queen of all saints, my mother Immaculate Mary, in a special way you are the mother of the priests. I introduce myself to you: at your feet there is a pitiful priest, humbly asking for your protection, divine enlightenment, and motherly counsel. Seat of wisdom, enlighten, teach, and counsel me.

First, I submit my doubts about the mortification of the taste. You know how much I have failed, and I am still failing!... You know how much these failures can hurt the Institution of the Poor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus!

Second, I submit my doubts about health, because of fasting. You know very well that I am unworthy feeding my sinful body; that I have hurt my spiritual well-being and perhaps my bodily health, because of intemperance!

Third, I submit my doubts and wishes about penance. Guilty of thousand faults, I should do hard penance, still, I do not do it.

Most holy mother, divine teacher of all the virtues, I beg you to make me walk the way of my sanctification, the sanctification of souls, and the development of this Pious Institution in the most holy Heart of Jesus. May I achieve the longed, loving union with my supreme goodness! (S.C. Vol. 10, page 7).

## 4. His defects

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Before going on, let us listen to the Father's confession of his own defects. "His dominant passion was gluttony; he never subdued it entirely. May Jesus forgive him! ... Sleepy, he never triumphed over sleep: during the night and the afternoon, he slept a good seven hours... Under the

pretext of health, he was tied to the comforts of life..." (S.C. Vol. 7, pages 241-242).

A theologian censor points out: "We must be on guard, because 'the just charges himself with something.' Besides, a hard working person of good health cannot be charged with gluttony, because he needs food." About sleep, "Sleep is a natural need, above all for the ones who are busy all day and part of the night."

Writes Fr. Vitale:

"Naturally, he suffered from hunger and such a stimulus was an inner suffering that led him to think of sanctification as an impossible goal for him. Attacked by faintness, at times he had to eat something. As for sleep, he slept soundly through the night; to break sleep was a pain" (Ibid. page 312).

Once, a family invited him to a dinner. Because they were late, he began failing and asked for a piece of bread to stay on his feet. At the same time he pointed out his physical and moral weakness to those people.

Witnesses lay stress on his spirit of mortification. "He practiced temperance exactly. His whole life seemed to me a continuous renunciation to appetite. I am told that up to forty years of age he fasted so hard that he got a nervous breakdown. After that, he somehow abated such a fervor of mortification."

A sister remembers the 1893 illness of the Father. "When he was sick, he complained for being unable to get rid of the comforts and of the cares he was given by the sisters and a brother. With evident simplicity, he said that he was missing the times when he scourged himself, bore the cilice, slept on the bench, cut food, and did vigil in prayer."

His strength grown feeble, his greater labors, and the guide of his spiritual directors forbade him to continue hard penance. But he contained himself under an extraordinary mortification up to his last.

## 5. His dinner

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The father held that the mortification of the taste is the beginning of the spiritual life. To avoid detriment to the spirit during dinner, he recommended attention to the spiritual reading in the refectory. In the early times he bought plates written with maxims like, "While eating, think of the poor who have nothing," "Let us imitate the most holy Virgin's temperance," "More men perish by over-eating than by the sword," etc.

Now let's move to the Father's sins of taste and his lavish banquet.

He drank no wine until 1893, when a disease prostrated him. Until then no wine was served at table, except when we had guests. By disposition of the doctor he later drank a little bit of watered wine, and he often did without it; hence several witnesses relate that he drank no wine. But he never drank liquor.

Nor did he eat meat, saying that it was harmful to his stomach. We, however, thought he was doing penance. In fact, the doctor prescribed some meat for him, in his last years.

He did without sugar and sweets. As to coffee, the sisters ground acorn for him... One of them says, "One day, I took the liberty of serving a doughnut instead of bread. He roughly refused it, saying, 'You play the devil!' (I related the fact to the mother superior). I knelt to beg pardon, and he did the same smiling and saying, 'Besides, you made a good doughnut.' In addition to the fast by the Church, he fasted 4 times a week, and ate no fruit on Friday and Saturday. Unaware, he once ate fruit on a Saturday at Taormina. Back to Messina, he told me, 'Sister, don't serve fruit for a week; I have to do penance for the fruit I ate at Taormina'."

His daily food was some pasta seasoned with oil and toasted bread grated with bitter centaury, which grows in our fields. He said that centaury avoided or attenuated stomach disorder; we



instead thought he was doing penance, because he put that seasoning as a penance in May. Obviously, several of the sisters or orphans were unable to gulp down that bitterness.

A brother remembers, "I waited on him for long time. He liked milk and toasted bread for breakfast; at lunch and dinner, some noodles seasoned with oil and butter, more some fish or eggs."

Brother Mary Anthony reports, "One day at Naples, I paid a lira for an egg. The Father told me not to buy eggs any longer, because they were expensive." At Taormina, the mother superior told a sister to buy a fish for the Father. When the fish was served, the Father said that the community was scandalized, and asked who bought it. When he knew that the door keeper did it, he kept the head of the fish for himself, sent a portion of the fish to the door keeper, and demanded that we eat the remnant. He used to tell the cook, 'First, you prepare the necessary elements: bread and water.' He always said that his dishes were many. Several times he skipped dinner, and suggested to us to do the same, but he never demanded it. Sometimes he refused the dish concealing the penance under the pretext that the food was overcooked, or salty, and the like.

The following is an incident which happened to me in the first month of my entrance in the institute.

Worker Scatigna cooked eggs with asparagus, and presented the delicious dish to the Father. He thanked heartily, but said smiling, "This is not a dish for a man, but for a boy..." Then he called me who was waiting on, and said, "Please come here, eat it. It will do good to you..."

"There was no chance that the Father ate a dish different from the community's, even on the solemnities when we had guests. He sometimes did so reluctantly in his last years, when he was sick."

Remembering the opening of the house in Gravina, a person who met the Father for the first time relates, "I was struck from the beginning by his simplicity and modesty. I was going to prepare a better mattress for him, but I was told to treat him as the others. On the inauguration day we ate bread and cheese, and so he did, refusing eggs and something else." "He ate like a bird. He was the despair of the mother superior who prepared a soup for him, because of his illness. He instead gave it up to the sick, and demanded the common dish. Very observant of the ecclesiastical fasting, he added other ones of his own, above all when he was waiting for graces." Mrs. Mazza Helen of Oria, a former

probationer of the Daughters of Divine Zeal, reports that the Father refused a dish of good pasta prepared for him, and ate a wormish watery mash with broad bean peels." A former orphan says, "In my hard time, the Father's dish was like ours."

The evidences from the Daughters of the Sacred Side are similar.

Everytime he came over, he ate soup, vegetables, and some eggs, refusing wine and coffee. Being rigorous with himself, he somehow showed liberality to us. He ate little, had no preference for food, and observed the fast imposed by the Church. As moderate eater, he was satisfied with a boiled potato and some eggs. Once, I saw him sprinkling his dish with powder. We knew he did so for penance. The several times he ate with us, any occasion was good to eat little; for instance, he got up to check quality and quantity of our food, and finding it scarce he ordered additional meat for the community. Everytime he ate with us, he distributed part of his dish to the needier ones. Some of us noticed that he sprinkled his dish with powder.

## **6. Still about the Father's dinner**

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It's worthy insisting on the normal use of centaury by the Father. He was always supplied with it.

We knew this powder from the plants of our garden in Oria, which was dried up and powdered by the sisters. One of them testifies, "One day Mother Nazzarena handed me a sheaf of bitter herb to bake and powder it. The Servant of God used it to give a disgustful taste to the food."

Says Brother Louis, "Once, I happened to go to the Father. The room was open and he was writing. On the table there was a snuff-box. He asked me if I took snuff, and handed me a little bit, recommending to put it directly on my tongue. I did so. It was in the morning. In the evening I was still feeling the acrid bitter taste; and yet, I had eaten twice. When I related the fact to Father Bonarrigo, he told me, "The powder is centaury. The

Father often takes it by mortification.' I think that someone else knew his custom. But, when he ate in the community no one perceived it."

Or better yet, Brother Louis did not notice it, because the Father tried to conceal himself while using the powder, but without succeeding sometimes. "Despite the attempts, now and then I perceived that he was sprinkling the powder on his dish. We knew that he carried worm-wood to help digestion, as he said. To sprinkle the food secretly, he pretended to use the handkerchief in which he had concealed a dose. One day a cook tasted the remnant of the Father's dish. He wished he had never done so, so bitter it was.

In Taormina the Father happened to have his snuff-box empty. Says the mother superior, "He asked me whether in the community we used to do some penance in the food. I answered, 'Yes, Father. we sprinkle the dish with cassia or quinine powder, once in May.' He told me, 'I am going to taste it to see whether your penance is serious,' and handed me his empty snuff-box. Evidently, he chose this excuse to conceal and supply himself with powder."

When he was at the sisters' community, he ate by himself, therefore he had more liberty to season his food; the sisters, however, perceived the strange flavoring. "He delighted in seasoning the dish with aloe and absinth. One day a sister happened to give up her food to a poor and was glad to eat the Father's soup because she thought it was blessed. She was unable to eat it all for its bitterness and bad smell, and vomited soon after." The sisters who waited on him "confided to us that the Servant of God bittered his food with aloe, and sometimes used that powder in a drink under the pretext to help digestion." "I have come to know that he was frugal, and I myself once realized that he sprinkled his dish with bitter powder. To imitate him in the penance, our community once bittered the food, but I gulped down only a few spoonfuls." "While boiling the water to make a barley drink, he poured fried bread and powder in the cup. One day he stopped doing so to go elsewhere, and I tasted it with the bread. It was very bitter. When the Father came back, he asked for the bread, and I confessed my curiosity. He told me to keep silent."

## 7. More mortification

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Let us see additional mortifications of another kind in the food.

"Generally he did not eat meat, and while traveling he preferred cold eggs without salt because they were tasteless" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 314).

"To feel no taste, he wanted the food overcooked." "The little he ate was overcooked, but he took great care of the others' food about quantity and quality." "As to himself, he was absolutely indifferent to the food's quality, but was very careful of the orphans' and the Religious' food."

"By negligence, I once cooked rice without salt. He remarked that, but added, 'Do not mind. In Rome I do not use salt, because it is expensive over there'."

The Father delighted in some things and felt repugnance against others. But he fought and won. A mother superior reports, "One day he confided to me that he had felt a repugnance against the bread-soup since he was a child, but endeavored to overcome it. Once I cooked a dish in my own way, trying to make it delicious, but he told me, 'That's not good,' and guided me to the kitchen. He poured the bread-soup in a small pot and stirred it up. Then he swallowed it. He did so to win the repugnance that he had not overcome yet." A sister assures that "in Trani he chose the sister as a personal cook that the community had refused because of her inefficiency."

Thirst was another habitual penance of the Father. He was short of wine, but he did not even quench his thirst with water.

Because Melanie used to "sip a little bit of water," he tried to imitate her. But he said, "I was unable, because one cannot quench thirst this way" (Vol. 45, page 181). He succeeded when he renounced to quench his thirst completely. Listen to the evidences. "He drank a little bit of watered wine. Usually, he sipped water for penance in the afternoon to imitate Melanie, and

he quoted her saying, 'We must not drink to satiety, as the animals!' When I saw him coming back home, I used to bring a jug of fresh water to his room. One day I was late, and found him on the treshold. He asked me, 'What day is today?' 'Friday,' I answered. 'Oh, if you knew how much thirst, how many sins, how much reparation! No, thanks! The following morning he told me, 'Last night, Jesus left me a little thirsty and kept me wide-awake. I suffered willingly, also because there was no jug!' Mother Nazzarena used to tell us that the Servant of God never satisfied hunger and thirst in full. "He sipped water, and we thought he did so for penance." "I heard that he drank water moderately to avoid satisfying thirst completely." Says Father Santoro, "When he was near to death, I suggested to him to drink some cordial, but he faintly answered, 'I never satisfy thirst in full!'"

Abstinence from fruit was one of his frequent mortifications. For instance, he always abstained from eating white figs in honor of the child Jesus. "He abstained easily from fruit." "We witnessed to his acts of mortification restricting food and drink." "During triduos, novenas, and preparation for solemnities he suggested abstinence from fruit, giving the example. The saving was given to the poor." "During the year, he observed the abstinence from fruit which had been drawn by lots in January." "On Saturday, we did not eat fruit. In the solemnities, we were relieved from the annual abstinence from the fruit drawn by lots, except the Father." He often exchanged with people the act of penance, reserving the harder one for himself. It usually happened when someone did not accept with generosity the penance drawn by lots. "Once, in Oria, he drew by lots the abstinence from all fruits during the whole year, and the following year the abstinence from all sweets. What a joy for him, who did the penance scrupulously. We instead were relieved from this kind of abstinence now and then."

To avoid that sweetness remain in the mouth, when cake and fruit were served up, the Father wanted the congregants to eat first the cake. And when various fruits were served up, he ate only from one species.

Reports a sister,

He liked figs and peaches. But he confided to me that he was abstaining from them since 25 years as an offering to Our Lady and Jesus. With regard to peaches, he told me that during his convalescence the brother who was waiting on him succeeded to make him eat one; the following year, however, the peach tree dried up. He concluded, 'What

we offer to the Lord is sacred, therefore we must never fail to fulfill our vow.' He liked home-made cake; after our insisting he ate a little bit of it. One day I dared to present to him a piece of chocolate I had softened in the kitchen because of his weakly teeth, but I had to retire. He said that the sisters and the orphans could be scandalized by that.

Says Father Vitale, "I remember that he abstained from fruit for two years in succession." I read in his notes, "Abstinence from fruit for five years. I began on August 4, 1907" (Vol. 6, page 118). I have no reason to think that he stopped continuing such a penance, save that the 1908 earthquake made it impossible for some time.

## **8. Instruments of penance**

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Cilice and scourge, the tools used frequently by legions of saints, were also the instruments of penance used by the Father.

Writes Father Vitale,

"More than once in the morning, I heard him crying meekly while praying, perhaps because of instruments of penance he used, e.g. a hairshirt, little chains, pinchers, whips, pointed crosses, etc. that did not pass unnoticed to the curious eye of his intimate acquaintances. Sometimes his innocent body bled" (Ibid. page 313).

In Oria we preserve a collection of such instruments: a hard iron scourge, metal strings with sharp iron points, a broad belt full with sharp iron, hairshirts, and whips. A Religious thinks that these instruments were not for the Father's personal use. He says, "To my knowledge, the instruments of penance we have at Oria were not used by the Father. He took most of them away from the persons he directed."

The witnesses instead affirm that the Father was familiar with these instruments. Therefore, most of them, such as the

pointed iron belt, were not taken away from too fervent persons. Sister Gertrude testifies, "The Father wanted two broad body belts: one in Messina, and the other one in Oria. Within the cloth we sewed hooked barbed wire projecting outside. Both the mother superior and I did it." Witnesses confirm it. In September, on the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, "we perceived that the Father was wearing this belt because after preaching very compassionately about the pains of Our Lady, he kissed the altar by bending his knees and his head, without bending his body." A sister of Taormina relates, "One day I found on his bed a belt of strong cloth having sharp points like needles. I retired without touching it. Later I heard that the Father wore it during the mass." "I heard from the sisters that the Servant of God used instruments of penance, that his shirt was sometimes found blood-stained, and that he himself sometimes washed his shirt because of the blood, perhaps." "Once I saw some cotton wool soaked with blood in the basin. I do not know if that was due to scourge." In 1915, the Father went to Soccorso along with Father Chiapparone for priestly ministry, and lived in the Cigala house as a guest for eight days. One day he left the door of his room opened, and Mrs. Cigala entered to clean the room. She saw a pointed instrument of penance. Back home, the Father asked whether anyone had entered his room. The lady had no courage to say the truth on that occasion.

"Because sometimes he could not bend, we thought it was due to the hair-shirts. Once I saw the sheets with spots of blood." "I often saw some instruments of penance in the bedside table that I opened by curiosity. Asked by him who had moved them, I confessed. 'Keep silent,' he said. 'Don't do it any more'." "On the occasion of the 1908 earthquake, he recommended the scourge and to wear the hair-shirt during the day; later he suggested to wear it only during the mass. I think he was the first to do so, because he used to say, 'Let us do penance!' Since he prohibited to make up his bed, we gossiped that he also used such instruments in the night."

He used additional tormenting instruments of penance, such as the pinchers to mortify his finger-tips, eyelids, ears, lips, tongue, etc., especially when he prayed with raised hands, kneeling.

Mr. Pisani of Oria relates,

I was a valet of Antonio Di Tommaso, bishop of Oria, when Canon Di Francia came the first time to talk with the bishop. He lodged in the episcopal palace several times. He did so for about a month before

settling his institutes in that town. From the first days I was struck by the spirit of poverty and penance of this unknown priest. It was my duty to wait on and to clean the rooms. At table he disliked to use more than one plate, and in the night he did not use the woolen mattress and the pillow, which I found clean. Obviously, he removed them and slept on the vegetable hair mattress, putting them back at their place in the morning. About the cleaning, he always preceded me. When I found him cleaning, I impeded him with polite manners, because it was my duty. He always refused to light the nightly candle, saying that one can also pray in the darkness, nor he used the cake of soap I put on the wash-basin (he used common soap).

The Father laid the foundations of our communities in Oria with penance and prayer.

Occasional penances did not fail. At Montemurro's, he was given a cup of milk with salt instead of sugar. He drank it silently. When the cook perceived it, he was amazed at, but it was too late. On another occasion, some boys were playing a low see-saw, and the Father delighted in seeing them. In the rush, the plank went over the feet of the Father, who reacted with a smile at the protests of the boys, and continued watching their play.

## **9. His fight against sleep**

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Now let us talk of sleep. He used to say that he had a weakness for sleep. While traveling by train, he slept easily. But he added, and wrote in his own funeral oration that he slept seven hours a day, on the whole.

We must admit that fight against sleep is one of the hardest even for the saints who distinguished themselves in mortification. Saint Catherine of Siena confessed to Blessed Raymond, her spiritual director, that she never found so hard difficulty in anything as in winning sleep (Papasogli, *Sangue e fuoco sul Ponte di Dio*, page 23). The Father's fight against sleep was never-ending.



As to sleep, the Father counted on prayer as he did for mortification. Here is a prayer to the most holy Heart of Jesus to win sleep.

Adorable Lord Jesus Christ, you told us to be watchful and taught us watchfulness in many ways. Please grant me the grace of being vigilant; strengthen my feeble nature and my unsteady will so that I may endure and win out over the lethargy of sleep. Our Lord Jesus Christ, I appeal to your Sacred Heart that was watchful even when you were sleeping. Heart of my Jesus, excite faith, fervor, and zeal in my cold heart in order that I may turn from so much sleep and may be fond of prayerful watchfulness. My Jesus, you poured out the charity of your heart all nights, praying in the fields, or the mountains, or the caves, or at home in Nazareth. Please grant me the favor of shortening my sleep in order that I may spend the extra time before you, crying for the interests of your Sacred Heart.

My Lord, you see that the spirit is willing, but nature is weak. I am very miserable and feeble; the donkey wants to lie down. My Redeemer, for the merits of your divine vigils, let me win sleep, render me watchful so that I may confess you in the heart of night, according to the prophet! Amen.

Then he invokes the most holy Virgin "model of the watchful virgins"; Saint John of the Cross, who treasured "time wisely, lovingly spending the night in prayer"; and his holy guardian angel to "win a pretty victory over sleep in order to spend the night together with him in fervent prayer for the interests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 25).

Seven hours of sleep were on the schedule, but the Father spent nights before the Blessed Sacrament when the material and spiritual needs of the institution were urgent - and it was not unusual. A sister remembers, "Mother Nazzarena told me that the Father had to perform his spiritual duties in the night because during the day was busy with people." Another sister says, "I often saw him in the heart of the night in the chapel, and in the morning he was already there before the reveille."

He confessed to be hungry and sleepy, but it was because he ate as a sparrow and slept less than it was due.

He called himself a sleeper, but at 4:30 a.m. he was out of the bed, even though he went to sleep late. He was often seen in the night going through the dormitories with the petroleum lamp, and when we kept vigil, he was the first to enter the chapel.

In summer time, he rested half an hour in the afternoon; in winter time, never.

As to the bed, he was easily pleased. He said that he was unable to sleep on a soft mattress. His woolen mattress laid down on planks, and he never let people shake it up. The change of his laundry happened once a week, he himself made up the blankets, and sometimes he slept on the planks, or on the ground.

Sister Ausilia confided to me that when the Servant of God went to Saint Eufemia in 1918 to preach on the feast of Immaculate Mary, he told her to never make up his bed. At the end of his staying she saw on the mattress, dot marks from the instruments of penance. Father Vitale wrote,

More than once when he was a youth, he spent the night praying or sleeping on the ground. In Castiglione, where he preached a triduo in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes, people noticed that he did not use his bed; the same thing happened at Saint Fratello on the occasion of his preaching to the Daughters of Mary. At Torre Grotta in 1926, even though he was 75, he slept on the ground because the sisters had prepared a comfortable bed with a woolen mattress (Ibid. page 616).

While concluding, we point out that the various mortifications of the Father did not hinder his activity. "Despite his penances, I think that the Father worked more." "Despite his mortifications, I noticed no fault in the fulfillment of his duty."

## **10. Kindness and meekness**

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Chastity, humility, and kindness, or meekness, are linked together with temperance as subjective or potential parts of it. Here, we speak of meekness. We'll treat chastity and humility later.

Meekness prevents or moderates anger, letting us bear and treat our neighbor with kindness, his defects notwithstanding. It is an excellent virtue, whose model is Jesus (Mt. 11, 29), but is also a hard virtue that implies the death of our interests. In particular,

it is the virtue of the innocent persons, in whom Jesus has established his dwelling. Bossuet wrote that meekness is "the true sign of innocence, either preserved or recovered" (Meditazioni sul Vangelo, giorno 3).

The Father notices that meekness and humility are closely linked together.

Meekness is a daughter of holy humility, which helps the people to become humble. Each Rogationist will be most vigilant in the exercise of this virtue, bearing in mind our Lord Jesus Christ's words, "Learn from me, because I am gentle and humble of spirit" (Lk. 11, 29). Looking to his divine example, each congregant will excel in this elect virtue in every circumstance by controlling and mortifying himself. Even though one may be somehow angry without sinning, while admonishing for necessity, usually we have to be meek while speaking (we should almost always speak in a low voice), while commanding, but over all while relating with our neighbor so that no one be scandalized (Vol. 3, page 21).

Each superior is warmly urged to keep himself calm and perfectly meek in every event, because his excitement rebounds on his subjects. It is written: "Yahveh was not in the wind" (1 King, 19,11), for he is the spirit of eternal peace. The superior is not forbidden to feel the impressions of the events, to share them intensely, and to act with fervor and concern in the circumstances, but he must never lose his internal calmness, for wisdom consists in combining concern and fervor with internal quiet, which makes everything proceed in order. Here is the rub: the superior will never act by passion, which is the source of these vices: anger, furor, and wrath. If he feels them, he must not consent to them (Vol. 1, page 132).

Meekness! Saint Francis of Sales says that this virtue should prevail over the others like oil floating on water. Such a virtue is necessary to everyone, but especially to the superior for many reasons.

The first reason is good example. Irascibility is common among human beings, but emotions of impatience are more spread among the Religious. The hellish enemy exploits the persons' inclination to irascibility and impatience by working upon it. Unless the superior prevails over this passion perfectly through meekness, he is unable to work as he should, and, therefore, he jeopardizes his subjects on the devil's behalf! Very soon his impatience, his very first emotions, outbursts, resentments, agitated talks, and the like unbridle each Religious' anger, deranging the community in such a way that the spiritual building collapses.

Each one will be meek, but the superior more. To reach this beautiful, beloved virtue which draws other virtues with itself, one must practice it and pray for it all his life long. We read, "In all that is right he guides the humble" (Ps. 24, 9). It means that God guides the meek superior's actions and words in the ways of his divine will, enabling him to lead his subjects to Jesus Christ (Vol. 1, page 204).

Let us glean from the Father's teaching.

Meekness is a sister of humility, and our Lord Jesus Christ suggests to learn from him who is gentle of heart. The merits of this virtue are ineffable. We must wish that the Lord will always send gentle souls to this institute, making meekness bloom among us. This virtue is a sword which kills the vices of human nature, and turns us very dear to God and men. Since each of us is somehow tormented by anger, the practice of this virtue engages us in a continuous fight against ourselves. Jesus' example of meekness stands out over the other ones, charming the people who meditate upon it. Jesus Christ was insulted, beaten, outraged beyond any saying. Through the Jews, the hellish enemy endeavored to arouse Jesus' indignation against his persecutors, but his divine Heart's favorite virtue confused the whole hell.

After Jesus, the most holy Virgin is a perfect model of meekness. Jesus was called "lamb"; Mary, "dove," which has no bile. She never got angry against the torturers of her divine son, but loved and prayed for them.

The saints loved meekness so much. To become meek, they fought against their nature with a will for years. Keeping oneself perfectly meek in any event is too hard, but whoever wins himself, he wins the palm of martyrdom. The holy Spirit said that whoever wins his own heart, is stronger than anyone.

The congregants will pay careful attention to achieve this beautiful virtue. They will beware of any fit of anger when they are contradicted, being mutually meek. But, when they treat with other people, they will show this virtue more. It is written, 'Avoid rash judgements, because it implies sin.' And elsewhere, 'Have you ever seen anyone rushing in his talk? It is easier to correct foolishness than such a person.' It is a very good habit to talk slowly, and in a low voice (S.C. Vol. 10, page 194).

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## 11. Prayer for edification

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The Father's life was perfectly corresponding to his teaching.

He wrote in his funeral oration, "By nature, he was irascible, and unfortunately he never subdued his somewhat vulgar anger" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 241). Writing to Father

Vitale he renews the charge against himself, "Your letter reflects your meek, candid, gentle soul before which my riotous, harsh soul clashes" (Vol.32, page 45). We have no difficulty to acknowledge that he was irascible by nature, but saying that he did not succeed to tame himself is incorrect.

The censors of his writings point out,

That he was of vulgar irascibility does not appear from his writing, he is rather incline to tolerance, forgiveness, and peace with all. He writes with resentful tone only the article for the rescue of the beggars, who had no alternative: starving or going to jail (Vol. 43, page 20-23). When he defends the rights of his institutes, he does so calmly on the ground of legal reasons. He recommends patience, moderation, and fine manners to the mother superiors.

Another censor writes,

From the results of his writing we cannot say that he was irascible, or worse, of a somewhat vulgar anger by nature.

On the contrary, he is usually sympathetic, benevolent, delicate, tolerant, but very firm in the principles; as well as strong-minded and resolute in the matters which were more correspondent to good and to the aims of his institution. It seems to us that the Servant of God meant to say that by nature he felt himself inclined to anger. We admit that he may have sometimes showed signs of agitation or impatience, or expressed hard opinions about someone, because the Servant of God was a little impulsive and bellicose by nature. All this proves that he hardly strove to achieve mental, emotional balance, and self-control, to which his writings bear witness.

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In his prayer we find the first evidences of his hard efforts to achieve meekness. We have already quoted the ones for the daily behavior (ch. 7, no. 6) and for the mortification (ch. 1, no. 4). Now we quote the prayer for the edification. He implores the grace to overcome irascibility and to achieve gentleness and meekness.

O Jesus, gentle and humble of heart, renders my heart like yours! My supreme goodness, even though I do not deserve it, please forgive my defects. See to it that this wretched man be not a cause of scandal! Give me holy enlightenment, quick reflection, presence of mind, calm reasonableness, fortitude and patience to control myself in any occasion. May I not cause scandal through impatience, intolerance, emotion, alteration, nuisance, rashness, fits of temper, resentments, piques, and free play; as well as through words somehow imprudent, or little modest,

or little humble. For the sake of yourself, for the sake of the souls for whom you paid so dear and you want to edify, grant me this great grace! Above all, bridle my tongue! For the sake of your tongue bittered with bile, bridle my perverse tongue! To avoid stumbling over the mistakes of my tongue, see to it that before talking I consider my words in the light of the evangelical perfection and reason. My beloved Jesus, grant me the virtue of knowing how to keep silent, grant me the precious virtue of silence! Lord, lock my mouth, and let me talk the words that circumstances require.

Sweetest heart of my Jesus, compress my perverse heart and free me once for all from the foolish, irrational impulses of irascibility. In the moments of irascibility avert the hellish enemy, awaken in my mind the holy considerations that disperse the foolish thoughts. If the enemy presses, give me enough strength to prevail over him. Let me keep in mind that meekness, control of the impulses, and gentleness in talking prevent me from plenty of defects, render me edifying to my neighbor, get me closer to you, my supreme goodness, and help things succeed more than any fit of anger. For the sake of your gentlest heart, hear me. O Lord, remember David and all his meekness. Through your efficacious grace see to it that I behave among the poor and children with such edification and meekness as to offset the scandal I have caused with my impatience! My Jesus restorer, let me make up abundantly and quickly for my errors (S.C. Vol. 10, page 4).

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To impetrate such a grace, the Father continues invoking the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Saint Joseph, the guardian angel, and several saints, such as Saint Francis of Sales, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Alphonsus Mary Liguori, Veronica Giuliani, the angels and saints patrons, and all souls of purgatory. The resolves we have quoted at ch. 1, no. 5, are added here.

In a note to his personal prayers, the Father writes, "Three Hail Marys, and three Glory to bes to win irascibility. Resolves: do not complain for personal things; meekness in everything; humble and calm patience during opposition and suffering" (Vol. 6, page 117).

## 12. His unshakable peace

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As to how the Father was faithful to his resolves, we have already said a lot in the past chapters. Now we quote additional evidences.

To begin with, we transcribe a beautiful page by Father Vitale.

Tender and compassionate hearted by nature, the Father worked upon himself through grace and efforts. He also endeavored to duplicate the model of the divine Redeemer in himself with a singular meekness and gentleness.

While treating with Religious, lay men, great and humble persons, friends and enemies, the Father behaved so affably as to captivate their hearts. They knew they could count on him for everything which was in harmony with his very delicate conscience.

Among the Servants of God committed to charity toward our neighbor, our Father has something unusual. In the early times of the institution, when he was unable to quickly pay off, his creditors were sometimes determined to manifest their heavy remonstrances, up to insult him, if necessary. But, as soon as they drew close to him, and he said a word, they surrendered as meek lambs. They understood that they were dealing with an exceptional man of the Lord.

Certainly, several persons abused his kindness, failed in their office, or did not keep their word. Then he mildly complained about, almost wailing, 'Unfortunately, they do not like the paternal government. They would deserve rigor.'

The Father often experienced a contrast in his spirit. When his fortitude in meeting the requirements of the virtue demanded the punishment of the guilty to make him up, the Father almost seemed excessive in correcting and in punishing. But a hint of repentance from the guilty was enough to render the Father mild and gentle. Then, by mitigating or eliminating the punishment, he attained the results he was longing for.

When the Father was driven to be severe with someone and seemed as though he was disturbed and unwilling to hear about that person, if he happened to know that the guilty had repented, then he sought to talk in any way: through a smile or a glance - oh, how gentle it was. He seemed like saying, "I am always your Father, and you my son!" Those who knew how to read in his heart, how they appreciated him!

Without a true understanding of the Father's spirit, some acts of his governments cannot be explained. But now we are unable to touch upon details, because they could scandalize instead of edifying.(1)

More than once he had to dismiss some persons who had no vocation,

or had committed faults grave with respect to their state. Perhaps, other superiors would have not received them again in the community, but the Father was not this sort of man. He could not understand that a person is unable to radically change his/her disposition, once the person has acknowledged his/her wrong. For this reason he could not help admitting them again, on condition that they resolve to improve their lives. Those who sometimes opposed his decision, were mildly told, "Saint Francis of Sales says that the congregants who are gone out can be readmitted up to three times..."

He recommended the people who shared the superiority to join firmness with gentleness, to avoid demanding the same things from all, and to ban harshness and natural strictness which can achieve external discipline, but interior virtue. We bore witness to plenty of facts, which revealed how gentle and meek of heart the Father was! Once, he made a few wise remarks about my way of acting in discipline, and I realized that he was sorry. I felt to beg pardon, and knelt asking for forgiveness. He also knelt saying, "You must forgive me, because I am unable to reach certain high levels of perfection." But his kneeling manifested his very high perfection...

In his last years he did his best to achieve heroism in the practice of these virtues. He never lost his temper. Not at all. Even in the low sound of his voice he endeavored to be always mellifluous. His words penetrated our hearts as a celestial balm. Everyone perceived his utmost attention to practicing meekness in the highest degree. He seemed to be willing to prepare himself to death with a deep peacefulness of spirit, the peace which is the prelude of the celestial glory.

At this point Father Vitale refers to our Founder, who charges himself with anger in his funeral oration. He comments, "For us who knew him intimately, his anger was the zeal of his heart for the observance of the law of God. His fight against the defects of nature ended with a splendid victory" (Bulletin 1929, pages 105-108).

We have heard from Father Vitale that the creditors were rather tolerant with our Founder, but not always, nor all of them. In fact, some witnesses testify that a few of the creditors threatened him with blows or accusation to the tribunals. But he bore everything patiently, completely submitted to the will of God. Meanwhile he generously forgave those who held him crazy and insulted him.

Even though very busy with several works of zeal and with the needs of his communities, the Father kept his peace unshakable



in the midst of very bitter hardships. He had already achieved full self-control!

How much he had to suffer to do good!

A sister relates how much was done in Trani in the start of the institute to convince the faithful to send their children to the churches for the catechism. The Father found out that no catechism was taught in the parishes. Upon agreement with Msgr. Carrano, one day the Father walked through the streets of Trani preceded by a youth carrying the cross, accompanied by Canon Tarantino, Don Alphonsus Gentile, Don Joseph Rossi, and followed by a few sisters. He rang the bell and invited the people to the cathedral. The church was crowded, and "the Father talked about the religious education and the parents' duty to send their children to the parishes. The sisters would teach them catechism. Because the clergy did not cooperate with the zealous sisters at the beginning of their teaching, they disheartened and liked to withdraw. But the Father supported, encouraged, and said to them, "Be patient, trust in God, and everything will be fine." Thanks to God, the organization of catechism improved.

The Father was always resigned to the will of God in the various suffering of his life. No one ever heard from his mouth a sharp reproof or a complaint against anyone who did evil to him. His maxim was, "The Lord knows what he is doing," and exhorted his followers to imitate him. "He quickly forgave anyone who wronged him, also helping him financially, if it was the case. He exhorted the sisters to forgive one another, and to make peace before receiving Communion."

## **13. Always eager for forgiveness**

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Some witnesses remember the tribulations the Father endured with a Christian spirit. "I can hardly think of someone who offended the Servant of God. In such a case, he would have imitated the divine teacher. Everywhere he passed through, he was respected and common people exclaimed, 'Padre Francia, Padre Francia!'" It is evident that the reporter refers to the esteem the Servant of God enjoyed

everywhere, especially in his last years, but he does not exclude that the Father suffered isolated affronts and insults. In fact, the Father himself speaks of an 'hellish fight that the city hall roused against him when the concession of the Holy Spirit convent to him was put to the vote.'" Nor have we to forget the furious barking at the city hall to deny the Father the financial help he had requested. "In the foundation of his institute, he faced plenty of grave obstacles. It is well known the revolt of the socialists and their fellows at the city hall and outside. They held Padre Francia as their rival, therefore they furiously barked to destroy his charitable institution since its beginning. The aid that the city hall had granted to the Father in the previous years was denied. The Father attended the meeting, but kept calm. The following day he wrote a renowned letter, insisting always more on his apostolate of redemption. Above all, he confided in God who is the source of any good, and neglected no human means nor natural resources. During and after the fury, he said everything in confidence at the foot of the Blessed Sacrament."

As to the offences, these are the Father's feelings:

Bewaring of nurturing aversion or grudge against anyone, still less against those who seem contrary or offensive to me, I promise the following:

1. I will not be prone to believe that I have been offended, I will think instead that my imagination and selfishness amplify the things making them appear grim to me.

2. If someone really offends me, I will not become indignant, but I will sympathize, love, and look on him favorably, recommending him to the Lord in order to return good for evil" (Vol. 44, page 120).

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Let us read the relations. He was eager for forgiveness, and unwilling to leave people displeased. He was so inclined to compassion and forgiveness that he marveled ingenuously, because he felt no lack of respect toward those who bothered him. Insulted several times especially while begging, he never reacted but heartily and easily forgave the people and the insult He kept in his mind this saying, "May the sun never set on your anger." All should live in mutual peace and charity. "He loved, forgave, and prayed for his enemies, exhorting us to do the same." "He often exhorted us with solemn and strong words to forgive our enemies. Sometimes we announced the visit of a person who had

misbehaved with the Servant of God, but he answered, 'At a greater reason he must enter.' One day he scolded some Daughters of Mary, and their relatives reacted badly, threatening him in the church. By prudence, Sister Maione suggested to stay in for some time, he instead did not worry and said that he had forgiven everything."

"Lawyer Guardavaglia related to me that at Taormina the Father was persecuted and insulted in many ways by the people who wanted to recover some buildings, but he always forgave heartily."

#### Listen to Father Vitale.

It is marvelous how the Father forgot the faults! His priestly ministry to his communities and souls, the sinners he converted, and the debauched he called back to Christian life, gave him occasions to deal with people who had fallen in the abyss of very grave sins. Many of them repented through the Father's ministry and were treated by him like the candid souls who were around him. Furthermore, he seized the opportunity to lay emphasis on their virtues in order to cancel any memory of their faults.

Once, a bishop asked my opinion about a person who had taken a false step, but recovered with the grace of the Lord. I took advice from the Father on how I should behave. He answered, 'You respond that he is an angel!' Another bishop, alluding to a person recovered by the Father, said to me smiling, 'See what Father Francia wants me to give that converted! Did he forget what happened?...'

Yes, like our Lord forgets the faults of his children, and hugs them lovingly as faithful ones, so the Father did (Bulletin 1929, page 107).

During the investigation of our community in Francavilla, people had ground for believing that the former orphan Morgante worsened the position of the institute with his lies. The Father wrote to Father Palma, "In the doubt that Morgante is responsible, treat him better than before, pitying and giving him more alms. We are Christians" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 56).

When a probationer was dismissed from the institute for lack of vocation, her mother spoke ill of the Father and the sisters. The Father invited her to the institute, and gave her coffee and biscuits. Because a sister complained about, the Father told her, "You must know that I have decided to give her an aid and a good loaf of bread every week. We win evil through good."

Lawyer Giovanni Parisi, the already quoted employee at the post office of Messina, told me another episode. "A mailman had been dismissed because he had unduly opened letters and stolen

money to the prejudice of Canon Di Francia. A few days later, Dr. Furci, the country director of the post office, made the mailman reassumed and his case destroyed. At Parisi's marvel, he said, 'I cannot help. Yesterday Father Francia came over and knelt pleading the cause of that man and his family by saying, -I forgave him. You too must forgive.- He was determined to get up on condition that I hear his plea. Could I deny Father Francia?'"

Reports Father Vitale, "After a sacrilegious robbery in our church, he did not worry about searching for the thief; instead he ordered prayers in our communities for the sinner's conversion" (Ibid. page 334).

Canon Celona remembers that when the chapter debated whether to change the schedule for the Lent preaching in the cathedral, the Father was treated uncharitably by a capitular, but he did not react.

The pressures from the poor were a continuous practice of patience and meekness.

"Everyone paid respect to him, except some poor who inveighed against their benefactor because their pretensions were not satisfied in full." He was so charitable toward the poor as to tolerate and be more generous with them, when they abused. If one of them treated the Father badly, the Father had him silent by increasing alms. "The poor who offended him were given more generous alms because of the gospel's saying, 'Render good to those who do evil to you'." He suffered the insults and even the threats of armed poor with extreme resignation. I remember specifically Julius Finocchiaro, a cobbler, who was never satisfied by the ordinary alms from the Father. "One day, an old man who felt himself deprived of his right to the soup insulted and pelted the Father with stones. A gentleman happened to pass by and rebuked the old man saying that Father Francia should be respected. But the Servant of God began whispering to him, "Let it ride, I deserve more than this for my sins!"

The Father was beaten twice in Naples. An old man related to Father Carmelo that the Servant of God received a blow in his face from an unknown man out of hatred for the clergy. As a matter of fact, they did not know each other. But the Servant of God told the man, "May God forgives you!" Father Redento narrated that when the Father took him from the streets of

Naples, (he was a scugnizzo), two hoodlums insulted the Father and one of them slapped him. The Father reacted, "What have you done, son? One must not behave so with a priest." The Father put into practice his own teaching. Writes Father Vitale, "He always repeated to us the exhortation of our Lord, 'Learn from me because I am meek and humble of heart' (Mt. 11, 29). He wanted all of us to be tender hearted even when we had to admonish and correct.

"A superior was giving orders with a domineering voice; she was told: 'Sister, I never give orders to the sisters'; instead I say: 'Would you mind doing this?' Please be so good as to do...' Because of this gentleness, any action against this virtue was forbidden. For instance, he once said about killing a chicken: 'That can be done by the gardener. Let the people do such things'" (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 327).

We move from chicken to sparrows. It is worthy remembering an episode narrated by Father Carmelo. Snow had fallen abundantly in Oria. From behind the window the Servant of God was observing a flight of sparrows in search of birdseed on the white sheet of snow. Thinking of them as creatures of God, he told someone to bring some crumbs to feed them. Father Carmelo brought an abundant provision. The Father, however, was displeased because the grains went deep into the snow. We had to find a table, and the sparrows feasted on it...

Now we move from sparrows to doves. The Father told the sisters of Padua to visit the saint at the basilica once a week, and to bring food to the doves which are on the square. Furthermore, he dictated a prayer that the sisters had to say on that occasion in order to become doves of purity and simplicity.

## Notes

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1. Father Vitale wrote that in 1929, but he left no facts, nor details.



## HUMILITY

1. **Foundation of the spiritual life**
2. **From his writings**
3. **Starter, not founder**
4. **Only to God honor and glory to God**
5. **Showy flowers and meadow-flowerets**
6. **The bungler**
7. **Humility, outcome of prayer**
8. **"The reproaches of my Lord to me, a wicked slave"**
9. **Teachings...**
10. **...And examples**
11. **"Humility goes before honors"**
12. **More witnesses**
13. **An objection**

# 1. Foundation of the spiritual life

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Our divine Redeemer told the apostles, "When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty'" (Lk. 17, 10). Through these words Jesus Christ made us understand the foundation of Christian perfection, i.e., the knowledge of ourselves and the confession that we are nothing (Vol. 10, page 15). The Father began a Marian preaching in 1877 by expounding this sovereign doctrine of the divine teacher, which he repeated and recommended to us as the foundation of the religious life.

We must clear this thought in order to avoid any contradiction between it and the Father's previous statement that mortification is the foundation of perfection (Ch. 22, no. 1).

More than a single virtue, mortification is a combination of virtues, and the first step to all virtues" (Tanquerey, *Compendio di teologia ascetica*, etc. no. 754). Not only the area of mortification is wider than the area of humility, but it also exerts influence on humility. Mortification is a habit of the will, which drives the people to mortify selfishness and directs the spiritual and bodily pleasures to the glory of God" (De Guibert, *Theologia spiritualis*, etc. no. 350). Humility instead is the virtue which makes us know and love our littleness, upon which the mercy and love of God work wonders. It is the negative foundation of the supernatural life since it eliminates the obstacles which hinder grace. Scripture says, "God resists the proud, but bestows his favor on the lowly" (Jas. 4, 6).



## 2. From his writings

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From the Father's writings upon humility we quote the following one regarding the practice of this virtue.

"The sacred writers hold humility as the foundation of the spiritual building. Saint Augustine teaches, 'If you want to build a spiritual skyscraper, take care that the base of humility be profound.' The more a person is holy, the more he is humble. Nothing hinders so much the sanctification of the people and their union with God as pride... Therefore, let us hold humility in great esteem.

Humility must be internal and external.

Internal humility requires that we form the poorest opinion of ourselves, fighting selfishness and our own disorderly esteem. Let us acknowledge our nothingness, and consider ourselves worthy of punishments and eternal reproof. By seizing any occasion to humble ourselves, we have acknowledged that we are not humble enough.

External humility requires that we humble ourselves in words and actions. We should never boast of our actions and things, nor should we seek our glory, esteem, and praise. When someone reprimands us for our faults, we must not excuse ourselves. On the contrary, we must apologize and assent with humility of heart both to the reprehension and the punishment. If the superior sees any fault in us, we have to conform our opinion to his, even when we think of being faultless. Or better yet, in this case we are to humble ourselves twice: first, because of the fault, and second, because we are unable to see it. By necessity, we can explain our reason with humility and low voice, but will keep silent as soon as our reason is dismissed.

Humility in the works requires that we love a humble and poor state. God forbid that anyone of us will wish honor, prominence, and dignity. It would be the sign that the building of the spiritual life is tottering! The practice of holy humility also requires the reparation of our faults in discipline by humbly begging forgiveness and penance. If we have set bad example and are told to remedy the prejudice to others, we have to do so willingly, before rendering the account to the tribunal of God. Therefore, none will receive Holy Communion before remedying his faults, because he wouldn't receive any benefit. Should anyone

offend a brother, he will beg pardon from him before approaching the Eucharistic table" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 192).

### 3. Starter, not founder

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The state of life the Father chose would be enough to make us have an exact idea of his humility. Since he renounced the benefits of his noble condition and his natural gifts, and decided to live in the midst of the poor as one of them, he had to face the judgments of the many who held him crazy. To feed his orphans, he begged from door to door in the city for over 20 years, and sometimes went on the ships to have the pots filled with soup. If that is not heroic humility, what does it mean to be humble?

Discussing about the Father's humility, we begin with his own funeral oration. It turned out to be his last solemn document of humility. He wrote:

"I beg my survivors in all the houses, specifically the superiors, not to praise me after my death because in such cases overstatements are made that, in my opinion, instead of relieving the soul, make it suffer. They make the soul suffer because it did not get the perfection, or the works, or those virtues that they have attributed to him" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 240).

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Even though the Father acknowledges that he had been endowed with good qualities and a few merits, still he charges himself with deficiencies and imperfection, as we have remarked here and there, and will do when circumstances require so.

He complains for the gaps in his culture. He says, "At the seminary he studied hastily and superficially" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 240). He attended the courses of his time. Father Vitale says that the seminary in the Father's time was different from ours, because of the political movements. The chair of morals was held by Ardoino, dogma by Filocamo, philosophy by Catara Lettieri, and letters by Bisazza. These were the teachers of his literary and

sacred culture... As soon as our Founder took the cassock, and certainly when he became a deacon, he turned out to be the most requested preacher in the city and the villages. When I was ordained a priest, he told me, "Avoid preaching for five years, and apply yourself to study. Thus, you will avoid what happened to me: I ruined my health and the maturity of the study." But, his writings prove that the Father was a teacher of asceticism. This was the science he needed to direct his communities. However, he always sought to fill the gaps and implored the Lord to achieve this goal. We call to mind his prayer to achieve ecclesiastical science (ch. 2, no. 7).

When the Father tried to convert learned people, by humility he asked Father Vitale to be a companion, because he thought he was not up to the debate by himself. So he thought.

With regard to the institution, being the founder is the first merit of the Father; but he does not acknowledge such a merit. He wrote:

"From now on, the people must know that the true, effective, and immediate founder of this pious institute is Jesus in the Holy Sacrament (Vol. 1, page 96, cf. ch. 9, no. 1). The Eucharistic Heart of Jesus is the absolute, effective, and immediate superior, and Immaculate Mary the absolute, effective, immediate superior, as well as the guide and the teacher" (S.C. Vol. 9, page 26, 29).

He considered himself as the "very unworthy vicar." He said that he was not the founder of the institutes; the Lord would send the real one. Once, a sister addressed a letter to him with these words: Father sfondatore, whose meaning is the opposite of founder. The Father immediately showed the address saying that the good sister had guessed right. "The Servant of God never wanted to be called founder, but starter. The founder was the Heart of Jesus, and the superior, Our Lady. He signed: the priest starter." "He didn't call himself the founder, but 'sfondatore'." "I heard him saying, 'Please don't call me founder, but 'sfondatore'; who knows whether my works ruin the work of God!'" (U. 12, 39).

The following incident is gracious. One year the community of Trani celebrated the Father's name's day, and children sang a hymn with the refrain which ended with, "Long live the founder!" As soon as the Father heard it, he extemporized some verses against himself, singled out the best singer, and made her sing them on the stage. Unaware of the meaning, the little girl sang them with enthusiasm. Despite the unwilling sisters, the Father made the girl sing it up to the end.

Instead of parading his merit through the institution, he took advantage of the institution to proclaim his inability. Writing to the mayor of Oria he said, "The institute is an enterprise above the feeble strength of a man with scanty spirit and wits, as I am" (Vol. 41, page 48). Another time, speaking of ideals, aspirations, wishes, and hopes for the institution, he added, "In the moments of depression, I incline to qualify them illusions of my imagination" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 212).

## 4. Only to God honor and glory

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The Father expounded his thought about human cooperation in the works of God with an article in *Heroine of Mansfeld*. It is a special issue published by the Geltrudine of Naples, in 1914.

After hinting at the troubles which hinder an institution at its beginning, the Father assures:

The virtues which sooner or later triumph are the following: "constance, pure and tender love for human beings, spirit of sacrifice, the faith in God (in whose hand man is an instrument), holy ideal, continuous activity, and immolation of oneself. But, woe to the people who take possession of an atom of such good! It is not man who plants, saves, and nurtures the tree by the long boughs, but God! Therefore, only to Him honor and glory!"

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What about the little institutions?

Whoever received one talent, will work with that one, humbling himself before the heroes of Christianity who received 5,000 talents and coped with them so well! As to us, we'll say, "Thank you, Lord, for the talent and the grace you benigned to give us in order to cope with it." People often say, "That institution cannot continue because of the person who undertook it. He is unable, nor up to it." Be careful. Isn't it true that God chooses the feeble things of the world and the despised ones, and those that are nothing? Only to God honor and glory! The critics fall into another error when they compare a new institution with

the ones founded by the heroes of Christianity, the saints. They say to the undertakers of a charitable institution, "How do you dare to imitate Blessed Don Bosco, or Blessed Paola Frassinetti, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Jerome Emiliani, Blessed Cottolengo, and the like? Please stop. You are not an extraordinary man, nor a heroine." By saying so, they make a big mistake. It is God who plants the institutions, and he chooses either saints, or poor men, or poor women. These are not up to the saints, nor to their wonders. To follow the holy impulse of doing some good on earth, without pretending to do wonders like the saints, is enough for a founder. God accepts and blesses him/her! We have charitable institutions all over the world, such as orphanages, asylums, and the like, whose founders were merely good Christians. And yet, their works are from God! God performed them, in spite of human and hellish oppositions.

Who was Tata John in Rome? A poor layman, who felt compassion for the street-urchins, began gathering them around himself, and began building the ample institute that the Popes protect. That was the beginning of his institute (S.C. Vol. 1, page 84).

## 5. Showy flowers and meadow-flowerets

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We know how humble and humanly insignificant were the origins of our institution.

The Father informs Father Cusmano:

"I find myself in the beginning of some foundations without almost knowing the how. It seems to me that God wants so. He chooses the least things." The Father acknowledges that the Avignone institution is "really beautiful and sublime"; the only false note is him. "The great inconvenience is the lack of a holy man who may push it forth." For this reason he prays to the Sacred Heart that he deign to provide this institution with an apostolic man, and repeats the words Moses said before the burning bush: "If you please, Lord, send someone else!" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 33).

The Father repeats his wish several times while writing. At the end of the rules for the novices, he writes:

The good Jesus may bless and sanctify these my daughters, and send to them a spiritual, holy master of the spirit who will edify them with

good examples, leading them to holiness. I am not up to that (Vol. 2, page 42). My daughters, pray to the most holy Heart of Jesus to send a holy master, because things go wrong with me. Be always zealous for the salvation of souls. Let us present ourselves to the Lord humble, but trustful in his kindness. We are nothing, nevertheless we hope in his mercy (Vol. 34, page 6). Pray to God that He will provide you and the Pious Institution with a man of the Lord (S.C. Vol. 5, page 9).

He was always in expectation FOR the holy man, and asked God for him in his prayers, urging his coming. In 1914, at the end of a letter to Father Palma, he wrote this foot-note, "Pray that the work of the Rogate may have the boss! (S.C. Vol. 7, page 70). And to Father Vitale in 1916, "The Lord makes me see so clearly my nothingness and the wrong I have done that I wish my departure from earth. May the Lord send his elect! Let us hope and pray!" (Vol. 31, page 75). He could not accept believing that the elect was himself!

"Humble as he was, he confined himself to resort to other congregations, asking them to take over his work. Only after they refused, he thought of founding the two orders." Says Father Vitale, "He told me, 'Canon, do not believe that we are thinking of doing great things like the Salesians.' As a matter of fact, at the entrance of Avignone Quarter the Father had written in big letters: 'Be not afraid, little flock!'"

At the renovation of the vows he said:

What do we pretend with this annual liturgy? Are we wishing to become a great religious order in the Church like the orders by the saints, or the religious congregations that stretch out their branches like marvelous trees, giving shelter to the birds, as in Nebuchadnezzar's dream? Not at all. We must get rid of any ambition, even of spiritual one. The only thing we wish, is to do God's will and to achieve the last end of our existence, the best we can... We should remember that the Church is a vast field with various plants: trees, showy flowers, plants growing profusely, and meadow-flowerets. Are they useless? Doesn't the owner of the field like them? Yes, he does, because they are an ornament. But, the consideration of the principle of humility must lead to the formation of a religious community, without hindering the common life's aim, which is our sanctification... Dearest sons, the Lord wants it! He wants us to look after our sanctification and to form this least institution for the consolation of the Lord, for his glory, and the salvation of souls. In

other words, we must favor the aims of the institute according to the will of the Lord. That's all (S.C. Vol. 6, pages 93, 94).

The Father seized any occasion to abate his merits as a founder of the institute.

From the beginning of his mission he greatly counted on the prayers of the Morning Star Sisters of Naples. One of them, Sister Lucy of the Sacred Heart, a soul full of supernatural gifts, wrote to him: "The Lord Jesus will form this institution, but it takes time. Me and others who are the founders, we'll see the completing of it from heaven." The Father comments with true satisfaction:

O mysteries of the Lord! I strove believing that I was founding an institution, but my useless efforts were coming to nothing without this puissant help! I thought of becoming the founder through my know how. An inspired virgin instead let me know that her zeal, prayers, offering, and tender entreaties to the Heart of Jesus, gave herself and the other sacred virgins the right to call themselves founders (Vol. 45, page 138).

Founders and co-founders were originated from the Father's humility. He writes to Mother Anthony Lalia:

The more the institution appeared beautiful, the more people and hell opposed it. Perhaps, it was even tested by God who permitted so painful events. A very important reason why the institution has been through all these events, is lack of a founder! On one hand, I am somehow the starter of the foundation, but on the other hand my work was fitting for destroying more than for edifying it! If I did not succeed in destroying, it is because the institution belongs to God, who prevented me from destroying it! Since my miseries and sins continue hindering the institution, an idea has crossed my mind during the mass, a few days ago. I have to invite the people who love Jesus and the interest of his divine Heart to spiritually support the formation of these works. They have to do so with Jesus and the most holy Virgin, who are the founders, and Saint Joseph, who is the co-founder. These people will be called the spiritual co-founders of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph" (Vol. 38, page 8). Their task consists in offering prayer and sacrifices to the Lord for the formation of these institutions which are entrusted with the divine Rogate.

## 6. The bungler

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The Father charges himself with the difficulties the institution has faced. "The main reason of the tardy development and the combination of so many painful events has been lack of a founder" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 156).

Despite his endless charity, the Father complained that he afflicted many people. We read in his funeral oration:

"The late canon wants people to know that during his life he made many people suffer and many hearts grieve; therefore, he begs God and you to pardon his bad example and the grief he caused to any person" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 241).

He writes to Father Palma:

I realize that I did nothing, but ruining everything. My life has been a chain of mistakes, errors, oversights, inexperience, temerity, and what is worse, bad examples. But calling other people to suffer with me grieves me most! "I toiled in vain and for nothing, uselessly spent my strength" (Is. 49,4). Please implore from the Heart of Jesus hope, trust, courage, and patience, because I need them very much! If I experienced them, I would feel strong and safe (Vol. 30, page 21).

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To remedy these presumed faults, he said 33 masses for the people he had made suffer, etc." (S.C. Vol. 10, page 88).

Writing to the Father, Canon Vitale called himself a bungler. The Father responded, "Please avoid speaking of bungler and not bungler... I am the bungler of this institution, from the beginning; but our Lord sent Canon Vitale to remedy the grave mistakes I had heaped up..." (Vol. 33, page 99).

When the sisters of Saint Benedict of Oria were granted to set the sacramental oratory, they made a Eucharistic feast, in the absence of the Father. He wrote to Bishop Di Tommaso, "I received from the Lord the privation of being absent, but I have understood better what I am experiencing from many years, i.e.,



that the communities do better and progress when I am absent. God lets me see how useless I am" (Vol. 29, pages 71, 2). Congratulating Father Vitale on the happy results of some affairs, the Father wrote, "I always say to myself, 'When I am out, things go better, and several difficulties disappear'" (Vol. 31, page 40). "Saint Anthony grants you the miracles that he denies to me. I do not deserve them. Praised be God and Mary! (Vol. 32, page 42). "Praised be God! You succeed in what I wouldn't and couldn't" (Vol. 33, page 15). With regard to some inconveniences caused by people who kept silent when they shouldn't, he writes, "Mute devil! It is over forty years that I am battling him. He causes grave damages to our institutes, but I have not succeeded in getting him out. The gospel says that the person willing to drive away the one staying in the courtyard and to deprive him of the weapons must be stronger! And I am not. For this reason, for over forty years I have seen him taking possession even of the elect in our houses" (Vol. 32, page 126).

The Father writes to the superior general of the Bocconiste that he entrusts our institute to her founder. "I managed it so badly, but was unable to destroy it because our Lord Jesus protected it against my inexperience" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 229). To save the institution from the abyss in which he had thrown it down with his temerity, the Father says to the Lord, "The means are failing, and my temerities fall down on my head! The work of my presumption, temerity, pride, ambition, and caprice is before me like an abyss, which I cannot fill! I have dug abysses of miseries for my neighbor, I have deceived, and deceptions fall down on my head! My Lord, have mercy on me! Have mercy on all these people. My Lord, save, save this institution!" (Vol. 4, page 72).

The Father is convinced that his presence attracts the punishments of the Lord on the institution. In the first months of 1915, foreseeing the entry of Italy into the war, he writes from Apulia to Father Vitale, "If complications set in, where should I stay? Also Oria is important, even though I fear that where I am, there we expect more slaps..." But he combines humility with confidence. "We have the Heart of Jesus who stretches out his hands to protect us" (Vol. 31, page 59).

In an evening during his last disease, the Father spoke about the Lord's mercies on our institution. I witnessed to a new proof of his humility. He said:

What is this foundation in God's mind? I imagine it like a great adorned palace, with courtyards and halls; or like an immense garden

with parks, villas, and houses. How much good can be done here! How many souls can be saved! How much glory and consolation it can bring to the Sacred Heart! Would it be the same foundation if God had chosen another person to start it, or if he had found more loyalty in me? My sins have reduced it to a poor plant having a life of drudgery... in the misery of Avignone Quarter!

This spirit of humility should be always at the head of the institution's progress.

When the vocations grow in number and the youth are well formed, they will be ready for new foundations, avoiding to wish them for ambition, levity, vanity, and vainglory, which would prevent the Lord from blessing them.

...They will work in the holy Church and in the mystical harvest of God for the divine glory, for the consolation of the most holy Heart of Jesus, and for the salvation of souls (Vol. 1, page 182). We repeat: we must avoid seeking to found any house by ambition, seeking big cities for a worldly reputation or for large profits; on the contrary, we must work for our Lord Jesus Christ's glory and for the poor who are not cared for by other institutions (Ibid. page 184).

## **7. Humility, outcome of prayer**

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The Father's humility was the outcome of prayer. He never grew weary of asking the Lord for this virtue. Perhaps there is no supplication in which the Father forgot to implore humility. However, all his prayers are inspired with feelings of sincere humility, which made the Father annihilated in the divine presence.

A significant episode. Soon after the first world war, the faithful of Italy said a prayer before the Blessed Sacrament to impetrate victory to Poland, which was attacked by Russia. As soon as the Father began the prayer (he always said all them), he gave the paper to the assistant cleric and kept silent. One evening

he explained to Father Vitale, "What sort of prayer is that one? I feel unable to say it! We should tell the Lord to remember the merits of that nation... Not at all. We should first humble ourselves in the prayer... The just charges himself at the beginning of the speech!"

The Father expatiates on speaking about how humbly we have to present our petitions to God, "Happy the person who puts himself in the divine presence and prays with a treasure of humility in his heart! How many graces he will obtain for himself and others!" (Vol. 1, page 65).

The Father noticed the spirit of prayer of Father Cusmano when that Servant of God preached in Avignone.

When he described the annihilation of the soul before God, which makes the prayer pierce heaven, he himself seemed annihilated before the Most High. Or better yet, he looked like reproducing the profound, intimate humility and the perfect loving trust with which he used to annihilate himself. He showed the feeling of his nothingness before the divine presence. Thus, he cast his heart to Jesus with the fervor, which snatched out plenty of graces from the Heart of the divine Redeemer (S.C. Vol. 9, page 145).

Unaware, the Father described himself.

We refer to chapter one, and to the several prayers of the Father for his conversion. His petition on October 2, 1888, starts from the life of Saint Dominic, and praises the Lord for having been humbled and defeated. It reveals enough the spirit of the Father.

My Lord Jesus Christ, I thank, praise, and bless you for your infinite kindness, charity, and gentle liberality through which you granted your beloved Servant Dominic everything he asked. I thank, praise, and bless you for your perfect justice and impenetrable disposition, through which you deny me what I ask you with wails and sighs. My sovereign Lord, I acknowledge your infinite wisdom and the admirable dispositions of your divine will.

For this reason you are endlessly worthy of praise and blessing. O Most High, you covered me with humiliation and ignominy; defeated and placed me before my iniquities; left my prayer out of your presence; closed my ways with square stones, and left me in the hands of my foolish counsel. Most High, I kiss the most holy rod that beats me, annihilating myself before you, my true and sovereign owner. As a

poorest slave, I am at disposal of your divine will. Do what you want with this worm! Amen! (S.C. Vol. 10, page 6).

If the prayers of the Father are not granted, he charges himself with failure. For instance, when Father Vitale was expecting graces for his spirit, the Father wrote that he had visited some shrines in Rome, Naples, and Pompei. Then, he added, "Everywhere I implore peace, health, and sanctification from the most holy Heart of Jesus and the sweetest mother Mary. If you get nothing, the blame is on me. But let us always hope. Always!" (Vol. 31, page 41).

To amend, the Father notes his defects with precision during his spiritual retreats (see ch. 1). In 1887, he happened to have a picture of the child Jesus squatted near a wounded donkey lying on the ground. The child is leaning a caressing hand on the donkey's neck, and holds a cross with the other one.(1) The Father sees himself in the wounded donkey, and writes this prayer on the back of the picture:

O Jesus, Good Shepherd, have mercy on your little donkey! See how wounded and languishing it is. Feed it with your fat pastures, and water it at your clear springs! O Jesus, Good Shepherd, ride and excite it with the power and the sweetness of your word, making it walk your ways and carry you where you want. Under the government of your merciful hand, render it obedient to your will! O Jesus, Good Shepherd, if your donkey is unwilling to surrender perfectly to your signs, beat it with your holy cross, and make it perfectly docile. See to it that the little donkey acknowledge you as the only owner and serve you with patience, humility, and meekness. May it always carry you where you want! Amen (S.C. Vol. 8, page 6).

One day he mailed the picture to Melanie, and acknowledged himself in the donkey. "Please place the picture near the child Jesus, or under the beloved feet of my child Lord, who is in the oratory. He deigned to be my Good Shepherd" (Ibid.).

## 8. "The reproaches of my Lord to me, a wicked slave"

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Msgr. Guarino loved the Servant of God so much, and one day told him playfully that he was like a horn. The Father held this word seriously, and wrote in his notes, "Msgr. Guarino, Archbishop of Messina, defined me wisely in August 1887, 'You are like a horn: empty, hard, and sharp'." Then he commented, "I am empty of virtue, sense, vigor, spirit, knowledge, science, etc. I am hard, because I am obstinate, hard-headed, insensible to the grace and call of God; hard-hearted with my neighbor, etc. If I am beaten, I do not soften, etc. I am sharp, because I am punctilious. I prick my neighbor with my tongue and actions, offend, hit, wound, and kill." He concludes with this prayer, "My Lord Jesus Christ, change me into a chosen vessel, full of your mercy, strong enough to keep the treasure of your grace, and steadfast. Amen" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 6).

We read in the gospel how our Lord lashes his enemies for their pride, repeating tremendously, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you frauds!" (Mt. 23, 13-15). The Father fits those diatribes to himself, giving a splendid example of humility.

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### THE REPROACHES OF MY LORD

The reproaches of my Lord upon me, a wicked slave! ... Woe to you hypocrite, who neglects seeking the kingdom of God for souls: you do not look after perfection, but impede others to get it, because of your defects!

Woe to you hypocrite, who feed lavishly upon the alms of the poor, but are inattentive to prayer and canonical hours. You will give a more severe account!

Woe to you hypocrite, who travel around to make a proselyte. Then you scandalize, making him like you!

Woe to you, blind director who say, "This is good, this is not." Fool and blind, isn't your duty to know what is convenient, and what is

not? Whoever tries his best to know, but he does not succeed, he is not a sinner; whoever instead doesn't try his best, is at fault.

Woe to you hypocrite, who gather orphans, give alms, say prayers, but neglect the works of justice, the law, the priestly ministry, and charity with your neighbor. You should do those things without neglecting these ones. Blind leader, who drip a midge, but gulp down a camel!

Woe to you hypocrite, who show yourself a devotee, but inside are full of robbery, anger, vanity, misery, pride, negligence, obstinacy, selfishness, falsehood, and thousand of sins. Blind! First purify your inside, setting right your intentions; then show yourself a devotee.

Woe to you hypocrite, who are like the whitewashed sepulchers, beautiful on the outside, but full of dead bones and dirty inside. You seem good to men, but inside are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Woe to you, who build the walls of the orphanages and adorn the rooms of the orphans saying, "If I had means, I wouldn't let perish plenty of children." Thus, you bear witness to yourself, who act worse than those having means, letting souls perish. if you have no means, you are the cause. You overflow the measure of those who don't try their best for the salvation of souls. Little serpent, viperish race, how do you escape the judgment of the fire?

I send to you warnings, good books, inspirations, teachings, good occasions, but you don't pay attention as you should. You are indebted to the grace of conversion and to priesthood, being liable for your faults in the service of my people and my altar. I truly tell you: you deserve the punishment for all these faults!

Soul, soul, who are negligent in corresponding to my grace and service! How many times I tried to purify and draw you close to me as a chick under the wings of the chicken, but you held out against! Behold! Your soul will be left desert and empty of grace! I tell you, "You won't see me again until you heartily say, "Come, O Lord, because I converted to you!" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 31).

In an ardent supplication to the most holy Baminella Mary, on September 8, 1905, he asks the most holy Mother to have her merits recognized before the most holy Trinity, in favor of the institutes:

It is over 27 years since I committed myself to this institution, how much moved by selfishness and false zeal! Oh, difficulties which would be so little for the master spirits were for me hard, rough mountains for me! What is worse, I myself created harsh, grave difficulties to me and others! I would like to shed as many bloody tears as the waters of the ocean. Everything got

spoiled in my hand! Everything stopped because of me! Who will free me from want of persons, buildings, and means? This is the triple treasure I have heaped up! Oh, if I had answered the divine graces! Oh, in what vile vessel the Most High deposited the great word of the divine zeal of his loving Heart! (Vol. 7, page 87).

Moved by such feelings, we do not wonder at the following words of his funeral oration:

"To tell the truth, the Pious Institution he started did not improve because of him! He tried four to five times to form the priestly Rogationist community and never succeeded because he lacked something, and sometimes he himself destroyed it for false zeal" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 241).

For this reason he attributed to others the merit of the foundation. "On the evening of June 13, 1926, he had a speech in the church at the second vespers of the saint thaumaturge. For the sake of truth, quoting the gospel's words "the truth will set you free" (John, 8, 32), he declared that both the works and the Anthonian movement shouldn't be attributed to him, but to God; and after God, to Father Palma for the economics, and to Father Vitale for the spiritual gifts. He repeated the same thought in a leading article of God and Neighbor of the same year. Besides, he had already qualified himself in words and writing, the starter. Because Father Vitale succeeded in fostering the clerics, "the Servant of God said smiling to them, 'You are Vitalini.' I am not up to such a work." "The clerics were called Vitalini because, according to the Father, only Father Vitale was entitled to the merit of their formation and of the fortunes of the congregation." On one occasion he wrote, "The founder of the Rogationists is Father Vitale, on behalf of the Blessed Sacrament, the divine founder" (Vol. 33, page 42).

One year, on the name's day of Father Vitale, one year the Father wrote a hymn to Saint Bonaventure, imploring the protection of the saint upon Father Vitale, who had joined the "falling Hannibal" in the institution. Father Vitale replaced "falling Hannibal" with "fervent Hannibal." But the Father sent back the paper qualifying himself in rhyme "glutton, sluggard, jester, and the like, in such a way that the words stood out in the song!"

## 9. Teaching...

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We can easily understand the role of humility in the Father's teaching.

One day, while we were vivaciously playing, the Father happened to pass by and called, "Children!" All of us ran to him... "What virtue have we to practice more to please the Heart of Jesus?" "Humility, humility," we answered in chorus. "Yes, children, just humility..." He went away pleased. We had met his thought.

"The word humility was often in his lips to admonish us." "He frequently exhorted us to achieve and practice this virtue." "In the community he often spoke of this virtue to foster our interest in it."

Reminding us of the evangelical parable, he recommended to always choose the last place. When he was afflicted by opposition or hitches, he humbled himself, seeing in the events the punishment of God for his sins. He begged pardon, and surrendered to the infinite mercy of the Lord, trustfully.

"In his lectures, he often told us that the Lord delayed the progress of the institution because of his sins. He took this idea as a motive for exhorting us to be humble like useless servants. "When he noticed some pieces of carelessness in the sisters, he wrote to the mother general, "I hope that these pieces of carelessness toward me and other persons come to an end when I will be no longer. Such things happen for punishment of my sins" (Vol. 36, page 16). If he perceived feelings of pride in us, he became sad and rigorous.

"He always recommended humility to us, saying, 'among the religious communities, you are grass, i.e., empty of virtue'." "He taught us that humility is the foundation of the virtues. The strutting of some probationers was a negative sign of vocation; therefore, he tried his best to make people humble also in the appearance."

Listen to a Religious of ours. "When I was a boy, I deserved



the punishment of kneeling in the refectory because of a little fault. Then, by rule I went to beg pardon from the Servant of God, but I did not kneel before him. To teach me how one should beg pardon, he admonished me solemnly and he himself knelt showing the way how to do it."

He exhorts Father Vitale to insist on cultivating the virtue in the Religious, even at the risk of losing youths of talent. "The matter of importance for us is to hold in esteem and to seek humility, and the love of Jesus, whatever they may be the brains we lose. But, more than losing, we gain. We must never put our trust in creatures, because the humble, simple souls form the institution, not the brains, as you teach me" (Vol. 32, page 45).

When the Father began the seminary in the institute, he wrote this beautiful prayer for the youth:

O most holy Virgin, you held yourself as the lowest among creatures, despite you were full of grace, and born without original sin. Grant us perfect internal humility along with compunction of spirit and love for humiliations. By humility, you drew God from heaven to earth in your purest womb; please infuse the precious habit of this great virtue in our heart! We beg you for the sake of your humility, which made you the Mother of God; for the sake of your divine motherhood, which came about for your humility; and for the sake of Jesus Christ your only Son, who loved and taught the virtue of holy humility. Holy Mother, see the mission into which we are initiated, if divine clemency destines us to priesthood. See to it that we prepare ourselves perfectly with the practice of internal and external humility. May we always acknowledge our nothingness and place ourselves in the last place, following the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen (Vol. 7, page 19).

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When the religious community was better organized, the Father replaced this prayer with a daily Hail Mary to the most holy Virgin.

When a religious student happened to scold a religious brother, the Father intervened with an extemporary, long, and so tender exhortation to be humble that Father Franze' of the Friars Minor told me, "I got out more from it than a month of retreat!"

On one occasion the Father admonished the novices, and they accepted his words with virtue. He was pleased, but insisted on humility:

I delighted in hearing that you have accepted my admonishment with humility. It must be done so, without thinking whether you deserved it. You must say within you, "It is right. I deserve it." Humility pleases the Lord, but displeases the devil, who endeavors to convince people that

they deserve no punishment. Blessed daughters, I exhort you always to renew your spirit, rising from your faults, humbling yourselves, and taking again to the road of the virtues with courage. I thank you for your wishes, but high seats are unfitting for me. May the good Jesus keep me under his divine feet, under his celestial table! (Vol.34, page 1).

A youth who fancied to become a sister wrote to the Father. She said she would perform great things as a member of the community. The Father responded, "My daughter, none is able to perform great things. On the contrary we should aspire to perform plenty of beautiful little things and make ourselves little. Great is only God, who is able to do great things" (Vol. 42, page 136).

## 10. ...And examples

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When the Father did, or thought of having done something rash while punishing or correcting, he humbled himself. By doing so, he grew in our esteem. Says a witness, "Once he told us that he had decided to dismiss a sister because of her faults. But after she acknowledged her faults in public, the Father forgave her and said, 'I am wrong.' Furthermore, at lunch time he gave the repentant sister the fish I had cooked for him." "In cases of misunderstanding, he apologized with the sisters, and recommended to keep in mind the evangelical parable about humility." Says a former orphan who was in charge of the typography. "Like a child, he had no ambition to stand out to the prejudice of others. I myself at the age of 22 reprimanded him because he removed a boy from a machine, running the risk of causing damage. As guilty on the spot, he apologized very humbly." Says a sister, "When we were in the garden, some boys threw stones at us, and a sister answered back with a stone. I was accused with that, and the Father deprived me of Communion. As soon as he knew that I was guiltless, he knelt at my feet in the presence of

the community, asking forgiveness."

In Rome he met a monsignor who was going to Padua for the first time, without reserving any place. The Father addressed him to Battizocco family, and gave a hundred liras for the expenses. On occasion, this monsignor could return the favor to the Father, and so he wrote to Father Vitale, "He may help." However, soon after he thought over it and added, "Certainly, Saint Vincent of Paul and Cottolengo would have reprimanded me for putting my trust in a creature, because of a hundred liras! But I am, 'I am not!'" (Vol. 31, page 40).

His humility made him discover defects in his own virtues. We read in his funeral oration:

"VIRTUES - Certainly, we cannot speak of heroism here, and before God's inquisitive eyes, this man has been less than nothing. We cannot deny that he had mercy on the poor, and many times he sympathized with them and tried to help them, even though we do not know if he went beyond his bounds because it was his duty to raise the sheltered orphans through the procuring of alms" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 241).

In 1921, the community celebrated the seventieth anniversary of the Father with a performance. At the end of it, the Father said, "You have come here to honor me and to delight in my institutions; but I think that the Lord is not pleased by my work. From the priests he shall demand an explanation of the things they have omitted to do." Mr. Micalizzi, a creature of the institute, almost always used to recite some verses in Sicilian dialect, at the closing of the feast on July first. By unfortunate idea, one year he began speaking of the Father and his institutions. He was immediately silenced. That day was the feast of the Blessed Sacrament. That was the topic one should speak of.

We have said several times that the Father helped the Morning Star Sisters in many ways, but he also wrote to them, "Don't hold my advices as infallible. Obey your superiors and do everything with the prayer; this is the surest way" (Vol. 39, page 74). When they thanked for his helping hand, he pointed out, "You say that without my help you wouldn't know how to do. Ah, you know better than I do that God is helping you. God uses whomever he wants! Either the cock crows or it does not, God rises the sun! Certainly, I am obliged to God more than you, because he deigns to use me!" (Vol. 39, page 10). When their institute was struggling through difficulties and want, the Father quoted passages from the bible to excite their confidence in God. He wrote to the mother superior, "Isn't it an evident miracle of

divine kindness toward your institute the fact that a poor priest burdened with fourteen communities send hundreds and thousands of liras to you in these hard times? Therefore, trust in God! As to us, let us thank the divine kindness that is pleased to help your holy institute through me, despite my demerits!" (Vol. 39, page 14).

His humility shines even when he asks for prayer. He asks Melanie, "Pray so that the most holy Heart of Jesus be superabundantly atoned for the pains I have caused him" (S.C. Vol. 8, page 3). On the occasion of a slight ailment, the Father writes to Father Vitale, "Do not make people pray much for my healing, because the institute's affairs are of a greater importance and have precedence" (Vol. 31, page 30). To the Morning Star Sisters: "Two doctors kept me under observation. They didn't find anything serious. Therefore, do not strive praying for me, but for the urgent affairs of your institute. May the omnipotent child Jesus make everything succeed according to his wishes" (Vol. 39, page 36). On another occasion: "As for my health, please do not strive praying. Say one Hail Mary a day. That's enough. You have to say so many prayers, you cannot tire yourselves therefore, above all the old ones" (Vol. 39, page 40).

Owing to an abscess to a leg, the Father was compelled to stay in bed. He wrote to the pious Virginia of Aquila.

You informed me that Father Ferretti has told you on my behalf to pray for me, because I am sick. There must be a misunderstanding. I told him to say some prayers, but not many for this trifle. Instead, you have to pray much for the interests of the Heart of Jesus, for the conversion of sinners, and my own conversion; for numerous, holy priests to the holy Church, and holy rulers; for the propagation of faith, and other serious affairs (S.C. Vol. 5, page 113).

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Even when the Father prepared the circular about his own death, he was moderate in asking prayer from the Sacred Allies of the institute.

The undersigned Canon M. Hannibal Di Francia from Messina, passed into eternity on...at...o'clock, at the age of... Through this printed paper written by himself, he announces the news of his death to the prelates of the holy Church..., to the venerable convents, friends, acquaintances, lords, and Rev. Fathers in order that they want to charitably dispose some suffrages for his poor soul...

He thanks very humbly and promises to pray for those who will pray for his poor soul. He does not demand that so many people spend excessive time on him in these bad times, when they have to pray more profitably for the main interests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the holy Church, the salvation of the souls, and everything concerning the universal triumph of divine love (S.C. Vol. 7, page 239).

## 11. "Humility goes before honors"

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We do not leave out an epoch-making episode to us.  
We quote a report:

"A learned person who did not agree with the Father upon a subject, in the ardor of the discussion labeled him with injurious epithets. Even though the Father was not convinced by the contrary arguments, he not only faced the insult with patient silence, but also retired apologizing. The debate was about the Messina traditions on Saint Anthony, which the learned person denies in the biography of the Saint."

After so many years, we can handle the subject more clearly.

During the national Eucharistic congress in 1924, our Founder met Father Vittorino Facchinetti of the Friars Minor (18..-1950) in Palermo. Author of various studies, especially upon Franciscan saints, Father Vittorino was later elected Apostolic Vicar of Tripolitania. He had published an abridged edition of Saint Anthony's life for the youth, condemning the Anthonian traditions of Sicily as tales unworthy remembering. Very sensitive to the religious traditions of the island, the Father wrote a letter to the author, insisting upon the value of those traditions, which cannot be erased by a stroke of pen.

Father Facchinetti did not answer. When they met in the sacristy of a Franciscan church, the Father apologized thoughtfully for his letter, in case his interlocutor had found motives of offense. Father Facchinetti took up the subject immediately, and the Father opposed his arguments by saying, "My Father, it is a mistake to deny a tradition because of lack of documents; it is a mistake to deny it without having positive proofs."

We don't know the condition of spirit of Father Facchinetti in that moment. Helped by a fellow member of his order, who

qualified himself as the lector general, he went out of bounds saying, "Saint Anthony's second coming to Sicily is false, is a lie, and you are in bad faith, you are a conceited dolt..."

These epithets blew out the Father's ardor in defending the cause. He mildly said, "Well, my Father, please recommend me to the Lord, pray for me in the holy mass..." and was going out to avoid an indecorous debate in a holy place in the midst of priests... But the other one continued insulting, so the Father repeated, "Recommend me to the Lord in the holy mass; recommend me to the Lord." But the interlocutor insisted, "Your criteria would make of you a good historian... I am going to publish a big life of Saint Anthony, and when I meet this subject, I will place a foot-note saying that Saint Anthony's second coming to Sicily can be admitted only by Canon Di Francia's odd brain..."

The Father took his leave, recommended himself to the prayer of his interlocutor, and went away accompanied by new undeserved epithets.

Then came true the Scripture's saying, "Humility goes before honors" (Prov. 15, 33). Father Galileo Venturini, S. J., one of the speakers in the clergy session, at the end of his speech at the national Eucharistic congress in Palermo, introduced the padre to the audience who cheered enthusiastically. The... bishops... showed great satisfaction at seeing him in the meeting. Some of the clergy moved closer to hear him from nearby while others stood up on chairs.

With his usual calm and with simple words vibrant from this great love for souls, the padre began speaking of the Rogate to which are joined the fortunes of the Eucharist.

A few days later Facchinetti passed by our institute and asked of the Father. Did he wish to apologize? The Father, however, was in Rome. I met Facchinetti in Assisi, in 1948 or 1949. He was already a bishop. He said only, "I have known Canon Di Francia: a holy man..." No more, no less.(2)

## 12. More witnesses

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If we gathered what the people have said about the Father's humility, a long work would come out. We make a choice instead. "The virtues which shone more in him were humility and charity for God and neighbor." Spending joyously good part of his life in the midst of the beggars is a monument of humility. "Averse to presumption, he avoided any circumstance which could make people believe he had feelings of pride and ambition." "In my frequent relations with him I noticed that he was a humble person never seeking himself, but the glory of God."

"Humility shone in his behavior: it was delightful to approach him because of his suavities." "Humility shone in his dress, walk, and his way of handling the people." "He was very humble. Even common people perceived this virtue from his walk. He always used third class train, except in his last years, because he was compelled by his children's love. Toward the end of his life, to move about in Messina he used a calash pulled by a little donkey. It was like a symbol of his poverty and humility... For the sake of humility, he loved so much washing and kissing the feet of people, above all the male comers in his institute. He did so with me and my companions. He also used to wait on at refectory. To pay homage to Saint Alphonsus, he volunteered to wait on the Fathers of Via Merulana (in Rome), but he was denied." "His humility was always hieratic, I ever saw it so. To my knowledge, he never failed in such a virtue." "Taking into consideration the nothingness of the human things, he held humility in profound esteem..." "One day I asked him," says Father Vitale, "whether he was a friend of His Excellence Blandini, the Bishop of Noto." "A friend? A Servant! He responded. After outlining the Father's humility, Father Vitale concludes, "However, never did he forget the duties of his office, the priestly dignity, and the splendors of worship."

"From his speaking and treating, the people noticed how humbly he thought of himself." "The Servant of God shone in humility... One day I caught him humbly bent in the chapel, confessing to a priest that I esteemed the last one in the city of Trani." "On the Father's name's day, a sudden storm flooded his room in Trani. With simplicity, he took off his shoes and began drying up the floor with the clothes he had at disposal."

Then he let others help him... More than once he said to us, above all in his name's day, 'A worm was born, which became a beast. Pray for this sinner who was born on July 5. He hinted at himself.'

"He excelled at humility by humbling himself with the superiors, his equals, and his subjects." "His customary way of asking was, 'Sister, (or brother), can you give, or do this, please?'" "He accepted canonry by obedience, after refusing it several times. He wouldn't have resigned himself to wearing honorary insignia. He thought that insignia and daily shopping for the Avignone poor were incompatible." "He delighted in bending before people lower than him. He often said in public, 'Lord, have mercy on me for the times I have offended you, even unwillingly! Children, ask the Lord to hear me!'" "He had the gift of humility. I saw him dealing with all classes of people, keeping the same attitude." "On the eve of the main feasts, he ate kneeling in the refectory. On Holy Thursday evening, he washed our feet, kissed them passionately, and had a moving speech for us."

"His admonitions were almost always about humility, and he practiced this virtue first... When the act of penance in the month of May was about humility and mutual forgiveness, he was the first to beg pardon."

"He cultivated humility profoundly, and when someone congratulated him upon his institutions, he responded quickly, 'Everything is due to God and my cooperators.' One day he asked me for the scissors to have his hat's tufts cut. Because I was amazed, he said that tufts weren't worth wearing." "He openly held himself as a useless servant in the hands of the Lord. His humility appeared from his attitude and his continuous confession, as well as from his warm exhortations to achieve this virtue."

The Father's last visits at Taormina are well remembered. "In the last visit but one, we gathered in the chapel. He wanted all of us present, and said, 'We won't see one another on earth any longer. I humbly beg your pardon if I have not answered your expectations and my duties.' At our hiccups, he changed tone and unusually let us kiss his hand. When he mildly demanded the master not to rebuke the orphans for their pulling and kissing his hands, he seemed Jesus repeating 'let the little children come to me' (Lk. 18, 16). Some days later he came again



unexpectedly, because the archbishop refused the luxurious hospitality at Saint Dominic hotel. Instead, he asked to dwell in our house, and asked the Father to accompany him in the pastoral visit to Taormina. To the humiliation of the Servant of God who narrated the fact, the archbishop sat at the left of the Father in the car, out of politeness. The faithful perceived the archbishop's esteem for our Founder's virtue, and rejoiced. The archbishop dwelt six days; the Father, three. Those were days of martyrdom for him; he was crushed by grief. He asked me humbly, 'Do you think I should ask the archbishop to let me leave?' As a matter of fact, while saying mass he seemed to breathe his last on the altar. Also, the religious brother who assisted him lovingly had not come. On my urgent demands, or else I myself would have done so, the Father asked the archbishop to let him leave. That was his last visit."

### 13. An objection

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We conclude this chapter with an objection against the Father's humility.

He commissioned Teresa Basile to paint a picture of several persons, who would stand for Saint Margaret M. Alacoque, Saint Francis of Sales, and the saint of Chantal. While commissioning the piece of art and communicating the scheme to the artist, the Father specifies, "I would like to be part of the picture. You could paint a priest at the foot of the altar kneeling in adoration before the Holy Sacrament, between the Salesian Sisters and the Daughters of Divine Zeal. To see the priest's face has no importance. A hint of his profile should be enough" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 126).

Someone said that the Servant of God's humility did not shine in this case.

And yet, it shone! We give further details.

First, the Father curtly opposed to show off himself in any circumstance. When the young painter Adolph Romano asked him insistently to pose for a portrait, because he liked to start his career with the Servant of God, the Father told him, "Paint a

Portrait of Father Vitale. He is better known and more appreciated than I am in Messina." And he denied posing.

Years before, he wrote to the painter Basile, "I listened to hearsay from mine in Trani about a portrait of me, etc. I beg you: do not meddle. I don't want any portrait. Not at all." (S.C. Vol. 5, page 125).

I add that the Father never permitted to expose any of his pictures in our houses.

Let us return to the painting by Basile.

This isn't a worship painting, but a living room decoration. It is in Messina in the mother-house of the Daughters of Divine Zeal. The Father mailed a photo of the painting to all the houses saying to expose it in the community, not in the church, nor in the oratory" (Vol. 34, page 227).

The reason and the meaning are the following.

For long years the Father nurtured the dream of a union between the Daughters of Divine Zeal and the Visitation Sisters by Saint Francis of Sales and Saint Jane Frances of Chantal. He prayed so long to make his dream come true because of the revelation to Saint Jane and her apostolate for the Sacred Heart in the world through her order. By so doing, the Father aimed at drawing a new protection and mercy from the Sacred Heart upon the Daughters of Divine Zeal; as well as at calling the attention of the Visitation Sisters upon the divine command to spread the prayer for good workers to the holy Church.

The Father had this scheme exemplified in a painting, which shows the Holy Sacrament on the altar, whence the devotion to the Sacred Heart came forth, and where all devotions converge" (Ibid. page 225). Immaculate Mary, Saint Margaret, (who holds a picture of the Sacred Heart with the Rogate), the saints founders Francis of Sales and Jane of Chantal are around the Blessed Sacrament. A group of Visitation Sisters is on one side, and a group of Daughters of Divine Zeal, on the other, whereas a priest is kneeling in adoration at the foot of the altar.

Suppose that the Father had thought of showing himself at the foot of the altar to meet his longing for staying in perennial adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Would it be an act of pride? We do not call Saint Teresa of the child Jesus a foppish because she delighted in mirroring herself in the paten, when she

was a sacristan. By doing so, she thought that the consecrated host could almost rest on her face.

But the matter went the other way round. People can think of whatever about the Father's desire when he commissioned the painting. The fact is that we see the priest in the picture from the rear -- perhaps for humility's sake. Furthermore, the Father explains:

"At the foot of the altar also a priest is kneeling in adoration before the Holy Sacrament, the divine Heart of Jesus, and Immaculate Mary. He could be the Blessed Father De la Colombiere, an intimate cooperater of the Blessed Margaret for the spreading of the devotion to the adorable Heart. But he may represent all the Rogationists, because he is praying to the most holy Heart of Jesus to send out good workers to the holy Church" (Vol. 34, page 226. See Vol. 38, page 15).

## Notes

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(1) The Father received the picture from the Servant of God Rosa Gattorno, the founder of the Daughters of Saint Anna. He kept it very dear.

(2) In 1925, Facchinetti published the big volume *Anthony of Padua - The Saint - The Apostle - The Thaumaturge* printed by S. Lega Eucaristica of Milan. He treats the second coming of the saint to Sicily, but differently from the language he used with the Father. "It seems sure that Anthony returned (from France) to Italy by sea. He boarded the ship at Marseille. He was granted it for the sake of God by the captain who set sail for the Tyrrhenian sea. Either the storm brought him again to Sicily, or he himself wished to see again the hospitable shores and the Religious of that province, who received him from Morocco, the tradition makes him landing again on the island of the sun. Track of his short staying are a few tardy monuments and tales of the wonders he worked" (page 317). However, Facchinetti acknowledges, "The early hagiographers make the saint go directly from Province to Padua, which was to be the most fruitful field of his zeal. But, this way, we find a gap of two years in the Anthonian history, i.e., 1227 to 1229" (Ibid.).

Are we able to think of Saint Anthony confined in any place without preaching the divine word, before reappearing at Padua out of the blue? He, the saint, the apostle of fire? If we don't have any documents about the saint's two year activity, we can rightly think that he spent this time in Sicily, instead of speaking of a short staying there. Thus, the tradition handing down that the saint founded several convents in the island remains vindicated. Also, it

is commonly admitted that the ancient legends, i. e., the collection of the saint's stories, have been mutilated. Viscardi writes about "the terrible crisis in the order of the Friars Minor after the death of the patriarch. Both the Conventuals and the Zealots... aimed at presenting Anthony as one of theirs, thinking that the authority of his name was of a great moment for legitimating opinions and doctrines. They did so with firmness ... but without respecting chronology, sometimes" (Viscardi, *Saint Anthony of Padua* - A.E. Formiggini, Rome, 1931, page 14). Facchinetti himself calls our attention to "the internal fights that tormented the order in its first three centuries." During this time, the friars who were nicknamed "the advocates of slackening," battled fiercely against the ancient manuscripts, the pure, candid, but very true biographical legends" (Page 16). (See the wonderful study by Prof. Salvatore Ribilotta: *La tradizione messinese nella storia di S. Antonio di Padova*, published on *God and Neighbor*, July 1933).

Therefore, the Father had good grounds to firmly uphold the Anthonian traditions of Sicily.

## RELIGIOUS VOWS

1. On Saint Joseph's feast.
  - A) Chastity
2. From his writing
3. A page of Father Vitale
4. An angel
5. He spoke of the virtue
6. With the sisters
7. With children
8. Against fashion.
  - B) Poverty
9. The Father's thoughts
10. The first poor of Avignone
11. The Father's room
12. His clothes
13. Always poverty in everything.
  - C) Obedience
14. Listen to the Father
15. Always obedient
16. With the bishops
17. With his Ordinary
18. Msgr. D'Arrigo archbishop of Messina
19. With the new diocesan curia
20. His friendship with Don Orione
21. Msgr. D'Arrigo and the Rogationists
22. "We couldn't be of God!"...
23. Always faithful!
24. Notes

# 1. On Saint Joseph's feast

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We have already pointed out that the Father put his religious communities under the particular protection of Saint Joseph, who is the patron of interior life. For this reason he disposed the taking of the garb and the vows on Saint Joseph's feasts. Specifically: the Daughters of Divine Zeal on March 18 or 19; the Rogationists on Saint Joseph's patronage, the third Wednesday after Easter. It was a solemnity in that time, transferable to the following Sunday.

On these occasions the Father always intervened to arouse the religious fervor with his warm, persuading word and to make the people taste the happiness of belonging to the Lord in our community. The order was so unpretentious in means and development, but was so pleasant to God that he entrusted his divine Rogate to it.

Only one of these speeches was singled out for the press. It was printed in Giarre (Catania) by a periodical of sacred eloquence, and is included in the volume of the Father's speeches (Vol. 45, pages 384-400). The numerous outlines of the other speeches however, are enough to reveal the Father's thought and spirit (S.C. Vol. 6, pages 81-146). The opinion of a theologian censor is the following:

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The speeches of the Servant of God are not extraordinary, but are well devised and full of sound doctrine. When he speaks of the religious life, of its benefits and rewards, etc., he becomes eloquent and his thoughts gush out of his heart. He displays in a lively and convincing manner the truths he has absorbed in years of study and prayer. Unaware, the Servant of God unveils his spirit totally leaning to God and looks for wings to fly higher through the gift of the religious vocation. The empty rhetoric is totally absent from these speeches, which are as fresh as they were in the Father's mouth.

Because we have already treated the vow of the Rogate in chapters 4 and 5, now we look at the Father in relation with the

religious vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. For historical reason we let our readers know that the sisters also took a fifth vow in those days: the vow of charity.

## **A. Chastity**

### **2. From his writings**

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We refer our readers to the Rogationist Anthology (pages 266-270), and report other thoughts of the Father.

The rules for the probationers at the beginning of the order require of the youth "to accustom themselves to the holy practice of the virtues of perfect chastity, voluntary poverty, and exact obedience." Even though the probationers do not take these vows, "still they will embrace them heartily, making them the object of their resolves." With regard to chastity, the Father emphasizes its importance and indispensability with these grave words: "May God see to it that this little community be an elect garden of pure lilies, pleasant to the One "who browses among the lilies" (Sng. 2, 16). Were it otherwise, we wish God to destroy this little seed at its rising!" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 169). He writes to the Religious: "Perfect chastity. Our Lord said, 'Blessed are the single-hearted for they shall see God'" (Mt. 5, 8).

The pure of heart are the chaste souls. They are compared to the angels because they resemble them in the freedom from matter and in the life of the spirit. For this reason chastity is called the virtue of the angels. It is so sublime and singular that only the fortunate souls understand it, according to the saying of the infallible witness of the truth, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, only those to whom it is given to do so" (Mt. 19, 11). Called by God to religious life, the fortunate souls must love this angelic virtue jealously. Therefore, their thoughts, works, words, and desires, must be very chaste. To be faithful to the vow, the Father recommends the following means:

1. Daily Eucharistic Communion received with a tender love for Jesus Christ. 2. Special devotion to the most holy Virgin, Saint Joseph, and the guardian angel. 3. Prayer and daily meditation upon the last truths and the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. 5. Work, avoiding idleness. 6. Humility, because chastity is a reward for humility. The proud are never chaste. 7. Mortification of the senses, especially sight and gluttony.

The Father ends with this grave warning, "Woe to the soul consecrated through the religious vows who staggers on this fundamental virtue This soul becomes quickly corrupted, and goes into ruin. The enemy of souls endeavors...to drive it to evil. Because of that Jesus warned us, 'Be on guard, and pray that you may not undergo the test" (S.C. Vol. 10, page 188).

### **3. A page of Father Vitale**

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The Father says in his funeral oration, "To the Lord's glory he declares that he never knew the actions that people call dishonest, obscene, etc., and he never understood what pleasure people find in them" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 242). It came to our knowledge from various witnesses that to qualify himself for confessing the faithful, the Father needed explanation on this subject.

As a youth before knowing his priestly vocation, the Father had a fleeting idea of forming a family, thinking of a creature unknown to us. This event left an ineffable sadness in his spirit, all his life long. Prof. Nicotra let us know this episode. He adds that the Father was always pure and deeply grieved by that human affection which pulled him away from the love of God, at least for a moment, in his way of thinking.

We continue with this eloquent page of Father Vitale:

We can say that Canon Di Francia was an angelic man. From the early years of his innocent life, he appreciated the priceless treasure of



the virtue without feeling inclined to opposite vice, due to God's grace. From his disclosure, from his behavior in some necessary and risky incidents, from the counsel he asked for, we detect that if ever an obscene thought crossed his mind, it did not affect him. This is not an over-statement; he himself wrote the following: "To the glory of our Lord, I declare that I never knew about actions that people call dishonest, obscene, etc.... and never could I understand the pleasure of such actions." And yet, he tortured his body and behaved with much prudence not only in dealing with immediate problems, but also in working out distant risks. Sometimes in his pure conscience, he considered whether he had behaved properly about a delicate matter for the good of souls, but later he told me: "For God's grace, I do not know such temptations."

Nonetheless, he was inflexible, harsh against any sign of this vice that could harm souls even slightly. A look less than sober, a frivolous touch of a hand, and spending of time with people of the opposite sex beyond what was necessary were reasons for serious measures.

One day, seeing a cleric looking here and there on the street, he told me: "It would be better for him to go back to the world."

To caress children, he generally laid his hand lightly on their heads.

He used to recommend that preachers speak about making people love virginity rather than speaking of the opposite vice beyond what was necessary.

Performances for youths dealing with worldly matters, which were improper and dangerous for them, were forbidden. Sometimes he reproached a missionary and made him stop a movie because of pictures of naked Indians.

He never allowed clerics, under pretext of literary culture, to read books or magazines hinting at erotic matter; rather he devised a way to lead them away from suspicious places and circumstances.

A young priest reports: "Once I was with the padre on a bus. All of a sudden, he called me and gave me a newspaper he had open in his hands. I thought that he wished to save himself the trouble of reading; therefore, I began reading aloud. But he told me to read it to myself. Then I understood: he gave the paper to divert my eyes from the people coming and going."

He seemed to lose his natural mildness in the presence of certain dress for young girls, reproaching the parents harshly and running the risk of making them react unfavorably. Trying to convince him that baring one's neck or chest moderately could be tolerated was useless. He could not agree because "the small" would grow "great." He wanted the girls to dress modestly. This was due to the purity of his soul.

How many times he repeated Saint Augustine's saying: "Your talk with women must be brief and austere" (Ibid. 321-322).

## 4. An angel

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Witnesses confirm this beautiful page of Father Vitale.

"To my knowledge, the Father always kept chastity. I deduce it from his talking and walking." "He was much reserved in his sight, especially with women, and was very strict in the observance of this virtue among us." "Walking through the streets he was very modest; I accompanied him often." "I can't specify anything about chastity, but his holiness appeared from his face." "I can't say anything of his innermost, but his external behavior showed an exemplary holiness." "I suppose he has always been innocent. I saw him modest in the sight -- always." "He walked modestly and recollected. When people saw him, they said, 'The saint is passing by'." "To my knowledge, his behavior was always serious and grave, demanding trust and respect from the priests, sisters, and lay people. When he talked of chastity, he always called it the angelic virtue."

On various occasions we heard a few statements on this subject from the Servant of God. "I heard the Servant of God saying that he had known certain sins from the study of morals." "With regard to an apostate, he confessed to me that he had never had a hint of such temptations; and yet, he coped with world and church going women. I lived with him more than 27 years; I don't know if I am wrong, but I affirm that I smelt such a perfume of holiness."

It is not a marvel, therefore, if the witnesses called him "an angel" in their reports. "In such a matter I found nothing different from an angel's purity." "In the community we thought of him as of an angel."

## 5. He spoke of the virtue

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He recommended the caution by Saint Francis of Sales, i. e., to preach on the virtue instead of the vice. He disliked the new expression of the catechism, "You shall not do impure actions," and in the booklets for our institutes replaced this expression with the old one, "You shall not fornicate."

Speaking of chastity, the Father spoke of its odor, never of the opposite vice. "On the taking of the garb, or the vows, his preaching on the chastity's beauty was suggestive, but he never spoke of the opposite vice." While teaching that "chastity requires sacrifices, he made us understand that it becomes a source of inner delights beyond comparison" (Vol. 45, page 221). He was very reserved about such a matter in his preaching, nor did he allow other priests to come to details, above all about the opposite vice. "He was merciless in supervising the performances, and removed any hint of worldly love." Msgr. Lojaco, Bishop of Ariano Irpino, gave the Father the works by Parzanese: four volumes of preaching, and four of poetry. The Father appreciated the gift and was delighted in reading the speeches. He read some passages to us, sometimes. However, after the Father's death, we found only three volumes of poetry. He had eliminated the fourth one, in which the poet sang the chaste love of his town's country people. And yet, such people lived in the simplicity of the morals of those times (1800-1850).

Nor did he allow the community to read something disturbing. "In May he warned me, because we read a meditation by Father Muzzarelli on the purity. He withdrew the booklet from circulation, saying, 'It is unfitting for the orphaned girls, and for you, the sisters.'" "I was reading at refectory a rather delicate story, but instead of paying attention to its meaning, I was looking at the somewhat grotesque attitude of a punished probationer; so, I burst into laughter. The Father was eating in a nearby room; he thought I was laughing about the reading, and got up to call me to order. In private he told me not to laugh at the story which regarded the offense to the beautiful virtue." " He was very reserved with us. I think that the beautiful virtue was sovereign in his soul. In fact, when I read a book at refectory touching upon the opposite vice, he told me at the end, 'Daughter, skip those pages. Some of the youth could misunderstand,

receiving evil instead of good'."

A Rogationist who has been many years an assistant to the boys points out, "We were forbidden to discuss with boys inconveniences about morals. It was reserved to the Father, or Canon Vitale."

## 6. With the sisters

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To guide and to form the sisters and the youth, the Father had founder-subject relationships. Hence, a certain perplexity, lest he should act against conscience. Then he submitted his doubts to Canon Pennino of Palermo, the former confessor of Father Cusmano. He responded,

After reading your letter I think that you behaved egregiously with the sisters and the orphaned girls of your communities. So did Father James Cusmano; so does his successor Father Mammana, a priest of pure conscience; so do the founders. Therefore, Your Reverence may be peaceful, you are in good company (September 14, 1897).

The witnesses report, "As to chastity, to my knowledge he never let women kiss his hand." A sister, "He was kind and reserved, but his attentions for us were carried out by the mother superior. He did not allow us to kiss his hand, and the few times we were allowed, we did it, crossing our arms."

I remember:

It was 1924 or 1925. Very tired, the Father sat on the landing of the stairs to rest a little while. The sisters passing by asked him with filial affection for the blessing and how he felt. He stopped that fuss rather sternly, and said to my ear (perhaps to teach me, I was a new ordained priest), 'Your talk with women must be brief and austere.'

Because the Rogationists' institute was under construction, the Father was compelled to dwell in an apartment at the Holy

Spirit. Due to his health fatally waning, he was cared day and night by a brother. Almost every evening we went over there to visit him and receive orders. More than once the sisters asked us for necessary information about the house and the institution. When the Father realized it, he appeared on the threshold of the door and dismissed us with resolute gesture. He prescribed by rule not to let women kiss our hand, following his example."

He didn't allow jokes of hands among us, nor to touch one another.

One day he warned two aspirants when one of them took away an ant from the shoulders of the other. He thought it was a gesture of kindness. The witness points out, "It seems excessive, but for the saints it is not." The same episode is narrated in details by another witness. During the play activity the Father had the bell rung for a meeting: he thought that a probationer had laid hands on another one, but it resulted that she had taken away an ant from the cape. The Servant of God remained humiliated." "A probationer who had touched a companion with the blessed branch of olive, smiling (it was on Palm Sunday), was scolded by the Father. She had to ask the mother superior for forgiveness and for a penance. A sister who said to an orphaned girl, 'How beautiful you are!' was admonished by the Father."

"As to chastity, the Father was irreproachable. In our ring-a-ring o'-roses, the Father told us to join our hands with the handkerchief to avoid touching one another. He used to say, 'Whoever is chaste, is humble and obedient.'" "We sisters were not allowed to touch one another."

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## 7. With children

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We have said enough of the Father's hearty kindness toward children. But someone compared them to the consecrated host, which is touched as necessity requires. So did the Father with children.

After noticing that the Father sometimes washed the feet of the Religious, a witness adds, "But I never saw him washing the feet

of children. He did not do so for modesty sake, I suppose." And again, "I have said that the Father didn't wash the feet of children, nor he caressed them; he only put his hand on their heads, demanding of us the same behavior. He prohibited the sisters who took care of the kindergarten children in Rome to wash them. A widow was hired for that." "Children were caressed on their heads; we were forbidden to carry children in our arms, or to caress them. Once, the Father censured me severely because I took a crying child in my arms to console him. I was told to deliver him to his parents and mine, who had come to visit me."

The Father did not want the Religious to kiss children. A mother superior who asked the permission to wash the feet of the sisters, was told by him, "I don't grant it. If you want, you can do so to children as a mother, for hygiene sake only, now and then every other week, but without kissing them" (Vol. 34, page 34).

A sister relates that when she was a probationer, her parents brought a recent born niece. The youth kissed her in the presence of the Servant of God. In the evening, at the end of the procession of Bambinella Mary, everyone approached to kiss her. When the probationer approached, she was told by the Father, "You have kissed your niece, that's enough."

The rules of another community of sisters taking care of children stated, "The sisters are not allowed to kiss children with much effusion." The Father remarked to the mother superior, "Who can bridle an internal effusion, which can easily follow? Where will the sister confine the child Jesus, with whom the consecrated soul enamored of Jesus has to exchange kisses and caresses?" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 220). Msgr. Sebastian Militto was distinguished in piety and doctrine. A former vicar general, he was fond of the Father and his institution, to which he sent several vocations. Once he brought a two years old orphaned girl to the Holy Spirit to be sheltered, and while leaving kissed her good-by in the presence of the Father. The Servant of God drove him to the room contiguous to the parlor to make him notice that such a manifestation of innocent affection is unfitting for a priest. That should be avoided to make the priestly life shine. Relating the fact after so many years, Militto showed admiration for the Father's delicacy and charity, saying that he had kept the brotherly and fatherly warning as a kindest memory.

Also Father Messina, a guest of ours for several years, relates a similar episode. At Guardia, a baby was moving joyously in the hands of his mom, leaning toward the priest with raised hands. Father Messina approached the baby and kissed him as to please the mother. The Father called and told Father Messina in secret that the tenderness and kindness of the priest toward children should be never signified by kisses.

The sisters were prohibited to kiss one another: "He recommended mutual charity and permitted to seal it up with the kiss, but on second thoughts, he decided against the kiss."

We notice a delicacy of his own in a letter about the rite of admission to a congregation:

When the priest questions the candidate, your ritual has, "My daughter," etc. These are fond words between the priest and the candidate. Such words are unfitting for that solemn moment when the soul must be full of compunction and touched for surrendering herself to Jesus, her adorable spouse and divine lover. The word 'daughter' should be more than enough, because of its broad meaning: daughter of God, of the Church. It is also a hint to a young age that implies and makes the renunciation to the world more beautiful; and it is fitting for the Scripture's saying, "My delights are with the sons of men," which we apply to Jesus. Therefore, the word 'daughter' by itself should refer to a simple, pious, innocent soul, in which Jesus wants to find his delights. He separates her from the world and binds her with his love. The word 'my' hurts all these beautiful meanings! (S.C. Vol. 5, page 218).

## 8. Against fashion

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Knowing the Father's criteria, we can imagine what he thought of fashion.

In September 1915, when Italy was already at war since May, the Father published an article on God and Neighbor. After stating that war is a terrible punishment of God because of men's sins, he describes the extremes in which humanity had fallen. He thinks that the scales of the divine justice were keeping balance, but a new sin made them turn.

"This great sin is the women's very immodest dressing since

a few years. Their very immodest dressing aiming at making the body appear is dreadful. It is the devil that invented it to ruin men and women. But to see how the damned fashion has caught women is more dreadful and causes surprise. Even the church goes, who hear mass and go to confession, use it without shame" (S.C. Vol. 1, page 171).

The Father was very strict. A worker remembers: "One day I entered his room having my shirt-sleeves rolled up to the elbow. He told me, 'What's that? There are the little girls here!' Looking at him was enough to understand that he was an angel in the flesh." When he was sick at Guardia, a daughter of a worker went to visit him. The Servant of God warned the girl and her father because her clothes were not quite decent." A witness says, "As for me, there was nothing wrong."

"Once, the Father refused an alms from a bare-armed lady, and turning round said, 'Please go away, do not scandalize these children!'" A sister declares,

"The porter had veils in stock to cover the indiscreet devotees coming to pray to Saint Anthony in the oratory. The orphaned girls were wearing a long dress to atone the immodesty of the world's ladies. The Father also scolded his little nephews (Toscano), and he himself sometimes unfolded the newspaper to cover their legs, when they sat in his room. The sisters told me that they all laughed when the Father related that he had covered with a handkerchief the chest of a lady while traveling by train, and that having hired a coach with a lady not quite decently dressed, he challenged her by saying, 'Or you cover yourself, or I get out!'"

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The Father's delicacy of conscience reached the highest point, when he had the pictures of his room covered to act easily.

Not even in the sacred pictures the Father suffered the nude. He saved from the debris of the earthquake a painting of Our Lady of Providence with the child by Rodriguez, and kept it at the Holy Spirit. But the Father felt uncomfortable before the child painted nude, and called upon Father Catanese, who delighted in painting, to have the child covered with fluttering clothes. Is it exaggeration? Perhaps, but even in this the Father is in a good company with Saint Charles Borromeo (A. Deroo, S. Carlo Borromeo, il Cardinale riformatore, page 195), and Saint Vincent Pallotti. The latter had a veil painted around the hips of the child, who is at the center of the altar-piece in the chapel of Saint



Charles, at the new church" (F. Amoroso, Saint Vincent Pallotti, romano, page 106).

Says a witness: "Speaking of Raffaello's Logge, some people refer a Father's saying, "Were I responsible, I wouldn't bear them one day." I myself heard the Father saying to Father Vitale, "I would like to be the Pope fifteen minutes to cover the nude of the Vatican rooms." Besides, this is not an original thought of the Father. In fact, when the Sistine chapel was opened, Rome was scandalized, and people protested against it. Still Michelangelo living, Pope Pius IV, perhaps also advised by his nephew Saint Charles, had the nude of the Universal Judgment covered by Daniel Ricciarelli of Volterra (1509-1556), who was nicknamed "Bragettone." Saint Pius V had this worthy job finished (Daniel Rops, La reforme catholique, page 98, 112).

One more witness. "The youth who visited Rome with the Father, were advised to see streets and monuments which had nothing against the virtue."

## **B. Poverty**

### **9. The Father's thoughts**

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The Second Vatican Council reminds us, "The poverty embraced of one's own free will to follow Christ, is a sign very appreciated today. Therefore it exhorts the Religious to cultivate it carefully (P.C. 13). If we follow the Father's teaching (Rogationist Anthology, pages 252-259), we'll comply with the Council's prescriptions. We report additional thoughts of the Father.

Before the birth of Jesus, the virtue of holy poverty was entirely unknown to the world. Our Lord made a chief demonstration of it. By his will he was born a poor, lived as a poor, and died in greatest poverty. Besides giving a very splendid example, our Lord exalted poverty with his doctrine. He narrated the parable of the pearl hidden in a field, which a smart dealer bought by selling all his belongings; called the poor happy, but the rich unfortunate; and promised an everlasting exaltation to

evangelical poverty... All saints were enamored of this virtue, considering it in our Lord Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. From God, he made himself a very poor man needy of everything; his Mother was his perfect imitator.

Saint Francis of Assisi called poverty his beloved spouse, and out of love for it he became the model and the teacher of this religious virtue. Also Saint Joseph Labre was a spectacle of poverty to the angels and the world, because he combined extreme poverty with abjection! Oh, how these champions of the holy Church were rewarded by God!

Holy poverty is the source of several virtues such as humility, patience, temperance, and holy detachment. It is the real treasure which is hidden to the world. To get this virtue, we must sell the glory of the world!

The Father recalls a circumstance which binds the Rogationists to poverty:

The congregants of this least order will have a loving enthusiasm for holy poverty. They are called to it by God with a particular vocation because of Avignone. This quarter is notorious for its poverty and abjection; our community is born here; and all of us surrender to the divine providence, because we are lacking everything in the midst of a poor flock. Therefore, going out of this holy start would be a worse crime for us, since the provident hand of the Lord placed us in it. By God's help may our small religious family appreciate our luck, and hold evangelical poverty as our own precious dowry. If we want the noble uniform of poverty to form our honor, we must love and hold it with its inconveniences, as the provident God wants. We must never pretend the honor of poverty and the comforts of the riches. "It would be a too big ambition," said the holy bishop of Geneva."

To avoid that the devil swerve us from these principles under the pretext of good, the Father recommends attention and watchfulness.

Beware of a trick of the devil. Because we are fortunately committed to the salvation of souls, to the relief of our neighbor, and to the formation of this least religious order, we need plenty of means. May God help us search for such means with purity of intention and without any thought of self. May he free us from the enemy of the virtue and souls, because he tries to distort such purity. Let us be vigilant on this matter, holding that the sound works of religion and Christian charity are formed with the practice of the holy virtues, such as humility,

patience, and faith in God, not with money or terrestrial means. The practice of pure charity combined with evangelical poverty is a perennial source of providence for us and others! (S.C. Vol. 10, pages 191-192).

## 10. The first poor of Avignone Quarter

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The Father devoted himself to the poor, living among, and for them. For this reason Father Vitale wrote, "Our padre, the first poor man of Avignone, seemed envious of those he fed and clothed. More than once, he seated himself and ate with them to enjoy their company and to be one of them" (Ibid. page 319).

"The spirit of poverty he cultivated sprang his majestic institutes." "We understand the Servant of God's spirit of poverty from his giving up everything for the poor, and from his holding the poor as the owners of the money he ran." "His observance of the vow of poverty was illuminated by charity for others and by self-denial... He taught us that the blooming of the communities is due to poverty, whereas their ruin is due to contempt of it. He used to say that begging is a practice of poverty, 'Whoever asks is a poor'." "He recommended poverty as the guardian of our communities; in default of it, the Lord would punish them." "He lived the spirit of poverty, and proposed Saint Francis of Assisi along with Saint Joseph Labre as models."

"Strictly observant of poverty, and to save money for the poor, more than once he prohibited me to buy expensive fish. Also our clothes were cheap, and he himself checked the price saying, 'The poor too have to eat.' Money was for the poor and the institutes; we had to conform to this tenet. The Father checked our belongings to see if poverty was observed."

"He dressed as a poor man, and poor was his dwelling room. He often ran out of his underwear, because he gave it up to the poor, even while traveling. I heard that his fellow canons mumbled when he was elected a canon and appeared among them wearing used clothes. But he used to say calmly, 'Leave me

alone, I have my poor!" "It came to my knowledge that he bought used canonical clothes. He taught us that the spirit of poverty draws upon us special graces from the Lord."

"He was imbued with the spirit of poverty. The sisters once hired a second class hearse; they were admonished by him, 'These are useless expenses. For me, do not even hire a third class hearse. When I die, a hand-cart will be enough for me!'"

A sister remembers, "When I was given a nickel silver-ware as a present, I put it at the Father's seat at refectory. As soon as he came, he asked me if we had tin-ware. I had one. I cleaned it and gave it to him. He said, 'I like it. It is useful!'"

"The mother superior at the Holy Spirit replaced the curtains of the reception room with better ones. When the Father saw them, he said, 'No, no. This is contrary to the spirit of poverty.' We had to remove them." Another sister reports, "I found in the drawer of the mother superior a penknife with a piece of paper. I read, 'The Father forbade to use it, because it is stylish.' I said to myself, 'Where is the style?' It was a common penknife which is sold on the booths; but the handle was of nacre, and the Father refused it."

He wrote:

The mother superiors will avoid spending unnecessary money for the community's maintenance, remembering that they have taken the vow of poverty, that they must use (and not abuse) the divine providence's affluence, otherwise they offend our Lord, stopping him from helping us. The community must be provided with the necessary food, clothes, furniture, accessories, etc., avoiding the surplus. The necessary objects will be of the lowest grade, except the ones for the use of noble guests. Do not say that some things are cheaper because they last more; even those of low grade may last if they are given careful attention. It is also of no avail saying that some elegant things are given free. We must avoid the devil's snare. Sometimes we have to renounce such gifts, and when courtesy obliges us to receive them, we can sell the marketable ones, putting the others in the guest rooms, or reserving them for the noble persons, but never for the Religious (Vol. 1, page 222).

## 11. The father's room

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The communities founded by the Father reserved a room for him; it was different from house to house, even though a poor and modest one. Obviously, the witnesses talk about the room they saw, and for this reason their relations are different.

"I have always noticed that the superior's room is more comfortable than the room of others; but, the room of the Servant of God was not. The priests told me that he used to foster the spirit of poverty through instructions." Out of poverty, he kept the holy water in his room in a glass.

"Extreme poverty reigned in Avignone: floor of rough wood, chairs of rope, and earthenware. Father Cusmano of Palermo said that the place was suffocating the institution." "His room was lacking everything; it was one of the slum. When a religious student came from Oria to Messina to continue the study for priesthood, he wrote, 'Saint Francis would be envious of our Father's poverty!' When people began taking the vows, rigor of poverty was somehow moderated in order to preserve vocations."

"He loved so much the little cells of the former Alcantarine convent in Oria. He dwelt willingly in them, and disliked any remodeling. When a Religious did so without informing him, the Father told him sadly, 'You are an anti-Franciscan'!" Listen to the transformer,

How many times he complained about the remodel I made in the floor of his cell in Oria! It was of earthen pots, rubbles, and lime worn out. I replaced it with variegated tiles, which were cheaper than the previous system of floor. But he told me that we must distinguish between economy and poverty. Not everything which is cheaper is fitting for a Religious. For instance, the friars perhaps pay more for the clothes established by rule. When I made him notice that the floor of the orphans' dormitories was better, he let me consider that the orphans do not take the vow of poverty. As to food and clothes, he made all sort of sacrifices. And yet, he was so generous and refined toward the sick and the strangers. His room was bare. On the occasion of a bishop's visit, we were arranging something from other rooms, but he stopped us calmly by saying that after all the bishop was visiting a poor Religious.

The community's mattresses were on wire net bedsteads; the Father's, on planks supported by wooden trestles.

"For about ten days after the opening of the institute of Oria, we slept on emergency beds, or mats, or blankets; the Father slept on planks covered by sheets. He said that an old man's bones are more resistant than children's. And he was the cook and the scullion for two weeks, doing everything fairly well naturally, and giving examples of poverty and humility. A terra-cotta cup on a system of his own at refectory had many uses. He had the earthen plates from Grottaglie inscribed with moral sayings, and each of us used one plate only."

Other relations about these episodes emphasize quite a few details. "He hardly suffered the change of his room's floor, remodeled in his absence; but he kept his mattress on planks laid on wooden trestles." We can still see his poor room in Oria: his bed with planks and wooden trestles; a rope to lay out his washing; long nails, wrapped in fabric, as clothes hooks. From his spirit of poverty we understand why he liked to be in the midst of the poor, eating like one of them. "The Father lectured frequently on the spirit of poverty, and did so solemnly during the nine days of preparation for the renewal of the vows."

"He wanted his room simple and whitewashed, a few pieces of furniture, sacred pictures, and some papers. Every object of the house should be kept with care, else it would displease him." A sister remembers, "Accompanied by another sister I entered his little room to talk to him. I marveled at the bare walls and his big, reddish slippers, which I judged unfitting for a priest." "His room was poor, but rich of sacred relics closed in a board. He often exhorted us to live the spirit of poverty, following the example of our Lord, Saint Francis of Assisi, etc."

"In Trani, the Father prohibited to replace the wooden floor with tiles." His small, poor cell was like a Franciscan one. "When we were willing to prepare a better room for him, he told us with simplicity, 'No, daughters, I am very comfortable. Not even in Messina I enjoy these comforts'!..."

The mother superior of Taormina community made her attempts to replace his hard mattress with two new ones.

"I wish I never did! I was solemnly scolded and ordered to return the old one. I thought of eluding the order by forming one mattress from the two, but I exposed myself to additional admonitions, being defined as narrow-minded and obstinate. I lost!... His furniture: two chairs, a desk, a rough clothes-hook, an earthen basin, a chest-of-drawers, a crucifix, some books, and some

pictures on the walls, among which his very dear Saint Joseph Labre, the saint of the lousy. Woe if anyone tried to change something under any pretext. But he thanked me smiling when I gave him five volumes by Martini."

## 12. His clothes

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Modesty and poverty had their own marks on the Father's clothes, and we had to take care to renew them. We had to suggest to him the changing of his hat or clothes when they were shabby, or worn out, or he was going to a meeting requiring better clothes. He, however, was scrupulous about personal hygiene.

Humble, colorless clothes, and shoes often mended were his attire. More than once Saint Vincent de Paul society provided him with cassock, because the one he was wearing was indecorous. Also other benefactors helped him with clothes, but such gifts often finished up in the hands of the poor.

Once, Father Catanese bought a new hat for the Father, and did away with the old one to have him wear the new hat. The sisters sometimes made a new cassock for him, but he was not satisfied. He said that money could have been given to the poor, whereas his old cassock could last longer. Anyhow, his clothes should be ever of common fabric, and underwear of rough cloth.

Say the sisters,

"One day that our founder was going to the Holy Father - say the sisters - we concealed his mended shoes and gave him a new pair. He didn't give in: we had to return the old ones. We do not know why, but the shoemaker once decided to make a squeaking pair of shoes for the Father. Hearing the squeaking, the Father became indignant, and exclaimed, 'What is this vanity?' He had that pair of shoes immediately burnt.

When a Religious was wearing a new cassock without any good reason, the Father became sad and invited him to change it.

A sister remembers: "One day the Father told the master to lecture me because not only had I repaired and cleaned his

cassock, but I also tried to iron it. He said that it was against the spirit of poverty."

Poverty and cleanliness get on well together, and the Father showed it by combining the spirit of poverty with the sense of hygiene. He loved so much the hydrotherapeutics by Kneipp. His sight proclaimed a clean poverty.

Writes Father Vitale,

"Everyone agreed, however, that he concentrated more on cleanliness than on showiness. Later, even when his cassock was mended and his shoes were worn and repaired, or when his mantle turned yellow with age, he would be spotless and dust-free. His clean spirit was reflected in his immaculate exterior" (Ibid. page 16).

### **13. Always poverty in everything**

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Poverty while traveling. We have already hinted at it, but let us read more witnesses. Remarks Father Vitale:

"In his old age, he was forced to lessen the strictness of his poverty regarding food, travel, and accommodations, especially because of the ailments of his sickness. But he always remained interiorly detached from these comforts" (Ibid. page 321). Health reasons forced him to lessen the strictness, but he never wanted a second class ticket. "He often traveled by third class train to visit his communities in Sicily and Apulia." "Once, while preparing to travel, he thought that the sisters were buying a second class ticket for him. Quickly, he entered a third class car leaving the sisters to risk missing the train" (Ibid. page 321). One day, however, the Father traveled in a sleeping car... Listen to Father Carmel: "He always traveled by third class car, but once. He traveled in a sleeping car from Trani to Rome by order of the doctor, because he suffered from leg disease. The citizens of Trani were amazed. I myself left from Oria to assist him during the trip." It happened in September-October when the Father



was busy buying the house in Rome.

In his last days, he refused the automobile and preferred the calash pulled by a donkey.

A gentleman of Ceglie owned a mare that was the marvel of the town. After the first world war, he bought a car and had to get rid of the animal he loved so much. He decided to sell it at a very cheap price to Father Palma for the orphans. When the Servant of God traveled to Oria, Father Palma went to the station to pick him up with the mare. As soon as the Father saw the animal, he exclaimed, "No, Father Palma. This mare is for lords, it is unfit for us." Father Palma defended himself by explaining that it was almost a gift, etc., but the Servant of God didn't want to listen to any reason and ordered the return of the mare to the owner. While Father Palma was trying to convince the owner to retake the mare, this mare slipped downhill Saint Benedict, dashed against the cathedral's walls, and died. Afterward, Mrs. Martini donated a lame horse, which the orphans nicknamed tripod. Looking at it, the Father said, "This is fit for us. The other one was for lords, and God took it away."

Instead of a leather bag, he carried books and personal things under his mantle in a big colored handkerchief. He did the same while traveling, as a farm-worker.

The canonical vestments were implemented by a pair of buckles on the shoes and the ring at the finger. Father Vitale narrates how the Father got rid of his buckles by giving them to him (Ibid. page 320). The ring served him several times, when he had no money. A sister testifies: "The first time I saw the Father at Palmi, he was wearing the ring. In Messina I never saw him wearing it." That ring went back and forth as a pledge at the pawnshop, or at the Marchioness of Cassibile when the Father borrowed money for his charitable works. Father Russello says that more than once he and Father D'Agostino redeemed that ring. At last, the ring was placed on the finger of the statue of Immaculate Mary, in the church of Saint Francis (Vitale, Ibid. page 320).

The Father sought poverty in everything. Writes Father Vitale:

"One day, we were at table as guests of a religious community, and the padre had doubts about something that could harm poverty at dinner. But when we realized there was a lack of glasses (some of them that were there were even damaged), then the padre said joyfully: 'I am going to rejoice! We are among poor; there is no danger!'" (Ibid. page 321).

This was the spirit he infused in the communities. "As to the spirit of poverty, at the beginning, in Avignone, we used the terra-cotta cup and the earthen plate for the first and second dish. The poor used the same plates after being washed. To wash, we used a small bowl."

Poverty in the food. "When the Father saw grated cheese on the macaroni at Taormina, he felt bad (the sisters had put it for the Father's presence). Back to Messina, he asked the mother superior how the matter of cheese was regulated. She answered that it was used at Christmas, Easter, July first, and on the name's day of the mother superior. He approved such a procedure and sent a circular to the houses to recommend the spirit of poverty." "Once I was warned about the spirit of poverty for having used one more plate while waiting on him." "One day the Father asked Mother Nazzarena whether the trimmings of the second dish would amount to a third dish; in such a case, they should be eliminated because of poverty; for the same reason he recommended to serve only one kind of fruit."

When the Father happened to cause some damage to the house... he repaired. "While saying mass at Taormina, he broke a cruet. To make up for the loss, he knelt at refectory, eating bread only and drinking water. He used to do so every time he happened to cause a damage."

Due to his perfect spirit of poverty, he wrote on pieces of paper and sent a circular to the convents he helped, advising against writing every other page. Thus, he would take advantage of the blank ones. The Father did so to settle an example.

"He inculcated all of us with the spirit of poverty. At refectory, he wanted nothing to be wasted." "I was warned about the spirit of poverty for having oiled a paper while roasting a fish." "While recommending to waste nothing in the kitchen, he used to say, 'When lead is enough, do not use gold.' And he referred above all to pottery. But when the matter was the house of God, he taught us to be generous in everything, except in the things used by him."

Witnesses about the use of money end this topic. He used to have no money.(1) It was the mother superior who helped the religious institutions, while the door keeper took care of the ordinary, small alms. "He had no money; the brother who accompanied him took care of it." "Money never reigned

in his pocket. He said, 'Generous, but secret alms!'" "Sparing for himself, he wanted the others to lack nothing." The Father wanted the necessary never to fail, and recommended to abhor superfluous things.

## C. Obedience

### 14. Listen to the Father

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Today's strongest contestations in the Church regard obedience. But, the Christian who wants to perfectly live his faith will also follow the magistry's teaching on obedience. Besides, *Perfectae caritatis* (no. 14) and *Evangelica testificatio* (no. 23-29) teach the nature and the pledge of this virtue. We quote a few teachings by the Father which agree with the recent documents of the Church. While the Church's documents discuss the subject theologically, the Father develops its ascetic importance.

Inanimate nature obeys divine will perfectly and continuously. Men should do the same, but because they fail in such a matter, the Religious must make up for such a failure. They consecrate themselves to God to be at disposal of his divine will. This adorable will cannot be fulfilled but through holy obedience to our superiors.

The vow of obedience is the most special feature of a religious institute. It cannot be conceived without perfect obedience. Whoever consecrates himself to a religion, he must be aware that he devotes himself to obey the superiors: their will, will be his will. The more the Religious is obedient, the more he will be perfect and holy, exteriorly and interiorly, temporally and spiritually!

Oh, admirable mysteries of Wisdom! When the Religious depends perfectly on the will of others, he seems to have lost his own liberty, becoming a slave. In reality, the Religious who sees God in the superiors, depends on God, not on men. God himself takes over this elect by governing, ruling, guiding, and leading through the superiors. The superior seems to do what he wants with this Religious, but it is God who is performing his own will jealously. The perfectly obedient Religious belongs to God; he cannot be a subject or a slave of human will. He enjoys the true, great freedom of the children of God.(2)

Besides, holy obedience drives the Religious to a great holiness in short time, enriches him with virtues, and makes him very dear to the most holy Heart of Jesus. Everything he does by obedience will bloom, will be blessed by God. Even the least, or unimportant actions will become a source of temporal, and spiritual treasures!

These are the delicious fruits of an obedient Religious. The fruits of an obedient community may be seen in the orders blessed by God, which have given so many saints to the Church. A community of perfect obedience is an invincible fortress; hell can do nothing against it. It is like a plant whose profound roots neither the winds nor the storms are able to root out; it is like a temple, where God reigns as in heaven; like a fertile soil producing flowers and fruits of virtues and good works. It is a congregation of saints, and an image of paradise! The community of perfect obedience is blessed by God and by the charity of the Heart of Jesus. Unfortunate whoever raises the flag of rebellion, and opposes the orders of obedience in an observant community! Other members will follow the example making Satan reign instead of God! (S.C. Vol. 10, page 189).(3)

## 15. Always obedient

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First, let us see the Father's obedience in his family. He was always obedient to his mother, except when he took the cassock. Says Father D'Agostino, "I knew from him that while a boy he longed for riding a bicycle, but he didn't because his teachers prohibited him." "I heard him saying, 'I always obeyed my parents, except when my mother tried to oppose my vocation.'" Mrs. Schiro', a niece of the Father, testifies, "My mom said that the Servant of God was always obedient to her. When she complained to the archbishop for her son's complete dedication to the poor, up to neglect his elementary needs, the Father told her, smiling humbly, 'Mom, what have you done?'"

As a founder, he was the superior of the institution and everyone acknowledged such an office willingly. But he performed everything in the spirit of obedience, the virtue he loved in

a special way. He found the will of God in the obedience, and wanted us to do the same. He held obedience as the mother of the vows. The sisters say that before undertaking anything of importance, he took advice from them. "He told us that obedience is the royal virtue leading to paradise, and he himself took advice from the mother superior before making a decision." "He never did anything without the permission of the bishop, or the mayor, or the pastor, and demanded that we do the same." "He often relied on the mother superiors' or the sisters' counsel and opinion, when he deemed it was better." A sister submitted to his approval a list of acts of penance for Lent time; one of her penances was 'blind obedience.' The Father added in writing, 'All life long.'<sup>(4)</sup>

Sometimes, the Father found a way to obey his subjects. "For practice of obedience he often asked his subordinates, even lay-brothers, for drinking between meal, making use of something, going somewhere, etc. He used to say that there is also a way to obey the subordinates. He often recommended the obedience by faith. To emphasize it, he once placed a child of about six years among us saying, "If I appoint him as your superior, you must obey him as you obey me." "He always asked advice from the mother superior and the Rogationist Fathers, following their proposal willingly."

"To drink between meal, we used to ask permission from the immediate superior. Once, the Father asked from Brother Mariano the permission to drink. Amazed, Brother Mariano said 'no' to signify that the Father should not ask permission from him. The Servant of God stuck to the letter of his 'no' and any attempt to convince him to drink was vain." "Sometimes the Father asked permission for little things from Father Vitale, or Father Palma, or an old brother like Mariantonio, who used to accompany him. Being the superior, the Father took these occasions to practice obedience. I know that he asked and followed the counsels of the ecclesiastical superior, or Father Vitale and Father Palma. Father Vitale told me that the Servant of God sometimes acted contrary to his own way of thinking. Upon request of the reason, he manifested with gravity and simplicity who had counseled him to do so."

His respect toward the ecclesiastical authorities was more remarkable than toward the civil ones. Strictly regarding the parish's rights, the Father asked the permission of the pastor to do some work at the Holy Spirit on Sunday, or to accompany a dead person to the cemetery. He also invited the pastor for the Easter blessing to the house of the Holy Spirit. Says a daughter

of the Sacred Side, "When he visited our communities, he was respectful of the pastors and the bishops, exhorting us to do the same."

## 16. With the bishops

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Writes Father Vitale,

"He was like a lamb in the hands of the ecclesiastical authorities: as soon as he knew their wishes he worked expediently and precisely according to them. Not only for himself but also for our example, he never followed his own opinion; instead he obeyed superiors not only overtly but also on the inside by conforming to their opinions and points of view. In certain circumstances when his superiors' point of view was the opposite of his own, he turned to their opinions. One day, he protested against someone who tried to stop him from perfect submission and exclaimed: 'He is my superior; that is enough for me to follow him blindly!'" (Ibid. page 317).

Let us read additional witnesses "His mail eloquently speaks of his perfect obedience to the Ordinaries." Perfectly obedient to the Holy Father, he disliked hearing the distinction between the Pope speaking *ex cathedra* and not *ex cathedra*. He followed not only the orders, but also the counsels of the bishops." "His reverence toward the bishops results from his recommendations to us in Oria. He said, 'Children, attention! As soon as you see the bishop in the street, run to him, kneel, kiss the ring, and ask for the blessing, as you do in Messina. The bishop represents the Lord, and your behavior will set a good example to the citizens of Oria, who are little expansive with the bishop'."

Specifically, let us see some of the Father's relations with Msgr. Di Tommaso, Bishop of Oria, and Msgr. Razzoli, Bishop of Potenza.

Sometimes the Servant of God had an opinion different from

Msgr. Di Tommaso. "Msgr. Di Tommaso, Bishop of Oria, sometimes said that he had points of view differing from the Servant of God, but in the end the Father always conformed to him." The following witness is more exact. "He was always obedient to the bishops. For instance, when the Servant of God asked the permission to have the Blessed Sacrament permanently in the oratory, Msgr. Di Tommaso denied his request. The Servant of God responded, 'That is vital for us. Nevertheless, God's will be done. I am happy.' The bishop in return said, 'And I grant you the permission because of your obedience.' The bishop himself narrated this happy incident." However, in his narration the bishop shortens the times, because the Father's obedience of a few years bent the bishop in 1917. On that occasion the Father thanked Msgr. Di Tommaso and begged his forgiveness for having insisted several times. He added, "Surely, the Holy Spirit appointed the bishops at the government of the Church; therefore, they are specially enlightened. To oppose such enlightenment is temerity. We should rather respect it in silence without inquiring." (Vol. 29, page 71).

Msgr. Di Tommaso understood the work of the Father, and said, "You evangelized Oria!" As a matter of fact, before our arrival at Oria, the priests were the target of carrots, tomatoes, and cores from children. Our school of catechism along with the rewards and plays attracted and regenerated children."

Keeping silence about dispositions from superiors recalls an episode regarding Father Occhiuto. He served the Daughters of Divine Zeal for several years as a chaplain at Saint Eufemia of Aspromonte. He writes, "In 1925, I was smitten by my superior because the bishop of Mileto took action against me after people insinuated suspicions about him. I went to Messina and asked the Father for advice and intervention. He encouraged me to be patient in my suffering, saying mildly, 'Silence changes a misinformed superior's mind.' He talked by experience. With time, my silence proved the truth of his advice."

We have already treated the Father's unexceptional behavior in his relations with Msgr. Razzoli in our reference to "The Father and the Daughters of the Sacred Side." Now, we confine ourselves to quoting one of those sisters and Msgr. Farina, a former apostolic visitor to the institute.

"When the Father was forbidden to come over to our house of Potenza," says the sister, "I along with a few of the postulators protested against the prohibition. But, he told us thoughtfully, 'We must obey blindly. The superiors represent God.' Besides, in his lectures he often said, 'Practice scrupulous obedience to

the priests and the bishops.' Before making a final decision, he used to say, 'We must inform the bishop, and follow his opinion'."

Msgr. Farina vouches:

I was struck by his respectful behavior toward the ecclesiastical superiors, included Msgr. Razzoli, Bishop of Marsico and Potenza, who was ill-disposed against and dealt with him very severely. I never heard from his mouth a word of complaint, nor a word of grumbling against anyone.

Regarding the prohibition of Msgr. Razzoli, he says,

Canon Di Francia received the hard, humiliating disposition, and obeyed perfectly. While talking with me, he spoke of that prelate with all respectful regard, even though he disagreed upon his judgment about the two sisters. On the whole, I was always edified by his peace and composure, even though he was suffering opposition and ingratitude to his direction of the nascent institute. And yet, he had accepted the burden of the direction by reasons of charity; as well as to keep so many initiatives of good alive; such initiatives are humble in themselves, but very useful to humble towns."

## **17. With his ordinary**

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Touching upon the Father's relations with various bishops, we must recall the Ordinaries of Messina under whose government he developed his activity. Specifically, Cardinal Joseph Guarino (1875-1897), Msgr. Letterio D'Arrigo (1898-1922), and Msgr. Angel Paino (1923-1927).

Let us see the Father's condition of spirit on this matter. I remember him saying that if the superiors dismissed him from taking care of the institution, he would obey heartily, asking God for being peaceful. When the two congregations were approved, he wrote to Father Vitale, "If Monsignor, or whoever on his behalf, orders me not to take care of the sisters any longer, I am



ready to obey quickly and joyfully with the grace of the Lord" (Vol. 33, page 119).

Cardinal Guarino. At the beginning of his priesthood, the Father went to Oria to visit Maria Palma. On that occasion he was invited to preach a triduo upon Our Lady of Lourdes in Saint Dominic's church, and to introduce her devotion in the town. He would have accepted the invitation immediately, but he liked to ask the permission from his archbishop, and wrote to him,

"Even though I long for preaching in honor of the most holy Mary, still I want to say not even one ejaculatory prayer without a clear, explicit, and spontaneous permission from Your Eminence (the underline is by the Father). I am convinced that everything done without obedience is lost, and I do not want to be told, 'You worked all night, and caught nothing'." (May 2, 1878).

A witness testifies,

"The Servant of God was heartily submitted to the bishops, and his spirit of initiative was hardly tested when Msgr. Guarino told him to have patience, because Marchioness of Cassibile would have built both the church and the institute. He waited in vain for five or six years. It happened the same when the Father was told to assist his brother sick of neurasthenia. He pretended that Hannibal be at his side always."

Father Vitale remembers: "When Cardinal Guarino heard someone knocking at the door in the night, he used to say facetiously, 'This must be Canon Di Francia asking for an obedience.' - He hinted at the nightly visits of the Father who wanted to be enlightened, taking advice from the Ordinary for his own initiatives in order to be absolutely dependent on the ecclesiastical authority in his priestly ministry." Besides being submitted and obedient to the ecclesiastical superiors, the Father was also very devout to Archbishop Guarino, who was created a cardinal. At his death, the Father took care of the funeral, said the eulogy, and printed a special issue of one sheet for his memory. In the eulogy we read of Guarino's benevolence toward the Father's orphanages, "which were the object of tender love and deep compassion of the illustrious deceased" (Vol. 45, page 32).

Msgr. Paino declares,

"In my relations with him I was always very edified and touched, feeling admiration for his fervent piety, living faith, endless charity, zeal and ardor never satisfied. He always supported, and more than once preceded me in the works of charity that I was going to undertake to meet the needs of the diocese. He did

so by comforting and encouraging me with so a vigilant, affectionate, and tender care that I cannot help remembering him without shedding tears. I felt to be before, and under the protection of a saint."

Writing to Msgr. Parrillo, the Father pays homage to Msgr. Paino:

I must confess the truth: I along with the male and female members of my institutes hold Archbishop Angel Paino as an angel of charity, kindness, and ardent zeal for the glory of God, as well as for the temporal and spiritual good of his mystical flock! He is about to undertake sublime works. As far as we can understand, we have noticed very singular virtues in this elect of the Lord, such as a purest intention, a deep piety, a very tender compassion for the poor and the sick, and an untiring activity. He combines these virtues for the glory of the Lord and for the temporal and spiritual good of all, in contempt of his health and comfort. Unfortunately, he happens to experience how true is the apostle's saying, "Whoever wants to live in Jesus Christ, will suffer persecution." He finds persecutors among the clergy, above all among those to whom he proves himself strong by conscience. But me and Canon Vitale encourage and comfort him (Vol. 29, page 48).

To conclude, I emphasize that if the Father died at Guardia, it happened by obedience to Msgr. Paino. The Father felt himself dying, and he wouldn't have liked going over there; but he did so willingly to obey the will of the Lord manifested through the archbishop.

## **18. Msgr. D'Arrigo, Archbishop of Messina**

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In the 1908 earthquake, Msgr. Letterio D'Arrigo was the archbishop of Messina. The rebirth of the city on the same place is due to him. That's his chief merit. When General Mazza told the archbishop that the new city should be built in the plain of Milazzo, and invited him to abandon Messina

because its ruins were about to be bombed, he met a flat denial from D'Arrigo. As a result, the city-planning scheme was changed, and the city was rebuilt in the same place.

In the appendix to *La Scintilla* (Jan. 1955, 158-162 installment), Father Caudo outlines a flattering eulogy of D'Arrigo's life and activity, and concludes, "That I was able to say of the great Archbishop Letterio D'Arrigo."

We are not going to question his eminent merits, zeal, and love for the native city; as well as his untiring care to make the city traditions revive in the fullness of Christian spirit after the December 28, 1908, catastrophe. But, Father Caudo adds, "History is history, which cannot be mutilated, or altered. This contemporary history will be handled by many people and by the accurate historical archive of Messina." We emphasize that history must pay homage to the truth. Eulogy is fitting for epigraphs on the tombs, but where the rights of third parties are at stake, truth and justice cannot be compromised. Both the Father and Father Vitale are joined in this matter.

As for the separation of Roccalumera, so for this subject we rely on the Father's biographer, who will clear the events. Meanwhile, we outline them to make our readers understand the chief points.

Before being appointed a bishop, Msgr. D'Arrigo was a Canon at the cathedral of Messina, and had hearty relations with the Father. Certainly, he shared the bias of the clergy, and said, "The blessed Canon Di Francia had set himself into the mess of Avignone, and was unable to get out..." Even though he was generous to the Father, D'Arrigo now and then warned him, "Play the Canon instead of embarking these enterprises!" However, any time debts and needs compelled the Father to resort to D'Arrigo, who was rich and generous, he never came back with empty hands. Furthermore, the Servant of God himself more than once says that D'Arrigo always refused the restitution of borrowed money. Before being appointed a bishop, D'Arrigo attended the feast of July first at Avignone every year. Meeting the wish of the Father, he also became the spiritual director of the Servant of God's mother and sister. As a professor of morals and canon law at the seminary, he had a predilection for the Father's clerics. In 1981 he dedicated his church to the Sacred Heart. On that occasion, the Father wrote the inscriptions which were carved on the ornamental marbles of the altars. At last, when D'Arrigo's mother died in 1897, the Father wrote the inscription which was hung at the church's door for the funeral.

As a canon, D'arrigo shone among his colleagues in doctrine and goodness of heart. He was the dearest disciple of Canon Ardoino, illustrious professor of morals. He was also the favorite of Archbishop Guarino and his Vicar General Joseph Basile. But, all at once his relations with the ecclesiastical authority darkened. Father Caudo touched upon this matter on La Scintilla, and wrote two reports on our request. Because the reasons are alien to our subject, we won't dwell upon them. However, it is necessary that we point out to the sad and painful consequences, because they regard us deeply.

The clergy of Messina divided into parties. On one hand the priests faithful to the legitimate authority, on the other hand the opposers, who linked up with Canon D'Arrigo. Usually, the opposers met at D'Arrigo's Arcipresbiteri house to speak ill of the superiors. D'Arrigo's mother was grieved by hearing them always speaking ill of the cardinal. Once she couldn't help speaking out, "Leave him alone. What evil did he do to you?" The hostility of the opposers against the archbishop, who was already created a cardinal, went so far that they set up a clandestine publication by the title *The Diocese*. It reached a serious gravity during the preparation for the golden jubilee of Cardinal Guarino, who was already struck by paralysis.

The topic is sad and painful, therefore it would be better to hush it up. But, if we did so, we couldn't understand the nature of the relations between Msgr. D'Arrigo and the Father.

Needless to say, the Father disapproved Canon D'Arrigo's behavior. He supported the principle of authority and stood for Guarino, because he was his bishop. What the Father would have done to induce D'Arrigo to respect and obey his superior! But he was not in the condition of doing so personally. His twin soul, Father Vitale, did his best to achieve reconciliation, but in vain. Father Vitale was allowed by the cardinal to invite D'Arrigo to preach the retreat to the clerics; as well as to take over the chair of morals at the seminary, after Father Muscolino's death. The good offices of Canon Vitale made no difference in D'Arrigo's behavior.

Cardinal Guarino died in September 1897. Msgr. Basile was elected vicar general in the first election, but he renounced the office. D'Arrigo was elected vicar general in the second election. His friends began launching a publicity campaign to make him

archbishop of Messina. Writes Father Caudo, "They made a clandestine subscription of few people. The followers of D'Arrigo, however, above all Bruno, made a public campaign." Bruno was a priest who had abandoned the diocese because of disagreement with Guarino. As soon as D'Arrigo was appointed vicar general, he recalled Bruno at the seminary, and made other political exile priests return. Thus a good group working to make D'Arrigo archbishop was formed. Father Caudo names some bigwigs who supported D'Arrigo. He was elected archbishop, and entered Messina solemnly on March 25, 1898.

## 19. With the new diocesan curia

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Immediately, Msgr. D'Arrigo designated his friends canons: Mangraviti, Bruno, De Francesco, and Carnazza, setting up the new curia. There is no objection against it, because he chose his confidential men. Caudo, however, writes, "He treated with little liking the affectionate of Guarino who stood for the ecclesiastical authority during the opposition, or were neutral." This is the painful point of D'Arrigo government. He did not seek, or did not succeed in repairing the scission of the clergy that had happened before. He considered the affectionate to Guarino as enemies, thinking of being hated by them. He always used these words. The division in the clergy lasted several years. In the time of Don Orione it was still alive.

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We state more precisely: Msgr. D'Arrigo did not persecute the affectionate to Guarino, nor did he make his government felt; on the contrary, he favored and made good to them on occasions. But, he did not trust them, always considering them as enemies. We use these words, because he used them. He did not understand that at least the Father and Father Vitale were for, and with Guarino because Guarino was the superior. Likewise, when D'Arrigo was appointed to the office of superior, they stood for him.

Let us return to the thread of the story. Writes Father Caudo, "Canon Di Francia never shared the disagreement between

the archbishop and the followers of D'Arrigo, but his affection to Guarino was enough to make himself looked upon with suspicion by the new curia."

Furthermore, D'Arrigo shared the Messina clergy's bias against the Father, and the scission of Canon Francis in the foundation of a house at Roccalumera worsened things. Listen to Father Caudo.

"I was in the houses of Avignone teaching some youth, such as Russello, Chiapparone, Pergolizzi, etc. therefore, I often heard speaking of the disagreement among the two brothers. But I noticed the following: Don Hannibal never spoke ill of his brother; only now and then he cleared himself of what his brother was charging him with."

An additional source of misunderstanding was the union of the Father with Father Vitale. They knew and loved each other since 1886. Since then Di Francia became the Father, and Vitale showed himself as a loving, faithful son. This strong friendship aroused suspicion, because Vitale had been favored by Guarino. In fact, he was designated spiritual director at the seminary, and was elected canon at the age of 28. It is true that Father Vitale gave several proofs of esteem and reverence to D'Arrigo, but he had the original sin of having been a favorite of Guarino. Therefore, Father Caudo points out,

"Vitale was hardly respected by the new archbishop, who held him a hypocrite!"

D'Arrigo is to be pitied... so far he was seduced by those who surrounded him! Father Caudo felt badly, and was so struck as to write,

"I felt in my heart a great decrease of my esteem for D'Arrigo's virtues."

We have touched upon this subject to explain the mood of Msgr. D'Arrigo toward the Father. Thus, we can understand several witnesses.

The Father couldn't help understanding the spirit of the archbishop, but charged himself with fault. In fact, in his funeral oration he writes, "He isolated himself and the Pious Institution from Msgr. D'Arrigo, Archbishop of Messina" (S.C. Vol. 7, page 242).

## 20. His friendship with Don Orione

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After the 1908 earthquake Saint Pius X designated Don Orione vicar general of the diocese of Messina. He held the office from June 25, 1909, to February 7, 1912. The two Servants of God understood each other, but their friendly, fraternal relation was another reason why Msgr. D'Arrigo distrusted the Father.

In 1967, Msgr. Pantaleone Minutoli, vicar general of Messina, published the fourth book of Messina ieri e oggi. It treats mostly about Msgr. D'Arrigo's work. While congratulating him upon the publication, I remarked, "It is a pity that from the processes of Don Orione and the Father some shadows fall down on the memory of Msgr. D'Arrigo, which is impossible to dissipate." He responded to me, "I do not agree upon your writing about Msgr. D'Arrigo. If you want, not only the shadows will disappear, but the three personalities will illuminate one another, becoming three stars in the sky of Messina. I venerate the three. Let us help one another. I would like that also the children of Don Orione understand this." How kind and dearest Minutoli was. He has been my side by side fellow student of theology for four years at the seminary of Messina! But, may he rest in peace, facts are at stake here, not will. Facts are facts, and history is history!

The Father knew of Don Orione in 1900 and congratulated him because still a young priest had consecrated himself, spirit and body, mind and heart to the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. He pledges his daily prayer for him and augurs a meeting in Sicily, because Don Orione had opened a house at Noto (S.C. Vol. 7, page 118). Such a meeting happened in the tragic event of the earthquake. They understood each other perfectly, and their friendship became like David's and Jonathan's (1 Sam. 18, 1). When Don Orione came to Messina in 1922 or 1923, Father Vitale introduced him to us as a great friend of our Father. Don Orione underlined these words with pleasure by saying, "A real friend, a real friend!"

That being stated, we cannot pass over in silence that the vicariate of Don Orione in Messina was a very martyrdom! We confine ourselves to saying that Msgr. D'Arrigo did not understand, nor did he trust Don Orione! I reveal no secret by recalling what the postulator of the Orionini published in the articles for

the apostolic process of Don Orione. Msgr. D'Arrigo described Don Orione at the congregation of the bishops as "a man of half conscience who is able to make a settlement with everyone, avoids the conflicts, and trumpets against the archbishop, boasting of being under the ample protection of the Holy Father" (art. 125).

What a difficult environment for Don Orione! But the Father supported him openly. Don Sante Gemelli of the Sons of Divine Providence said that Canon Di Francia was the visible guardian angel of Don Orione, in that time!

Don Orione and the Father bound fast, we can imagine how Msgr. D'Arrigo and his friends regarded the Father. Given this environment, we understand the following relation, "After the 1908 earthquake, I knew incidentally from the archbishop's secretary, Msgr. Mangraviti, that some people murmured against Msgr. D'Arrigo and that Don Orione and Canon Di Francia shared in this group." For this reason Msgr. D'Arrigo dissuaded Canon Celona from living together with the Father.

## **21. Msgr. D'Arrigo and the Rogationists**

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Let us see some relations about Msgr. D'Arrigo's attitude toward the Rogationists.

"I heard incidentally that the Servant of God along with Father Vitale was charged with having little affection to Msgr. D'Arrigo, Archbishop of Messina. Such a situation dated back to the election of D'Arrigo as vicar general. The point is that the archbishop wished the institute at disposal of the diocese, whereas the Servant of God looked beyond."

Evidently, the witness ignores the precedent we have talked about, and confines the dissent to the nature and aim of the



institute. The institute was born with the title "Regular Clerics for the Poor of the Sacred Heart," and Msgr. D'Arrigo blessed it on the feast of Saint Joseph's patronage, May 6, 1900. But he thought of a college aiming at preparing the priests for the diocese. In fact, as soon as the youths were ordained priests, he destined them to the parishes. The Father instead wanted a religious congregation, and from the beginning he announced a regular novitiate at the proper time. But the youth held firm to the priesthood without thinking of religious life. So, when the Father proposed the novitiate in 1904, they left the Father and were received in the seminary by Msgr. D'Arrigo.

The Father had to begin over again. The recognition of the institute by Msgr. D'Arrigo was by words, so the Father asked him in 1909 for the decree of erection (Vol. 29, page 26). After the earthquake, the Father had grounds to ask the decree, because its institute was already beyond the limits of the diocese. But, Msgr. D'Arrigo deemed to have a new reason to deny it for the presumed collusion with Don Orione; therefore, he did nothing. Nor did he do anything in 1919, when the Father submitted the constitutions of the institute, which were elaborated according to the new canon law (Vol. 29, page 32).

However, we must point out to the change of Msgr. D'Arrigo's ideas about the institute. It happened in his last years.

In fact, by admitting the first Rogationists to receive the tonsure, he renounced relying on them. He made them swear that they were ordained on behalf of the Rogationist congregation existent in fact, and that they would hinge to the diocese of Messina if the congregation would not achieve the canonical erection.

If Msgr. D'Arrigo did not arrive at approving the constitutions, it depended on his character of centralizer, who wanted to do everything by himself. He himself wrote in full the list of the masses to be celebrated! Therefore, the manuscript laid for years on his table, buried under an avalanche of papers until the Lord called the archbishop to paradise.

## 22. "We couldn't be of God..."

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In September 1922 Msgr. D'Arrigo celebrated the golden jubilee. Wishing him all the best with the communities, the Father said some words, among which these ones, "Excellence, the nothing that we are, are yours; and we couldn't be of God if we were not yours!" (Vol. 45, page 550).

"Very well! Enthusiastically said Msgr. Paino, who received a new proof of the Father's good spirit. But, over so many years, Msgr. D'Arrigo did not understand it.

The principle of faith in the authority was the golden rule which guided the Father all his life long. For him, authority represented God!

His exhortation to Saro Marchese is significant. Mr. Marchese had dealt with Canon D'Arrigo familiarly for long years; but when D'Arrigo became a bishop, the Father insisted that Mr. Marchese venerate his dignity. "I still remember his warnings. When I was before Archbishop D'Arrigo, I had to consider the bishop, the apostle, not Msgr. D'Arrigo. Therefore I had to kneel and to kiss his ring with great devotion." Father D'Agostino, a former Rogationist, remembers, "When the Father had to obey the superiors, he flew. I suppose that one day Msgr. D'Arrigo suggested the Father to reduce my tasks so that I might dedicate myself to the study as preparation for priesthood. As soon as he came back home, he told me, "Do not worry about anything, but study!"

More witnesses: "Even though Archbishop D'Arrigo, the successor to Cardinal Guarino, was not fine with the Father, the Servant of God never opposed or disobeyed him. I realized that from persons who were disgusted by the opposition of the ecclesiastical authority to Canon Di Francia and his institutes. But the Servant of God never complained, nor did he speak ill." "Before I entered the institute I knew that the diocesan curia had a grudge against the Servant of God... he instead bound himself more

strongly to the Heart of Jesus. I have been on the Father's side for 22 years, and never heard a word of regret against his superiors." "A few sisters told me that he was obedient to Archbishop D'Arrigo, even though the Ordinary was not always benevolent with him... but I knew nothing from the Father. On the contrary, he always spoke well of the archbishop, exhorting us to obey."

When a disposition by the curia hurt some feelings, the Father did his best to justify the curia. Once, a sister hinted at the bishop's previous dispositions against our religious clerics. The Father intervened, "Silence, silence. The Lord speaks through the superiors. Were they to destroy the congregation, I would be happy the same in order to obey."

## 23. Always faithful

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Not only the Father was obedient to D'Arrigo, but also faithful to him, giving proofs of affection and devotion.

For the vitality of the institution the Father confides in the protection and the moral help of the shepherd: "Without this protection and help we would fail like little plants which wither as soon as they sprout in the field" (Vol. 29, page 24). He declares, "The formation of a congregation depends on the favor and blessing of the spiritual shepherd more than on the human protections and the plenty of terrestrial means. We say with the prophet, 'Some confide in the cars, others in the horses, but we in the name of the Lord!'" He concludes imploring "a copious, effective blessing that like celestial dew penetrates our souls giving grace, fertility, perseverance, and life" (Ibid. page 13). On another occasion he confesses, "The protection of the bishop for us is the greatest treasure, the palladium of our existence, and the safety shield in any conflict" (Ibid. page 14).

We have also a lyric poetry for the name's day of Msgr. D'Arrico (page 265), as well as other works for his sacred visit to Taormina and Graniti. On the seventieth anniversary of the archbishop, the Father published two speeches; on the golden

jubilee, a speech and five prayers, as well as verses for the solemn triduo in the cathedral, which began with the preaching by the Father.

Eugenio Toscano, an editor of a city newspaper and a cousin of the Father, published a scornful phrase in 1907. The Servant of God defended the archbishop in these terms:

My dearest Eugenio, in the last issue of Germinal you gave me, I read that our archbishop is named "The Sacristan D'Arrigo!"

I was scandalized!

I am very sorry for you who are throwing yourself into an abyss! You begin offending God seriously, grieving his divine Heart! Bit by bit you are losing the consideration and the remorse for what you are doing! It may be that other people wrote this scornful phrase against the anointed of the Lord, but you are the editor, the representative of the newspaper. Therefore, you are responsible before God and your conscience.

Great is the dignity of the priests; greater that of the bishops. Jesus Christ said of them, 'You are like gods,' and, 'Whoever despises you, despises me.'

You can object, "But the bishop and the priests do not comply with their duties."

First of all, it is not your duty, nor are you qualified for judging whether the bishop is up to his sublime ministry. If all of us are forbidden to judge our brothers - the apostle said, "Who are you to judge your brother?" - at a greater reason we are forbidden to judge the ecclesiastical superiors. You instead judge and scorn your superior! Know that you are a subject of the bishop; he has the ecclesiastical power over the consciences.

It may be that some priests fail in something. And so what? Everyone is forbidden to scorn people, all the more the priests; none is allowed to publish the faults of others, all the more of the anointed of the Lord! When Cam jeered at his father Noah sleeping naked and benumbed by wine, he was cursed by Noah. On the contrary, Sem and Japheth approached him backward out of respect, and covered him with a blanket. By doing so, they were blessed by Noah!

Like Ham, those who publish and deride the faults of the priests will be cursed by God. Like Sem and Japheth, those who excuse and conceal the faults of the priests will be blessed!

God is jealous of his priests and wants them unoffended. It is written, "Do not touch my anointed."

My dearest Eugenio, the way you are walking is very bad! As a priest, a friend, and a cousin I warn you that God can punish you severely! He can render you unhappy in this and the after-life! Do not

think of God leaving people doing for ever what they want. He reserves his day to make justice!" (September 9, 1907).(5)

We point out another intervention by the Father pro Msgr. D'Arrigo in a painful circumstance.

The last years of the archbishop were poisoned by foolhardy persons who published a clandestine libel by the title *The New Diocese* (June 1920). The subtitle was "Qui gladio ferit, gladio perit!" That is, those who use the sword are destroyed by it! It was an evident reference to the *Diocese* which was published against Cardinal Guarino.

The Father was grieved beyond any saying. One day the Servant of God and Father Vitale were at table with Father Catanese and Vicar Antonuccio of San Pier Niceto. They talked of the event which had aroused the indignation of the city. I was waiting on them. At a certain point of the discussion, the Father said,

"There is one thing in this painful event that worries me most. The citizens of Messina know very well the archbishop; they will not let themselves be cheated. The archbishop is calm because of his pure conscience. But the thought which grieves me is the following: the writers of the paper are surely priests who commit a grave fault, and we think that they say mass sacrilegiously..."

Meanwhile, none in the city was taking an initiative in favor of the archbishop. Then, the Father dictated a vigorous "Protest of Messina Clergy Against a Slandering Libel About the Venerable Excellence Msgr. Don Letterio D'Arrigo, Archbishop and Archimandrite of Messina." We quote only the following paragraph:

"We protest not because our action is necessary to give the lie to the charges, or to make up His Excellence. We know very well that like gold our archbishop doesn't blacken when he is touched by mud. But we protest to have the high honor of manifesting our sincere, profound, sacred homage and filial love we have always nurtured for our very deserving shepherd" (S.C. Vol. 5, page 296).

Such a protest was published and spread under the signature of the members of the chapter, and the priests.

Msgr. D'Arrigo died suddenly in the morning of December 18, 1922. The Rogationists informed the Father by telegram, and he left immediately from Taranto to Messina. I remember the

meeting of our community with him.

Sad and grieved, the Father told us, "Msgr. D'Arrigo died!" He began talking of the archbishop's merits and virtues, adding: "Surely, we cannot forget him. He was so good and fatherly, always giving us full freedom. He never meddled in the affairs of our community, nor he asked an account of them, even though he had the right to do so. We always did what we wanted..."

Our community said the prayers for the late Msgr. D'Arrigo, but the Father celebrated seven masses for him, as he used for the priests. Then, taken into consideration the responsibility of the bishops, the Father added a course of thirty Gregorian masses.

The January 21, 1923, the First Department of the Youth Explorers commemorated the late archbishop. The Father not only placed the Holy Spirit's hall at their disposal, but also accepted the invitation to say the commemoration speech. Before the crowd he sang the virtues of the archbishop with warm, trenchant style, substantiating his words with touching episodes.

These were the relations between the Father and Msgr. D'Arrigo.

## Notes

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(1) The various witnesses on this subject refer to the last years of the Father. They mean that usually, he didn't carry money. It is obvious that while traveling alone, he had it; but sooner or later it ended into the hands of the poor.

(2) With these words the Father is ahead of the "Perfectae caritatis" (14): "Far from lowering the dignity of the human person, religious obedience leads it to maturity by extending the freedom of the sons of God. -

(3) I read on a paper of the Father a few notes about the persons who always find faults in the superiors.

"This superior behaves badly!" "And you?... Now, if you behave badly, how do you dare to censure others?" You can say, "If I held that office, I wouldn't take that action, I would behave differently in that case!" "You are

wrong!" Everyone knows that people who see things from outside and calmly, have a different sight from those who are involved. Now, even though your judgment may be right, you judge in cold blood what position you would take; but, you are not considering the superior who is in the midst of opposite predicaments, and absorbed by the whole business. In such a situation you too would fail! Who assures you the contrary? Or at least, you would be right in one action, but wrong in so many others. And yet, you do not pay attention to the right actions of your superiors. In fact, you do not talk of them, but are on the look out to catch their faults! Be cautious! It may be that your being on the look out to censure has caused some damage to the sight of your spirit, and therefore you judge everything wrongly, censuring what you should praise, the good! Are you perhaps one of those who always see things upside down, and are never satisfied? If the superior is zealous, you call him an imprudent; if he is a prudent, you call him a shy; if he punishes someone, you blame him for his rigor; if he forgives, you charge him with weakness; if he hurries, you say that he is ruining everything by rushing; if he lingers, you say that he doesn't take care of repairing; if he does nothing, you say that many things should be done; if he eventually does something good, you remember what he failed to do. Don't you see that you are never satisfied, never bridling your mordent tongue? You fancy how people must do good and avoid evil; which are the limits of the virtue, the rules of moderation, the duties, etc. In short, you fancy handling the scales of the just and the honest, and in this scales of your imagination you weigh the actions of your superiors. Don't you see that your daring makes you the only guilty, while you think of yourself as the judge? Don't you see that your arrogating a right of others' business proves that you are an ignorant of the right and duty? While you judge things, you are like a sick who calls the sweet bitter, and the bitter sweet, because his palate is sick. So, because you have lost the sense of right and honest - it is not right nor honest to freely judge and censure your superiors - you are unable to distinguish truth from falsehood" (Vol. 27, page 119).

(4) According to traditional ascetism, the Father often speaks of *blind obedience*, against which people rebel today. The only speaking of it is a scandal. We need to understand the significance of the terms. Dialogue may be ample, open at the highest, but *the authority of the superior belongs to the nature of obedience. It is his duty to decide what to do.* If the superior makes a decision contrary to the perceptions of the subject, the subject - if he wants to obey - must obey blindly, or better yet, enlightened by faith. It is faith that makes us see the superiors as representatives of God; and the sacrifice of our obedience unites us to his will more strongly and safely (P.C. no. 14).

(5) We like quoting the continuation of the letter containing fatherly warnings to the cousin who had forgot the interest of his soul:

"You should not forget the days of your childhood when you grew up a Christian educated by good principles, being even a monitor in the school of catechism. How long has it been since you have gone to confession and holy Communion?...

The perverse world has surrounded you. They show the lucre, sing your praise, and inebriate you. But they betray you completely by making use of you for their purpose! When they needed a typography and a skilled printer, they looked at you, a poor youth! I am deeply pierced by pain for you! You cannot be happy while walking this way. Don't believe that you will be rich or get a prized reputation. The wicked never prosper, and true reputation is

achieved with the wise, the honest, nor with the dupes, unhappy, perverse cheaters!

Dearest Eugenio, think of your soul, of the hanging death. Sooner or later we will be called to the tribunal of God; therefore, avoid the risk of losing yourself for ever!

Listen to my word. I am an affectionate relative who knows the risk you are running!

I understand that when a person has walked a long way unfortunately, it is hard to go back at once. At least, begin thinking of your state, fearing it. Lift your eyes to heaven when you are alone, and pray to the Most High, the Immaculate Mother of God. Beg forgiveness, time, and grace to return to the right way! Pray to God that he may prevent you from doing anything against his most holy will and law.

I will never stop praying for you every day so that you may walk another way and free yourself from the slavery of the world! May you be again a good Christian and a Catholic according to the traditions of our families, as you were before!"

Postscript: "Hold this letter as a warning from God, who wants you saved!"



**ENDING**

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**A**t the end of our work we deem to listen to the generic, comprehensive opinions of the persons who knew the Father.

First of all let us recall that the judgment on the virtues of a Servant of God is reserved to the holy Church. Only the Church is in the position to value the virtue of its children and pronounce an exclusive, final sentence upon it.

However, the Church permits private opinions; it rather requires them in the process, demanding the witnesses to freely open their thoughts. But we must be aware that such opinions are private ones. Furthermore, if people want to publish them, they have to declare that such opinions are not meant to anticipate the decision of the Holy See. We made no declaration of this kind at the opening of this work; because it is reserved to the private use *pro manuscripto* of our communities. But we do so now to remind ours that we accept the reported evidences about the virtues and holiness of the Father with the reservation that we submit them with perfect obedience to the authority of the Church.

Therefore, let us read the evidences.

"As for me, the Father's heroic practice of the virtue chiefly lies in the charity he practiced readily, continuously, and with delight in an absolutely exceptional way."

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"The heroic manifestations of *charity* imply the heroism of the other virtues, as for instance,

*His patience* in suffering the insults launched against him because of his charitable mission. His patience was such that not only he never told us his suffering, but also delighted in it, thinking that it was an indispensable requisite for the life of the institution.

*His Fortitude*, the Christian, apostolic perseverance in making up the ranks destroyed, or almost destroyed by the previous storms. He did so all his life long."

"The heroism of the virtues practiced by the Father is the outcome of his profound, interior life. He ever sought to please God with his actions aiming at the greatest glory of the Lord, while concealing himself."

"His virtues were not of shallow roots; they were deeply rooted. I saw him slightly run the virtues leading to holiness. Any

time I approached Canon Di Francia, I did so with great enthusiasm because I was always edified. My impressions turned out to be convictions. They are: he is a holy priest forgetful of himself, humble and meek, poor as a Franciscan, full of interior life and of a singular piety. His charity for the poor was such a characteristic that to point out to a charitable man, the citizens said, and still say: 'He is like Canon Di Francia'."

"I noticed the heroism in several virtues, especially poverty, humility, trust in the Lord, fortitude, and love for God and neighbor." "His virtues were heroic. Only the heroism of his virtues can explain his various, great works. His practice of the virtues appeared spontaneous." "Today's people's opinion on his holiness is like yesterday. To say 'Canon Di Francia' in Messina is like mentioning a saint. It happens for his virtues, and is a public opinion."

"Taking into consideration his life, I affirm that he lived the virtues almost spontaneously and in full. I would say that his brightest virtues were faith in God and charity for our neighbor. God was always present to him, and the feelings of the Servant of God for such a presence appeared from his words. On the other hand, his charity for our neighbor was almost the reason of his existence. Owing to these virtues I hold him a saint."

"I deduce the heroism of the Father's virtues from his way of talking to us. He almost changed, became more eloquent, his eyes shone, and our souls were absorbed in following him, in his spiritual ascensions."

Some more flowers.

"Every time I approached the Servant of God, I saw a man of God in his pale features, in his meditative appearance. When I listened to him talking to his community in a hall near the refectory, my opinion was corroborated. In that evening he repeated the saying of Saint Paul, 'The Spirit too helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groaning that cannot be expressed in speech' (Rom. 8, 26). After thirty years I still feel listening to the fervent emphasis with which he pronounced the words '*grownings that cannot be expressed in speech!*'" (Father Cosimo Spina).

"I was impressed by the Canon as by a man pervaded with the spirit of God, enflamed with charity, and enamored of the unprivileged and the needy. His institutions prove it. His talk was sober, his hint of smile was suffused with mild reserve, and an angelic perfume surrounded him" (Father Peter Elia).

"When I opened my heart to him and asked for advice, I felt I was before a man of God. I found him serene, upright, meek, humble, generous, charitable with everyone, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, ready to foster any good initiative for the poor, the orphans, and the suffering" (Canon Treasurer Dominic De Candia). Don Joseph Rinaldi, well known as the founder of the Vocation Institution in Rome, remembers the Father "as a person full of zeal and love for our Lord." The Servant of God sent to him "a generous alms for the institution through His Eminence Cardinal Pompili, who speaking of Di Francia showed his great esteem for him, holding him as a saint. Knowing the cardinal's way of judging, I was amazed."

Says Msgr. Caruso, Bishop of Cariatì, "I learned to admire this singular man through the works of his prodigious charity; but, some years ago I happened to meet him in the bishop's palace of Cariatì and I felt I was in the presence of a saint. Since then I nurtured aveneration for him." Msgr. Raphael Faggiani, a former provincial of the Passionists and successor to Msgr. Caruso, recalls the Father when he was a guest of his community in Manduria. "I remember very well both his behavior and his talk which edified all the community. On that occasion I made this consideration, 'How this soul rises quickly from the terrestrial things to the heavenly ones!'"

Msgr. Costa, Bishop of Lecce: "I saw the Canon only twice for a few moments, and I was struck by him as I was by his renown. His person, face, and glance revealed holiness." Msgr. Taccone, a former bishop of Bova: "I knew him at the Eucharistic congress in Palermo in 1924. Because I listened to his talk in the priestly section, I can bear witness to the general emotion aroused by his holy words in the assembly, which was edified and convinced of his holiness. The name of the Servant of God is so venerated in Sicily, Calabria, and Apulia that it seems to be an anticipation of his glory."

Let us quote Msgr. Paino's farewell to the Servant of God on the funeral day:

"O Saint, O Saint, let me say my last word to you. Let me send my good-bye and that of the whole city... O Saint, accept the last good-bye, the last blessing, and the gesture of the crowd, the likes of this perhaps never seen in Messina, especially the

spectacle of this excited crowd that has come here to say good-bye to you and to thank God who wanted to reward you in this way even on earth.

We, who do not know how to deprive ourselves of you, recommend us and our city to you. The city will find the best realization of its ideals in the continuance of your work. Hence our communion of life remains: you pray from there, while from here we will cry aloud: glory, glory, glory; and you will answer: charity, charity, charity..." (Father Mary Hannibal Di Francia, page 372).

We conclude with the opinion of two Servants of God. Don Lorenzo Berteco, of the Pious Society of Saint Paul, writes that Don James Alberione preached to his clerics in Alba, the fall of 1924, this way,

"Do you want to meet living saints? Go to Turin and visit Canon Allamaro and Don Rinaldi; go to Liguria and will find Father Semeria; venture as far as Sicily and you will find Canon Di Francia."

Don Orione: for him the Father "was absolutely a saint." Read his telegrams. At the death of the Servant of God he wrote:

"Deeply grieved for the death of the great priest of God, Canon Di Francia, apostle of charity, glory of Messina clergy, and honor of Sicily, Italy, and Church. I hug his Religious and orphans, brotherly comforting them in the crucified Jesus. We will pray for the blessed soul and recommend ourselves to your holy founder" (June 13, 1927).

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A few years later, while telegraphing to Father Vitale for information, Don Orione seized the opportunity to insist on the cause of the Father:

"Speed up the cause of Canon Di Francia... the archbishop will build a great monument, which will be the honor of Messina and the edification of the clergy in Sicily and Italy" (August 2, 1934).



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