

□ Reading time: 7 min.

Maria Troncatti, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, is a witness of consecrated life "in truth" (Jn 17:19). Totally united with Christ and docile to the action of the Spirit, she embodied the Gospel with simplicity and courage in the Amazon rainforest, where she was able to combine faith and human promotion, charity and justice, becoming a woman of reconciliation and peace. In her humble and fruitful existence, the Italian missionary offered the world a living reflection of Jesus' style: obedient, meek and passionate for the salvation of souls, to the total gift of herself for the love of God and man.

Consecrated in truth

In the priestly prayer of Jesus to the Father is contained the meaning of our whole existence. *"He has consecrated us, that is, handed us over to God for ever, so that, from God and in view of Him, we might serve human beings"*. Maria Troncatti's life was truly consecrated in truth, working from God, in communion with Jesus Christ, in the love of the Holy Spirit. She was united and conformed to Jesus Christ, renouncing herself and living in fidelity to the commitments she made in her religious profession, as a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, living as a missionary in the Amazon jungle.

United with Christ

The bond with Jesus was the constant in Maria Troncatti's story, even as a girl and then as a young Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, and grew in an extraordinary way during her long missionary march. This bond was paid for through self-surpassing, the renunciation not only of evil, but also of affections and the things dearest to her. A pruning that would mark her until the end of her life, wounds that were always open, so that the gift of self would be authentic and not ephemeral or self-interested: true love is a cut to the quick, if we do not want to give more! *"It is required of us that I do not claim my life for myself, but make it available to another – to Christ. That I do not ask what do I get out of it for myself, but rather what can I give for Him and so for others? Or even more concretely: how is this conformation to Christ, who does not dominate, but serves; who does not take, but gives, to be realised?"*

Obedient to the Spirit

Her conformation to Christ led her to an evangelical obedience that yielded profound renewal, particularly among the peoples to whom the Father sent her as a missionary of the Gospel and of his love. A concern, not according to her own

desires and expectations, but in docility to the action of the Holy Spirit, to the real needs of people and to the seeds of hope placed in people's hearts and cultures. *"Did not Christ correct the human traditions that threatened to stifle the word and will of God? Yes, He did, to reawaken obedience to the true will of God, to His ever-valid word. He cared precisely about true obedience, against the will of man. And let us not forget: He was the Son, with the singular authority and responsibility to unveil God's true will, to thus open the way of God's word to the Gentile world. And finally: He concretised His mandate by His own obedience and humility to the Cross, thus making His mission credible. Not my will, but your will: this is the word that reveals the Son, his humility and at the same time his divinity, and shows us the way."*

Sister Maria Troncatti, thanks to her faith and constant self-sacrifice, shines out for her extraordinary ability to know how to combine the proclamation of the Gospel and human advancement in an admirable way, obtaining fruits of spiritual conversion and human and social liberation.

Sister Maria belongs to the large group of people from whom fresh rivers of life have flowed and are flowing, filled as she was with joy.

Maria Troncatti: a woman of reconciliation and peace of faith, lived in the radicality of obedience and with the strength of love. Rivers always accompanied her life in a realistic and symbolic way.

For her they represented a constant danger: from the flood at Varazze that, after breaking its banks was about to overwhelm her, to the rivers of Amazonia, unpredictable and threatening, that risked being her grave forever, as they were for several indigenous people and missionaries.

It is beautiful to recognise that Sister Maria became, by virtue of her conformation to Christ and without her realising it, one of those *"translations"* *"into orders of magnitude more accessible and closer to us"*, by virtue of which she was for her own and for the people who knew and met her a *"translation of Christ's way of life, which they could see and to which they could adhere. The saints show us how renewal works and how we can put ourselves at its service. And they also let us understand that God does not look at big numbers and external successes, but brings His victories back in the humble sign of the mustard seed."* And with her sisters and the Salesian missionaries Sr Maria was the evangelical mustard seed which sprouted and grew into a leafy tree rich in fruit. For her, missionary action was not *"a dry pole to be watered"*, but a work of God sprouted in the heart of the

forest. She was convinced that the seed of the Word, sown in that impervious and isolated region, would bear fruits of charity and renewal.

Witness of faith

It is significant and moving that the Church officially recognises, in the very year dedicated to the faith, the sanctity of this daughter of hers who becomes a sign of hope for this world of ours where there is “religious illiteracy spreading in the midst of our highly intelligent society”. Sister Maria knew very well the basic elements of the faith, which every child used to know, because she learned them in the family and at the school of holy priests and educators. She learnt as a young girl, as a young nun and then as an intrepid missionary that *“to be able to live and love our faith, to be able to love God and thus become able to listen to Him in a right way, we must know what God has told us; our reason and our heart must be touched by His word.”* That is why her whole life would be a continuous proclamation of the Gospel and Christian doctrine. Every opportunity would be appropriate to point to salvation in the name of Jesus and Mary. Whether cooking, caring for the sick, or healing, always the word of the Gospel would be sown by her in the depths of people and would descend as medicine that heals the wounds and sores of hearts and souls.

The canonisation of this missionary of the Gospel helps us to remember that the missions have their centre in the proclamation of salvation in the name of Jesus, and makes *“the Year of Faith, the remembrance of the opening of the Second Vatican Council fifty years ago, an opportunity for us to proclaim the message of faith with new zeal and joy. We naturally find it in a fundamental and primary way in Holy Scripture, which we cannot read and meditate on enough. But in this we all experience that we need help to convey it rightly in the present, so that it truly touches our hearts. We find this help first and foremost in the word of the teaching Church: the texts of the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church are the essential tools that show us authentically what the Church believes on the basis of the Word of God. And of course the whole treasure trove of documents that Pope John Paul II gave us, which is still far from being fully exploited, is also part of it.”*

Sister Maria was not a scholar, an intellectual, but with her proclamation she touched people’s hearts, because she herself had been touched in the heart by the grace of the Spirit. And she did it in the way that was most natural to her, without much artifice or special methods. *“All our proclamation must be measured against the word of Jesus Christ: ‘My teaching is not mine’(Jn 7:16). We do not proclaim private theories and opinions, but the faith of the Church whose servants we are.*

But this of course should not mean that I do not support this teaching with all my heart and stand firmly by it. In this context I am always reminded of the words of St Augustine: And what is so much mine as myself? What is so little mine as myself? I do not belong to myself and I become myself precisely because I go beyond myself and through going beyond myself I am able to become part of Christ and his Body which is the Church. If we do not proclaim ourselves and if inwardly we have become one with the One who has called us as his messengers so that we are moulded by faith and live it, then our preaching will be credible. I do not advertise myself, but give myself away."

"For the salvation of souls"

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that Sr Maria embodied the Salesian motto '*Da mihi animas cetera tolle*' in a unique way, through unconditional zeal and dedication for souls, even to the gift of her life. Today, the term "soul" seems to have become an exclusive prerogative of psychology and talk of the "salvation of souls" "an unfashionable expression that is hardly used any more. In some circles, the word soul is even considered a forbidden word, because - it is said - it would express a dualism between body and soul, wrongly dividing man. Certainly man is a unity, destined with body and soul for eternity. But this cannot mean that we no longer have a soul, a constitutive principle that guarantees man's unity in his life and beyond his earthly death." Sister Maria was concerned with the whole human being, with their physical and spiritual needs. By her example and her message she reminds all members of the Salesian Family that "we are not only concerned with the body, but precisely with the needs of the soul of the person: with people who suffer from the violation of law or from a destroyed love; with people who are in the dark about the truth; who suffer from the absence of truth and love. We are concerned about the salvation of men in body and soul." How many souls saved! How many children saved from certain death! How many girls and women defended in their dignity! How many families formed and preserved in the truth of conjugal and family love! How many fires of hatred and revenge extinguished with the strength of patience and the handing over of one's life! And all lived with great apostolic and missionary zeal. The people who had the grace to meet her had the experience of a woman and a consecrated person who not only conscientiously performed her work, but who no longer belonged to herself. A continuous availability, a dedication renewed every day at the foot of the altar, a surrender up to the supreme sacrifice of life for reconciliation and peace. Thanks to Sister Maria's evangelical and Salesian witness, "people must perceive our zeal, through which we give credible witness for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let us pray to the Lord to fill us

with the joy of his message, so that with joyful zeal we may serve his truth and love."