

□ Reading time: 8 min.

On the centenary of the birth of the Servant of God Vera Grita, a laywoman and Salesian Cooperator (Rome 28 January 1923 – Pietra Ligure 22 December 1969) we offer a biographical and spiritual profile of her testimony.

Rome, Modica, Savona

Vera Grita was born in Rome on 28 January 1923, the second child of Amleto, a photographer by profession for generations, and Maria Anna Zacco della Pirrera, of noble origins. The close-knit family also included her elder sister Giuseppa (called Pina) and younger sisters Liliana and Santa Rosa (called Rosa). On 14 December of the same year Vera was baptised in the parish of San Gioacchino in Prati, also in Rome.

Even as a child Vera showed a good and mild character that would not be shaken by the negative events that befell her: at the age of eleven she had to leave her family and detach herself from her closest affections together with her younger sister Liliana, to join her paternal aunts in Modica, Sicily, who were willing to help Vera's parents who were hit by financial difficulties due to the economic crisis of 1929-1930. During this period, Vera showed her tenderness towards her younger sister by being close to her when the latter cried in the evenings for her mother. Vera was attracted by a large painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus hanging in the room where she said morning prayers and the Rosary every day with her aunts. She often remained in silence before that painting and frequently said she wanted to become a nun when she grew up. On the day of her First Communion (24 May 1934) she did not want to take off her white dress because she feared she would not sufficiently show Jesus the joy of having Him in her heart. At school she achieved good results and got on well with her classmates.

At the age of seventeen, in 1940, she returned to her family. The family moved to Savona and Vera graduated from Teachers College the following year. Vera was twenty years old when she had to face a new and painful separation due to the premature death of her father Amleto (1943) and renounced pursuing the university studies to which she aspired, in order to help the family financially.



On the day of First Communion

The drama of war

But it was the Second World War with the bombing of Savona in 1944 that would cause Vera irreparable harm: it would determine the subsequent course of her life. Vera was trampled by the fleeing crowd seeking shelter in a tunnel.



Vera around 14-15 years old

Her condition was known in medical terms as *crush syndrome*, the physical consequences that follow bombings, earthquakes, structural collapses, as a result of which a limb or the whole body is crushed. What then occurs is muscle damage that affects the whole body, especially the kidneys. As a result of being crushed, Vera would suffer lumbar and back injuries that would cause irreparable damage to her health with fevers, headaches and pleurisy. This dramatic event was the beginning of Vera's 'Way of the Corss' that would last 25 years, during which she would alternate long hospital stays with her work. At the age of 32, she was diagnosed with Addison's disease, which would consume her, making her body weak: Vera would only weigh 40 kilos. At the age of 36, Vera underwent a total hysterectomy (1959), which caused her premature menopause and exacerbated the asthenia she was already suffering from as a result of Addison's disease.

Despite her precarious physical condition, Vera took and won a competition as a primary school teacher. She devoted herself to teaching during the last ten years of her earthly life, serving in schools in the Ligurian hinterland that were difficult to reach (Rialto, Erli, Alpicella, Deserto di Varazze), arousing esteem and affection among her colleagues, parents and pupils.

Salesian Cooperator

In Savona, in the Salesian parish of Mary Help of Christians, she attended Mass and regularly frequented the sacrament of Penance. Since 1963 her confessor was the Salesian Fr Giovanni Bocchi. A Salesian Cooperator since 1967, she realised her call in the total gift of self to the Lord, who in an extraordinary way gave himself to her, in the depths of her heart, with the "Voice", a "Word" telling her about the Work of the Living Tabernacles. She submitted all her writings to her spiritual director, Fr Gabriello Zucconi, also a Salesian, and guarded the secret of her call in the silence of her heart, led by the divine Master and the Virgin Mary who would accompany her along the path of her hidden life, a life stripped of everything, a life of self-emptying.

Under the impulse of divine grace and accepting the mediation of her spiritual guides, Vera Grita responded to God's gift by witnessing through her life marked by the fatigue of illness to the encounter with the Risen One, and by dedicating herself with heroic generosity to teaching and educating her pupils, contributing to the needs of her family and bearing witness to a life of evangelical poverty. Centred and steadfast in the God she loved and who supported her, she showed great inner firmness in bearing the trials and sufferings of life. On the basis of this inner firmness, she bore witness to a Christian life of patience and constancy in goodness.

She died on 22 December 1969 in Pietra Ligure at Santa Corona hospital in a small room where she had spent the last six months of her life, in a crescendo of sufferings accepted and lived in union with the Crucified Jesus. "Vera's soul," wrote Fr Giuseppe Borra, a Salesian, her first biographer, "with her messages and letters, enters the ranks of charismatic souls called to enrich the Church with flames of love for God and for Jesus in the Eucharist for the expansion of the Kingdom. She is one of those grains of wheat that Heaven has let fall to Earth to bear fruit, in her own time, in silence and concealment."



On pilgrimage to Lourdes

Vera of Jesus

Vera Grita's life unfolded over the short span of 46 years marked by dramatic historical events such as the great economic crisis of 1929-1930 and the Second World War, and then ended on the threshold of another significant historical event: *the 1968 protests*, which would have profound repercussions at a cultural, social, political, religious and ecclesial level.



With some family members

Vera's life began, developed and ended in the midst of these historical events and she suffered their dramatic consequences at a family, emotional and physical level. At the same time, her story shows how she went through these events, facing them with the strength of her faith in Jesus Christ, thus bearing witness to *heroic faithfulness* to crucified and risen Love. Fidelity that, at the end of her earthly life, the Lord would repay by giving her a new name: *Vera of Jesus*. "I have given you my Holy Name, and from now on you shall be called and be 'Vera of Jesus'" (Message of 3 December 1968).

Tried by various illnesses that, over time, describe a situation of generalised and irrecoverable physical wear and tear, Vera lived in the world without being of the world, maintaining inner stability and equilibrium due to her union with Jesus in the Eucharist received daily, and to the awareness of the Eucharistic remaining permanently present in her soul. It was therefore the Holy Mass that was the centre of Vera's daily and spiritual life, where, as a small "drop of water", she joined the wine to be inseparably united to the infinite Love that continually gives itself, saves and sustains the world.

A few months before her death, Vera wrote to her spiritual father, Fr Gabriello Zucconi: "The illnesses I have carried inside me for more than twenty years have degenerated. Devoured by fever and pain in all my bones, *I am alive in the Holy Mass.*" And on another occasion: "The flame of the Holy Mass remains, the divine spark that animates me, gives me life, then work, the children, the family, the impossibility of finding a quiet place where I can isolate myself to pray, or the physical tiredness after school."

The Work of the Living Tabernacles

During the long years of suffering, aware of her frailty and human limitations, Vera learnt to entrust herself to God and to abandon herself totally to his will. She maintained this docile obedience even when the Lord communicated the *Work of the Living Tabernacles* to her in the last 2 years and 4 months of her earthly life. Her love for God's will led Vera to the total gift of herself: first with private vows and the vow of being a "little victim" for priests (2 February 1965); later with the offering of her life (5 November 1968) for the birth and development of the *Work of Living Tabernacles*, always in full obedience to her spiritual director.

On 19 September 1967, she began the mystical experience that invited her to live fully the joy and dignity of being a child of God, in communion with the Trinity and in Eucharistic intimacy with Jesus received in Holy Communion and

present in the Tabernacle. “The wine and the water are us: you and I, I and you. We are one: I am digging in you, digging, digging to build me a temple: let me work, do not put obstacles in my way [...] the will of my Father is this: that I remain in you, and you in me. Together we shall bear great fruit.” There are 186 messages that make up the *Work of the Living Tabernacles* that Vera, struggling with the fear of being a victim of deception, wrote in obedience to Fr Zucconi.

“*Take me with you*” expresses in a simple way Jesus’ invitation to Vera. Take me with you where? Where you live: Vera was educated and prepared by Jesus to live in union with Him. Jesus wanted to enter Vera’s life, her family, the school where she taught. An invitation addressed to all Christians. Jesus wants to come out of the Church of stone and wants to live in our hearts with the Eucharist, with the grace of Eucharistic permanence in our souls. He wants to come with us where we go, to live our family life, and he wants to reach out to those who live far from him by living in us.

Following the Salesian charism

In the *Work of the Living Tabernacles* there are explicit references to Don Bosco and his “*da mihi animas cetera tolle*”, to live in union with God and trust in Mary Help of Christians, to give God through tireless apostolate that cooperates in the salvation of humanity. The Work, by the Lord’s will, is entrusted in the first instance to the sons of Don Bosco for its realisation and diffusion in parishes, religious institutes and the Church: “I have chosen the Salesians because they live with the young, but their life of apostolate must be more intense, more active, more heartfelt.”

The Cause for the Beatification of the Servant of God Vera Grita was launched on 22 December 2019, the 50th anniversary of her death, in Savona with the presentation of the *Supplex libello* to diocesan Bishop Calogero Marino by the Postulator for the Salesian Congregation, Fr Pierluigi Cameroni. The Diocesan Inquest was held from 10 April to 15 May 2022 at the Curia in Savona. The Dicastery for the Causes of Saints gave juridical validity to this Inquest on 16 December 2022.

As the Rector Major wrote in this year’s Strenna: “Vera Grita attests first of all to an all-embracing Eucharistic orientation, which became explicit especially in her final years of life. She did not think in terms of programmes, apostolic initiatives, projects: she accepted the fundamental “project” that is Jesus himself, until he made her life his own. Today’s world attests to a great need for the

Eucharist. Her journey through the strenuous labour of her days also offers a new lay perspective on holiness: becoming an example of conversion, acceptance and sanctification for the “poor”, the “frail” and the “sick” who can recognise themselves and find hope in her. As a Salesian Cooperator, Vera Grita lived and worked, taught and encountered people with her strong Salesian sensitivity: from the loving-kindness of her discreet but effective presence, to her ability to be loved by children and families; from the pedagogy of kindness that she carried out with her constant smile, to her generous readiness with which, regardless of the inconvenience, she turned in preference to the least, to the little ones, to the distant, the forgotten; from her generous passion for God and His Glory to the way of the cross, letting everything be taken from her in her illness.”



In the garden of Santa Corona in 1966