

□ Reading time: 11 min.

*Vera Grita, together with Alexandrina Maria da Costa (from Balazar), both Salesian Cooperators, were two privileged witnesses of Jesus present in the Eucharist. They are a gift of Providence to the Salesian Congregation and to the Church, reminding us of the last words of Matthew's Gospel: "I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

### **The invitation to an encounter**

Vera Grita (1923-1969), laywoman, consecrated with private vows, Salesian Cooperator, mystic, has been included in recent years among the Salesian Family's figures of holiness. Vera is now a Servant of God (the diocesan phase has been concluded and the Roman phase of the Cause is currently underway) and her importance for us derives essentially from two reasons: as a Cooperator she charismatically belongs to the great Family of Don Bosco and we can feel that she is a "sister"; as a mystic, the Lord Jesus "dictated" to her the Work of the Living Tabernacles (a Eucharistic Work of broad ecclesial scope) which, by the will of Heaven, is entrusted first and foremost to the Salesians. Jesus strongly calls the Salesians so that they may know, live, deepen and bear witness to this Work of Love of his in the Church, for every human being. To know Vera Grita therefore means, today, to become aware of a great gift given to the Church through the sons of Don Bosco, and to be in tune with Jesus' request that it be the Salesians themselves who guard this precious treasure and give it to others, putting themselves profoundly at stake.

The fact that this Work is first and foremost Eucharistic (... "Living Tabernacles") and Marian (Mary Immaculate, Our Lady of Sorrows and Our Lady Help of Christians, Mother of the Work) can only bring us back to Don Bosco's "dream of the two pillars", in which the ship of the Church finds safety from the enemies' attack by anchoring itself to the two pillars of the Virgin Mary and the Most Holy Eucharist.

There is therefore a great, constitutive Salesianity running through Vera's life: this helps us to feel her close, a new friend and sister in spirit. She takes us by the hand and leads us - with her typical gentleness and strength - to a renewed encounter of great beauty with Jesus in the Eucharist, so that He may be received and brought to others. This too is a gesture of preparation for Christmas, because Mary ("golden tabernacle") brings and gives Jesus to us: the Word of life (cf. 1 Jn 1:1), made flesh (cf. Jn 1:14).

## **Biographical-spiritual profile of Vera Grita**

Vera Grita was born in Rome on 28 January 1923, the second child of the four daughters of Amleto Grita and Maria Anna Zacco della Pirrera. Her parents were originally from Sicily: Amleto belonged to a family of photographers; Maria Anna was the daughter of a Modican baron and, by marrying against her father's wishes, had lost every privilege and the very possibility of cultivating any ties with her family of origin, forever. Vera was born from this emotional rift, but also out of a great love which her parents remained faithful to through many trials.

Her father Amleto's anti-fascism, a theft of photographic equipment and, above all, the 1929-30 crisis had serious repercussions for the Grita family: in a short time, they found themselves poor and unable to provide for their daughters' growth. So, while Amleto, Maria Anna and their youngest daughter Rosa remained together and started again from Savona in Liguria, Vera grew up with her sisters Giuseppina and Liliana in Modica with her father's aunts: women of faith and talent, fully in the world but "not of the world" (cf. Jn. 17). In Modica - the Sicilian UNESCO heritage town due to the splendours of its Baroque - Vera attended the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and received First Communion and Confirmation. She was attracted to the life of prayer and attentive to the needs of her neighbour, keeping silent about her own sufferings to be a "mother" to her little sister Liliana. On the day of her First Communion, she no longer wanted to take off her white dress because she was aware of the value of what she experienced and all that it signified.

Returning to the family in 1940, Vera obtained her teacher's certificate. The early death of her father Amleto in 1943 forced her to help the family with work, but she gave up her desired teaching.

On 3 July 1944 - at the age of 21 and while seeking shelter from an air raid - Vera was run over and trampled by the fleeing crowd: she lay on the ground for hours, lacerated, bruised, with serious injuries, believed dead. Her body was scarred for life and, over time, ailments such as Addison's disease (which depletes the hormone responsible for stress management) and continuous surgery, including the removal of her uterus at a young age, took their toll. The events of 3 July and the compromised clinical picture prevented her from forming a family as she would have wished. *"From then on it was a succession of hospitalisations, operations, analyses, excruciating pains in the head and all over the body. Terrible diseases were diagnosed, various cures were tried. The affected organs did not respond to treatment and, in that inexplicable disorder, one of her attending physicians, amazed [,] declared: 'It is not understood how it is possible that the patient could have found her balance.'"*

For 25 years, until the end of her earthly life, Vera Grita courageously bore a suffering that would deepen into a moral and spiritual one, and she would veil it with discretion and a smile, without ceasing to dedicate herself to others. Hers became a “heavy” body (although a graceful one: Vera was always very feminine and beautiful), a body that imposed constraints, slowness and fatigue at every step.

Thirty-five years old, she realised her dream of teaching with great strength of will and from 1958 to 1969 she was a teacher in schools almost all in the Ligurian hinterland: difficult to reach, with small classes and sometimes disadvantaged or handicapped students to whom she gave confidence, understanding and joy, going so far as to give up her medicine so she could buy the tonics necessary for their growth. Even in the family, she was more a “mum” with her nieces than their own mother, testifying to a very fine educational sensitivity and a unique generative capacity, humanly inseparable from her tried conditions (cf. Is. 54). When the relationship with others, situations, problems seemed to get the upper hand and Vera experienced human discouragement or was tempted to rebel because of a perceived sense of injustice, she was able to reread the situation in the light of the Gospel and remember her “place” as a “little victim”: “*Today [...]*,” she would write one day to her spiritual father “*I see things in their value.*” “*Let us remain calm in obedience*” this priest recommended to her.

On 19 September 1967, while she was praying before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the little church of Mary Help of Christians in Savona, she inwardly felt the first of a long series of Messages that Heaven communicated to her in the brief space of two years and which constitute the “Work of the Living Tabernacles”: a Work of Love with which Jesus in the Eucharist wants to be known, loved and brought to souls, in a world that believes him and seeks him less and less. For her, it was the beginning of a relationship of growing fullness with the Lord, who entered into her daily life with his Presence, within a real conversation like that of two lovers, participating in Vera’s life in everything (Jesus dictated his own thoughts even as Vera wrote them down, so the letter was written by “four hands” with the greatest familiarity). From “*bringing to Jesus*” to “*bringing Jesus*”.

Vera submitted everything to her spiritual father and obedience to the Church, with a high concept of dependence on them, much obedience, an immense humility: Jesus had taken a “teacher” and placed her in the school of his Love, teaching her through the Messages and above all calling her to consistency of faith and life. He was a very sweet and yet very demanding Bridegroom in training her in this virtuous path: he resorted to the images of digging, of work, of the chisel, of the hammer with its “blows” to teach Vera how much she must remove from herself, how much work must be done in a soul so that it may be a true Temple of God’s

Presence: *"I am working in you with chisel blows [...]. The barrenness, the small and large crosses, are my hammer. So, at intervals the blow will come, my blow. I must take many, many things away from you: resistance to my love, distrust, fears, selfishness, useless anxieties, non-Christian thoughts, worldly habits."* Vera's docility was a daily asceticism, the humility of one who touches the limit but makes it available to God's omnipotence and mercy. Jesus, through her, teaches a path of holiness that – while clearly oriented to be able to welcome the fullness of His Life – is expressed through a "less" of what we are and how we resist him: holiness... by "subtraction" to become transparency of him. The first characteristic of the Tabernacle is, in fact, to be empty and willing to welcome a Presence. As the novice Mistress of a Benedictine Monastery of the Blessed Sacrament wrote: *"The thoughts she writes are of Jesus. How clean the texts are, even! Sometimes, even in the spiritual diaries of holy and beautiful souls, how much subjectivity emerges [...] and it is right that it should be so. [...] Vera [instead] disappears, she is not there [,] she is not speaking of herself"*

Vera would one day write: *"My pupils are part of me, of my love for Jesus."* It is the ripe fruit of a Eucharistic life that made her "broken bread" with the One Victim. Without Jesus, she could no longer live: *"I want Jesus no matter what. I can no longer live without Him, I cannot."* An "ontological" statement that speaks of the indissoluble bond between her and her Eucharistic Bridegroom.

Vera Grita had received a first Message, followed by eight years of silence, in Alpicella (Savona) on 6 October 1959. On 2 February 1965 she took the vows of perpetual chastity and to be a "little victim" for priests, whom she served with particular delicacy and dedication. She became a Salesian Cooperator on 24 October 1967. She intensely loved Mary, to whom she had consecrated herself, and lived her filial relationship to her in the spirit of de Montfort's "slavery of love". Later she offered herself for different intentions of an ecclesial nature: in particular for priests who during the late 60s abandoned their vocation, yet remained beloved sons, never far from the Heart of Christ as he himself assured her.

Considered worthy of faith, much loved and esteemed, with a reputation for holiness, Vera died at the Santa Corona hospital in Pietra Ligure (Savona) on 22nd December 1969 of hypovolemic shock from massive haemorrhage and consequent multi-organ failure: "bride of blood", as she had been called by Jesus in the Messages, long before she understood what this meant.

A few moments later the chaplain – with a gesture as spontaneous as it was unusual – raised her remains to Heaven, praying and offering everything, presenting Vera as a welcome offering: *consummatum est!* It was the last in a series of gestures that punctuated the life of the Servant of God and that, in other ways, she

herself had performed: the sign of the cross; the genuflection well done, slowly; the Holy Staircase on her knees with the Booklets in which she transcribed the Messages of the Work; the offering of herself brought even to St Peter's. When she did not understand, in weariness and sometimes in doubt, Vera Grita *acted*: she knew that the most important thing was not her own feeling, but the objectivity of God's Work in her and through her. She had written of herself: *"I am 'earth' and of no use except to write under dictation"*; *"Sometimes I understand and do not understand"*; *"Jesus does not leave me but uses this rag for his divine Plans."* Her spiritual director, astonished, commented one day - referring to the words of the Messages: *"I find them splendid, even beatifying. And how can you remain dry?"* Vera had never looked at herself and, as for every mystic, a stronger light had become for her dark night, bright darkness, proof of faith.

Eight years later, on 22 September 1977, Pope Paul VI (already the recipient of some of the Work's Messages, and who had instituted the Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist in 1972), received Vera Grita's spiritual father, Fr Gabriello Zucconi sdb, in audience and blessed the Work of the Living Tabernacles.

On 18 May 2023, the Bishop of Savona-Noli, Bishop Calogero Marino, *"approved the Statutes of the Association known as 'Opera dei Tabernacoli Viventi' and on 19 May erected it as a private Association of the faithful, also recognising its juridical personality."* The Rector Major of the Salesians, Card. Artime, already in 2017 authorised and charged the SDB Postulation to *"accompany all the necessary steps so that the Work [...] continues to be studied, promoted in our Congregation and recognised by the Church, in a spirit of obedience and charity."*

### **Being and becoming "Living Tabernacles"**

At the centre of the Messages to Vera is Jesus in the Eucharist: we all have experience of the Eucharist, however it should be noted (cf. theologian Fr. François-Marie Léthel, OCD) how the Church has deepened *over time* the significance of the Sacrament of the Altar, from discovery to discovery: for example, from the celebration to the *Eucharistic Reserve* and from the *Reserve to the Exposition* during the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament... Jesus asks, through Vera, for a further step: from Adoration in church, where one must go to meet Him, to that *"Take me with you!"* (cf. *below*) through which he himself, having made his dwelling in his Living Tabernacle (us), wants to leave the churches to reach those who would not spontaneously enter a church; those who do not believe him; do not seek him; do not love him or even lucidly exclude him from their life. The **charismatic grace** linked to the Work is in fact that of the **Eucharistic permanence of Jesus in the soul**, so that whoever receives Jesus-Eucharist in the

Holy Mass and lives sensitive to his calls and to his Presence, radiates him in the world, to every brother and sister and especially to the most needy. Thus, Vera Grita becomes the example and model (in the literal sense of the term: one who has already lived what is required of each one) of a life spent in a profound body-to-body with the Eucharistic Lord, until he himself watches, speaks, acts, through the “soul” that carries and gives him. Jesus says: *“I will use your way of speaking, of expressing yourself, to speak, to reach other souls. Give me your faculties, that I may meet with everyone and in every place. In the beginning will be for the soul a work of attention, of vigilance, to discard from itself everything that poses an obstacle to my Permanence in her. My graces in the souls called to this Work will be gradual. Today you bring Me into the family, My kiss; another time, something more and more, until, almost unbeknownst to the soul itself, I will do, act, speak, love, through her as many as will approach this soul, that is to say, Me. There are those who act, speak, look, work feeling guided only by my Spirit, but I am already the Living Tabernacle in this soul, and it does not know it. It must know it, however, because I want its adhesion to my EUCHARISTIC PERMANENCE in its soul; I also want this soul to give me its voice to speak to other people, its eyes so that mine may meet the gaze of its brothers, its arms so that I may embrace others, its hands to caress the little ones, the children, the suffering. This Work, however, has **love** and **humility** as its basis. The soul must always have before it its own miseries, its own nothingness, and never forget of what dough it has been kneaded.”* (Savona, 26 December 1967).

One can then also understand a further aspect of the “Salesian” relevance of the charism: being for others; sent in particular to the little ones, the poor, the least, the distant; living an “apostolic interiority” that means being all in God and all for one’s brother and sister; the great gentleness of those who do not bear themselves, but radiate the meekness, meekness and joy of the crucified and risen Lord; the privileged attention to the young, who are also called to participate in this vocation.

Vera – whose confessor in life was a Salesian (Fr Giovanni Bocchi) and whose spiritual father was also a Salesian (Fr Gabriello Zucconi) and a reference person of the mystical experience (Fr Giuseppe Borra) – returns today to knock on the door of Don Bosco’s sons. The Work itself was born in Turin, in the cradle of the Salesian charism.

Bibliographic references:

– Centro Studi “Opera dei Tabernacoli Viventi” (ed.), [\*Portami con Te! L’Opera dei\*](#)

[Tabernacoli Viventi nei manoscritti originali di Vera Grita](#), ElleDiCi, Turin 2017.

- Centro Studi "Opera dei Tabernacoli Viventi" (ed.), [Vera Grita una mistica dell'Eucaristia. Epistolario di Vera Grita e dei Sacerdoti Salesiani don G. Bocchi, don G. Borra e don G. Zucconi](#), ElleDiCi, Torino 2018.

Both texts include studies of historical-biographical, theological-spiritual, Salesian and ecclesial contextualisation of the Work.

*"Mother of Jesus, Mother of beautiful Love, give love to my poor heart, give purity and holiness to my soul, give will to my character, give holy enlightenment to my mind, give me Jesus, give me your Jesus forever."* (Prayer to Mary that Jesus teaches Vera Grita)