 Reading time: 20 min.

To speak of Salesian holiness in history is to engage with a tangible experience, one that has developed within the ordinary life of the educational communities that originated from the Oratory of Valdocco and the first house in Mornese. This account narrows its focus to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and, in particular, to what emerges from the beatification processes of the period 1900–1950. The focus is not on a "catalogue" of virtues, but on the procedural sources – especially the 'Positiones' – which gather testimonies, documents, and judgements on the reputation for holiness. Through the figures of Maria Domenica Mazzarello, Teresa Valsé Pantellini, and Maddalena Morano, the text highlights two dynamics: the holiness perceived and declared by witnesses, and the holiness desired and lived out as faithfulness to the Rule, the Preventive System, and the educational mission among young women.

The theme of *Salesian holiness in history* is rich and vast; it encompasses the journey of maturation in faith, hope, and charity of all members and sympathizers of the Salesian Family who, starting from the time of the Oratory of Valdocco and the first community of Mornese, have found and continue to find, even today, in the lifestyle of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, the valid elements to reach the fullness of Christian life. The subtitle of this report: *Emerging aspects in the beatification processes of the FMA narrows that vast field of Salesian holiness* related to the FMA and among them, even more, only to those for whom the *Processes for beatification* are being instructed during the period considered by this research. For this reason, two premises:

1. *Female Salesian holiness* is not limited only to the FMA for whom the Cause has been introduced. On the contrary, there are numerous FMA who have led a heroic life in silence and sacrifice through their presence in courtyards, kitchens, laundries, workshops, oratories, schools, missions, at home and in the most remote places in the world. No one has ever thought of introducing their Cause, and for this reason, despite having lived an exemplary life, they escape our research. Those, on the other hand, who have received recognition

from the Church with the title of *venerable, blessed, saint* are not because of this, holier than others. I am referring, therefore, not to a complete picture, but only to a *representative portion* of female holiness.

2. The second clarification regards the content focus of this report in reference to the chronological period provided by this Congress: 1900-1950. If we take the *opening of the processes* as a criterion, we would have as the object of our study only the three Causes of the FMA that were introduced during this time: that of Sister Mary D. Mazzarello (now a saint), Sister Teresa Valsé Pantellini (now venerable), and Sister Maddalena Morano (now blessed), introduced in the years 1911, 1926, and 1935 in the respective dioceses of Acqui, Turin, and Catania, and we would remain only in Italy. If, on the other hand, we take *the life of the FMA*, placed within the framework of the period considered by the Congress, we will find both Blessed Laura Vicuña (†1904) and eight FMA operating in the contexts of their mission in Europe and America for which the Processes are ongoing.

The brevity of this report suggests the first option, leaving the richness of references and the sanctified life of the six Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and Laura Vicuña for another occasion.

The last introductory clarification concerns the source, indicated already in the title with the expression *Beatification Processes*. Each Process collects and produces various documents, starting from the *Public Copy* that documents the diocesan phase, through the *Positio* that is elaborated by the Postulation, up to the *Apostolic Brief*, signed by the Supreme Pontiff, which closes the procedure. I have chosen only one type of document, the so-called Positio, which constitutes the reasoned presentation (*Informatio*) of the heroic virtues, through the use of testimonies and documents collected during the canonical Process (*Summarium*). Having three reference figures, I consulted a total of six *Positiones*: three super *Introductione Causae* and three *super Virtutibus*, finding in them a rich procedural material (more than 1200 pages) according to the interrogation made to eyewitnesses regarding the *theological, cardinal virtues*, and the *religious vows* lived by our protagonists.

Methodologically, I decided to choose a specific question from the interrogation that concerns the *fame of holiness* of the FMA and I asked myself: *who and how has spoken about the holiness* of our three sisters; then I tried to identify the Salesian imprint *of their holiness*. My report is structured in this way: I titled the

first part *Perceived and Declared Holiness*; the second, *Desired and Professed Holiness.*

1. **Perceived and Declared Holiness**

The first aspect that emerges is a series of personal *perceptions* verbalized during the interrogation or declared in writing by the witnesses who express themselves regarding the people they have known *de visu* or *de auditu*. This phenomenon is interesting, given that none of the witnesses starts from the definition of holiness, but formulates it using the data they deem appropriate for such a concept. However, their judgment is ultimately the expression of the *concept of holiness* elaborated in their historical era and filtered through the *sensus fidei* of the people of God.

1.1. Sister Mary Domenica Mazzarello (1837-1881)

Mary Mazzarello, during her first meeting with Don Bosco, immediately sensed his holiness, and already in October 1864, 70 years before his canonization, she made the famous declaration: “Don Bosco is a saint, and I feel it.” Then throughout her life, she deepened and lived the constitutive traits, translating them into categories appropriate to her situation as a woman and educator.

The procedural acts assure us that both Don Bosco and the other Salesians did not overlook her holiness. Cardinal Cagliero declared: “I was a witness for six or more years of the same virtues exercised with ever greater Christian and religious perfection, to the point that immediately after her death, I told the sisters surrounding her not to be saddened, because their Mother Superior had flown to heaven to enjoy the just reward of her holiness […] This is how I thought, and like me, the Venerable Founder Don Bosco thought the same, who had a high regard for their Mother as a holy religious, of a very discreet Superior.” Sister Teresa Laurentoni adds: “I saw letters that Don Bosco wrote to Mrs. Pastore of Valenza in which he said that Sister Mary Mazzarello was a saint.” And Sister Ursula Camissasa testifies that Fr. Lemoyne, after the death of Mother Mazzarello, “ordered that nothing be touched in her room and that no one should go to live there.”

Regarding the impression of the FMA, Sister Elisabetta Roncallo declares: “In the community, the opinion was that we had a holy Superior. This perception was also shared by those who approached her from the outside.” The missionaries in America complete this: “In life, everyone regarded her as a holy religious; after her death, we prayed to her to obtain graces for us.”

1.2. Sister Teresa Valsé Pantellini (1878-1907)

Mons. Giovanni Marenco in 1908 in Rome stated: “From the knowledge I had of the sisters, during the time when, as General Director, I had to deal with them, I can say that some died in the concept of holiness, and the Process of beatification should be promoted, and *among these, Sister Valsé is one of the first.”* The same Mons. Marenco asked Sister Maria Genta “to keep the garments of the Servant of God who had died, because he said, ‘who knows if one day the Lord does not want her to the honors of the altars!'” His intuition was confirmed and specified by Fr. Filippo Rinaldi, Rector Major, who during the Ordinary Process said: “I have heard her inner holiness praised, consisting of a truly unblemished life, of deep and solid piety and regularity, free from all sentimentality, without any exaltation. She had an extraordinary inner holiness, living apparently an ordinary life. The holiness of the Servant of God also appeared towards her Sisters, with whom she used true religious charity and also towards the young girls of the oratory and workshop for whose spiritual and material salvation she sanctified herself. She followed and studied the girls even in their shortcomings to help them and win them over with kindness. For my part, I am convinced that the Servant of God had such virtue as to be equated with the holiest souls, but she knew how to hide herself so much that she did not let her entire holiness be seen. She made a particular effort not to let be seen what she did and practiced.”

The FMA agree with the previously highlighted perception: “I can attest – testifies Sister Maria Genta, who was her teacher and then Superior – that during the religious life in Rome of the Servant of God, both the Sisters and the Patrons of the Oratory, as well as the young girls and the workers who frequented the Oratory and the workshop, regarded her as a saint and had great veneration for her.” However, there is also a contrary case recorded in the procedural acts: “For the sake of truth – says Sister Luigia Rotelli – I must say that I heard some Sisters report that a certain Sister Brusco Maria (FMA) does not share the concept of holiness of the Servant of God, saying that she did nothing extraordinary, while considering her a

pious and exemplary sister.” The laywomen did not have these doubts. Mrs. Olga Mazzetti, a companion of the Servant of God at the Sacred Heart in Florence, said to Fr. Maccono: “You are trying to make Sister Valsé a saint; we girls said even then that she was a saint.” Another companion adds: “Reading the lives of the saints, I always find exaggerations, but reading the life of Sister Valsé, I find that she was portrayed just as she was.”

1.3. Sister Maddalena Morano (1847-1908)

Mother Morano had a fear; being aware that people considered her a saint, she said: “When I am dead, do not say ‘M. Morano was a saint and will be in Paradise’ and with that, you leave me to burn in Purgatory until the end of the world, if by God’s mercy I am saved. Pray, pray for me.” She knew “that holiness consists entirely in doing the will of God, as this is the only way to demonstrate our love for Him.”

Both the Salesians (Cagliero, Marenco) and the diocesan priests, from the pastors of the local Church to the simple country priests, were convinced of Mother Morano’s holiness. Sister Paolina Noto testifies: “I remember that during a visit made by Cardinal Nava to Trecastagni, he said to us: ‘You have a holy Superior; know how to appreciate her.'” And the Provincial of the Salesian houses in Sicily, Fr. Franco Piccollo, wrote: “Certain names […] acquire special meanings, and for those who have known M. Morano, this name assumes three meanings: namely, *insurmountable strength, authentic holiness, and full generosity with God and exquisite kindness towards all*. [She] showed strength in suffering for almost her entire life with serious discomforts and ailments, although she kept them secret; a true daughter of the venerable Don Bosco, she awaited rest in Paradise.” “Don Albera, still only the spiritual director of the Salesian Society, when he first came to Sicily, was amazed to find in Morano so many beautiful qualities and one day said: ‘Oh this Mother Morano, what a wonderful Sister! She could govern not only a Province but the entire Congregation of the FMA.”

The FMA and her students respected her as well. Sister Signorina Meli testifies: “Her beautiful character attracted all the people who had the fortune to approach her and she led them towards the Lord. […] She united in herself the contemplative life through constant union with God and the active life through her tireless action for the good of souls, fulfilling her duties exactly in all the works entrusted to her care,

sparing neither effort nor sacrifice throughout her life. The Servant of God had a reputation for holiness even during her life, being regarded by all as a privileged soul enriched with singular virtues." And Sister Decima Rocca: "She was intensely loved by her employees, and all regarded her as a saint." An exception is the isolated voice of Sister Rosaria Cuscunà from Biancavilla (FMA), accepted by singular exception by Mother Morano herself into the Institute, who is contrary to the concept of holiness of the Servant of God. However, her position is considered by the other FMA as an unbalanced judgment. On behalf of the students, Mrs. Agata Zappalà expresses: "I can attest that the Servant of God was held in the concept of holiness, not only by us students, but by the people who knew her." In fact, the President who had threatened to close the school, upon hearing of Mother Morano's death, said: "What a pity; this Sister should not have died. There may be good and holy Superiors, but they cannot have all the virtues and all the holiness of Mother Morano."

2. **2. Desired and Professed Holiness**

Another aspect that emerges from the procedural testimonies is the *strong desire for personal sanctification and the salvation of the souls* of our protagonists. It is an inner fire that consumed itself by translating into practical language the motto of the founder: *Da mihi animas, cetera tolle*. Their own sanctification was sought in adherence to the Will of God, understood as observance of the Rule and obedience to superiors, without failing to bring joy and feminine creativity to the community. The apostolic passion in them was expressed according to the categories of the Preventive System in the contexts of the North (Mornese, Nice), the South (Sicily), and the Central (Rome) Italy. Religious profession allowed future FMA to give a Salesian imprint to their holiness through community life committed to the education of young people, on the common path towards Paradise, imitating Jesus and the saints, in obedience and joy, always showing themselves strong in the face of contrary situations.

2.1. Community life and the education of young people

Such dimensions were for the FMA from the beginning, the space of sanctification, later expanded to the missionary horizon, in which the obedience professed

destined them to live.

Mother Mazzarello cared greatly for the climate of fraternal life, fostering the conditions for growth for both the sisters and the girls. “Once – Sister Felicina Ravazza testifies – hosting a small emerging community, she came to know that harmony did not reign among those daughters, and she worked tirelessly until after midnight to bring peace to that community.” “She had a great love for the girls – adds Sister Teresa Laurentoni -; she sacrificed herself and wanted us to sacrifice ourselves too for their good education.” “She was always ready in fulfilling her duties and always showed herself cheerful – completes Petronilla Mazzarello – all the sisters who knew her can testify how well she *kept the spirit of the Community uplifted*, even in very painful circumstances.” Mother Caterina Daghero specifies: “What she did, she recommended that the sisters also do, and she instilled that they do it immediately when the opportunity arose, saying: ‘What you can do today, do not wait to do it tomorrow’.” Don Cagliero noticed it immediately, declaring during the Rogatorial Process: “There was only one spirit that reigned among them, one heart for wanting to love each other, one will of all in obedience. One desire to become saints and one love for God, for the holy poverty of Our Lord Jesus Christ, for sacrifice, for prayer, and for work. And this sacred concert of hearts, of wills, and of love was directed by the Superior, or rather, the most zealous and dearest Mother Mary Mazzarello, always first in everything and above all in humility, charity, and religious observance.”

The same tireless zeal characterized her spiritual daughters: Sister Teresa Valsé and Mother Maddalena Morano. Of the first, it is written in the *Summarium*: “The servant of God burned with the desire to make God, Jesus Christ, and His Church known […] She burned with the desire to go to the mission among the infidels of China… she had this desire from the moment of her first Communion.” And of the second: “Regarding the propagation of the faith, she herself prepared and formed the missionary Sisters, whom she sent in various groups to the missions. She told us: instruct the souls in our Holy Religion and bring all souls to the Lord.”

Sister Teresa Valsé took care of the girls in Rome: “She particularly committed herself to teaching catechism in the parish of St. Prassede, which she imparted to the older girls of whom she was an assistant. These were particularly numerous, and she spared no effort to be useful to them in their spiritual formation.” And Mother Morano did the same for the young people of Sicily: “During the feasts, she managed to call and encourage young people to approach the Holy Sacraments, using her motherly and persuasive ways for this purpose. The servant of God

distinguished herself especially for her catechetical apostolate among the ignorant; indeed, the foundation of catechetical schools was the soul of her mission."

2.2. With a mother's heart and fidelity to the Preventive System

The apostolic action and the animation of the FMA, as the witnesses emphasize, were permeated not by a technique, but by a method that had the traits of maternal warmth and emanated from their way of interacting with everyone, especially with the recipients of education.

"Maria Mazzarello was gifted with an uncommon criterion – testifies Sister Enrichetta Sorbone – she possessed the gift of motherhood, and the truly admirable gift of governance, an energetic, vigilant, but loving governance. She treated us frankly, yes, but she loved us cordially; she had a certain something that drew us to good, to duty, to sacrifice, to Jesus with a certain sweetness, without violence. She saw everything, anticipated the good and the evil of her daughters, always ready to provide for both the physical and the moral, according to need and possibility." And Sister Maria Rossi adds: "In the office of Superior, she always behaved towards the Sisters with maternal charity; she was prudent; she required that each one fulfil her duty, but she had no harshness. For the various offices of the Institute, she always chose those whom she thought were most suitable." Then she specifies further: "The servant of God was maternally good to all, but she knew how to be strong, when necessary, especially with somewhat strong characters, or with those Sisters who needed it."

Regarding Sister T. Valsé, it is said: "She constantly watched over the girls to ensure they were animated by a lively love of God and stayed away from sin. And for this purpose, she carried out intense activity in the oratory. From this, I infer that she had a great horror of sin and therefore sought to prevent it and also to repair it." "Once she became a Sister, she perfectly practiced the system of the venerable founder, the so-called *Preventive System*." "To dedicate herself to our good – adds Mrs. Regina Cerrai – she never knew hours of rest, especially on holidays, which were for her days of great sacrifices […] I can say that I saw how, due to the solicitude of the servant of God, the most mischievous became the best." And Mrs. Giulia Conciatori: "With those who were afflicted by illnesses or misfortunes, even

financial ones, she was full of maternal charity. She visited them, consoled them, and helped them materially as well."

Mother Morano also: "She venerated and esteemed Don Bosco as a saint and wanted the Preventive System to be well practiced in the school and in the assistance […]. She said to the Sisters and the assistants: 'Do you want to be respected? Respect. The girls are as we want them: let us not complain about them, but about ourselves, who do not always know how to do our part well'." Sister Teresa Pentore adds: "She had her own method in dealing with certain odd and stubborn students. She did not embitter them, did not scold them, nor punish them, yet she achieved what many others would never have obtained from those rebellious natures." And Sister Teresa Comitini specifies: "The servant of God, as an educator, understood from experience the effectiveness of Don Bosco's spirit, namely: [that] joy in life is a strength, an essential element in the education of youth. As a religious, she better understood that joy is the atmosphere of heroic virtues; it is a necessity of spiritual life. Her activity can be said to be a continuous radiance of holy joy and Salesian goodness." Sister Giovanna Costa adds: "Truly, the most tender of mothers could not have done more than what the servant of God did for all her daughters. No one can have an idea of it except those who had the fortune to know her and practice with her […]. She was not swayed by sympathy or antipathy, but rather, when necessary, she used the needed seriousness, firmness, and strength like that which a good mother uses who cares that her daughters will grow well, virtuous, and holy, and we felt so well-loved by her that each of us was convinced she was her favourite."

"Often during the night, she was seen with her little lamp making the rounds of the dormitories like a true guardian angel and with maternal attention – confirms Sister Teresa Comitini, her external student, then FMA – The servant of God was appreciated, loved, desired. Like prudence, all the virtues that in a religious soul indicated constant zeal for her own perfection and for the salvation of souls shone in M. Morano."

2.3. Towards Paradise

The climate of the communities and the teaching of the Institute made the ideal of

holiness desirable, culminating in the experience of full life beyond death. Paradise was spoken of as the attainment of the reward after so many sacrifices, as a tranquil reality enjoyed after work and the acceptance of the cross. But not only that, also as an atmosphere of peace and joy in mutual relationships.

Mother Mazzarello, Sister Enrica Sorbone testifies, “had great trust in God and it was truly extraordinary to hear her speak of God, of Paradise. In everything, she revealed this hope, this confidence in the Lord and in Mary Help of Christians.” “She was animated by a lively desire to become a saint and to see the Sisters diligently awaiting their own sanctification – adds Sister Ottavia Bussolino. Then she often sang to us during recreation: ‘I want to become a saint and a daughter of Mary – I want to become a saint and a bride of Jesus – I want to become a saint – and a saint in joy – I want to become a saint – and a saint ever more’.” Sister Clara Preda adds: “She was very much in love with Paradise; she also encouraged me to hope, urging me to ask for the grace to die in an act of Love of God and sorrow for my sins, telling me that we do not want to go to Purgatory.” Even in her letters, she often spoke of Paradise. To Sister Angela Vallese in 1879, she wrote: “We became Sisters to secure Paradise for ourselves, but to gain Paradise, sacrifices are needed; let us carry the cross with courage, and one day we will be happy.” And to Sister Pierina Marassi in 1880: “Let us remember that Paradise is not acquired with satisfactions and being preferred, but is acquired with virtue and suffering.” To the community of Saint-Cyr: “My good sisters, think that where charity reigns, there is Paradise […] Words do not take you to Paradise, but rather deeds.”

Sister Teresa Valsé Pantellini “often had the word: Paradise! Paradise! on her lips! which she pronounced with an accent that demonstrated her very lively desire to possess it. And I also seem to have heard it said – testifies Sister Adelaide Barberis – that she said: a piece of paradise compensates for a whole life. It was very clear that everything in her: mind, heart, and thought was completely oriented towards Heaven.”

The same is confirmed by Sister Elisabetta Dispenza regarding Mother Morano: “The only desire of the servant of God was Paradise, and in certain moments of greater fervour, she began to sing ‘Paradise, Paradise – great city of the elect – in you, joy, songs, and laughter – reign and will always reign’.” Then she exclaimed: “If I go to Paradise, I will not return to this world anymore.” Sister Elisabetta herself remembers this prayer of M. Morano: “Give me so much to suffer here on earth, O my God, so that after my death, you will lead me with You to Paradise, because I do not want to go to hell.” Sister Paolina Noto, *ex officio* witness, adds: “I learned […]

from her own words […] that the servant of God embraced the religious state through a true vocation, for the desire to consecrate herself to the Lord, to become a saint, to save souls, and gain Paradise" and cites what M. Morano often said to her sisters: "Daughters, we came to the Congregation to become saints and acquire Paradise."

2.4. Imitating Jesus and the saints

The gaze towards Paradise for the FMA was not a magical or poetic feeling. There were God and the saints, considered models to imitate; after having travelled the earthly path, they enjoyed the eternal reward. Paradise was seen as a celebration of the encounter with Jesus, with Mary Help of Christians, and with the patrons of the Institute: St. Joseph, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Teresa of Jesus, and Don Bosco himself who had promised to wait for everyone right there. References to the saints are very abundant in the *Processes* and present themselves as not secondary aspects in the path of holiness. I will mention only a few.

I start from the fundamental core of Christian life, which consists in the *following of Christ*, the saint par excellence. All three figures are united both by the reading of the Imitation of Christ and by the imitation of Jesus in daily life. It was a book prescribed by the first Constitutions, but our protagonists already knew it before their entry into the Institute. Mary Mazzarello discovered it in the group of the FMI and made some expressions her own that we find in the correspondence. Fr. Maccono, the editor of her first 15 letters, cites 17 passages from the *Imitation of Christ* in the notes to help the reader understand the analogy of the contents. Mary Mazzarello recommended it not only to her sisters but also to laywomen. Mrs. Angela Mazzarello, a resident of Mornese, recounts that she once received from Mother Mazzarello, from Nizza, a rosary and the recommendation to read and meditate on the Imitation of Christ. Another lady, Caterina Mazzarello, speaks of Maria's spiritual fervour: "She had great devotion to the Madonna; she urged us to recite three Hail Marys to her purity […] She also urged us to commend ourselves to the Guardian Angel, suggesting the recitation of the *Angele Dei*." Sister Maria Genta adds: "Among the saints, she particularly recommended devotion to St. Joseph, whose hidden virtues, humility, and silence, etc., she encouraged us to imitate, to St. Louis, for whose honour she recommended the practice of the six Sundays, to St. Francis de Sales, to St. Teresa, our particular protectors." Cardinal Cagliero specifies: "She lived lost in God! Whether she was gathered in prayer, when she

was engaged in work, when resting, in vigil, and it can even be said in sleep, like the bride of the canticles."

Regarding Sister Teresa Valsé, Sister Maria Genta, of whom the servant of God was secretary for a period, testifies: "From her, I learned that, even before becoming a religious, she regularly attended to prayer, making daily meditation, and that, among the meditation books, she preferred the *De Imitatione* and the *Practice of Loving Jesus Christ* by St. Alphonsus." In her notebook, we find written: "Take advantage of all opportunities to humble yourself," and, in larger letters, she copies the maxim of the *Imitation of Jesus*: "Love to be unknown and regarded as nothing," and it is for this reason – explains Sister Eulalia Bosco – that "she was able to endure the affronts of spitting [from a girl] without being disturbed at all." "Before such a beautiful figure, my heart feels moved – declares Ms. Pia Basetti, her schoolmate – and I thank the Lord for having granted me the grace to know […] the servant of God Sister Teresa Valsé Pantellini. Oh! May I imitate her in her virtues; this is what I ask of her, with all the fervour of my poor and miserable soul!"

Of Mother Morano, her biographer Fr. Garneri attests: "I can say [that] her inner study was to imitate Jesus in everything." And she did so by repeating the ejaculations: "All for you, my good Jesus, my immense good! Only for your love and glory is enough for me, my Jesus." In the face of this love, Sister Elisabetta Dispenza confesses: "I felt attracted like by a magnet… when I saw her going to and returning from Communion, she no longer seemed a human creature but angelic. In those moments, I desired to imitate her…" "She often spoke of the Madonna, and sometimes she even sang with the people her praises in Sicilian dialect: 'Long live Mary, Mary always alive. Long live Mary and He who created her, and without Mary, one cannot be saved'." She often told the Sisters: "Let us remember that we bear the name of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and we must be such, not in words, but in deeds, imitating her virtues, and with our good example," and she repeated: "My Sisters, we have become Sisters to make ourselves saints and to sanctify the souls that the Lord entrusts to us." Speaking with her, Sister Dispenza adds: "I had this impression several times, that in her spiritual perfection, she traced the footsteps of St. Teresa, St. Francis de Sales, St. John Bosco, three saints of whom she often spoke and whose lives she knew very well." Fr. Monasteri expresses this impression: "When I saw her, it seemed to me that I was before St. Teresa." Mother Morano "devoted to all the saints, had a special devotion to the Patriarch St. Joseph, so much so that under his protection she placed the Sicilian Province. In honour of the saint, she composed a special rosary and for the needs of

the House, she made us pray like this: ‘’St. Joseph, think of us.” “She always spoke to us about M. Mazzarello, of whom she was a great admirer and imitator – testifies Sister Adele Marchese – she proposed to us the examples especially of temperance, and she put more effort into copying them in herself.”

2.5. Fortitude in difficulties and adverse situations

Trials and adversities are not lacking along the way, and the FMA also face them with courage, unleashing the inner resources that make them strong and courageous in challenging circumstances.

Mother Mazzarello, Petronilla testifies, “showed great fortitude when Don Pestarino suddenly died and she found herself without the one who had always been her advisor and guide. Yet she moved forward full of resignation, urging others to think that we are in God’s hands who will provide.” Sister Giuseppa Balzoni recalled that “many times the servant of God told her dependents that men could take everything from her, except the heart to love God.” Sister Enrica Sorbone adds: “She wanted her daughters to be strong too.”

Regarding the fortitude of Sister Teresa Valsé, Sister Maria Genta offers an eloquent example, having experienced the same difficulties that the Servant of God faced: “The special conditions for the continuous difficulties we faced in keeping the Oratory open reached the point that it was considered to suspend everything and close the Oratory itself, especially since, before us, four other religious Institutes had had to abandon the field. In these conditions [Sister Teresa Valsé] was always the one who animated us, encouraged us to pray, to make novenas of prayer, assuring us that God’s assistance would not fail. She reminded us of the example of the venerable Don Bosco, who found himself in the same critical circumstances and, never discouraged, trusting in the help of Divine Providence. I can truly affirm that if I had not had her help and encouragement by my side, I certainly would not have continued in the work, but I too would have closed the house.”

Sister Adelaide Barberis adds: “I can attest that the servant of God had a strong character. She was not frightened by difficulties and contradictions, but continued to carry out her apostolate with zeal and constancy.” And Sister Luigia Rotelli explains the secret of this strength of spirit: “Because she was animated by the lively hope of one day possessing Paradise […] she was able to overcome every

difficulty, [she was] a true model of a Salesian religious." Mother Morano was of the same temperament: "The servant of God prayed and made others pray always," declares Sister Elisabetta Dispenza, "indeed, when adversities happened to her, she did not lose courage, but always cheerful and serene, she doubled her prayers, urging us to pray with more intensity. Then she remained calm and serene, abandoned to the will of God, sure of being consoled. Meanwhile, she often repeated: 'O will of God, you are my love'." And Sister Angela Macchi adds: "The servant of God never let herself be downcast by any difficulty, no matter how grave it was, because she said that difficulties show the works of God; the devil puts these obstacles to prevent doing good." M. Morano "always showed herself strong in the various circumstances of life – confirms the same witness – recalling the example of Don Bosco who said: *When you cannot face a difficulty, go around it.*" And she herself said: "In struggles, adversities, and sufferings, let us think of the eternal reward that will be given to us by the Lord in recompense for our small sacrifices and our sufferings. We FMA must not be discouraged, because our Father Don Bosco told us: 'To those who continue to persevere in the vocation, the Lord has promised bread, work, and Paradise.'"

Conclusion

The holiness of the FMA during the considered period was a visible and perceptible reality both within the Institute itself and from the outside. From the FMA themselves, it was desired and embraced with religious profession as a sure way of salvation, paved by Don Bosco who, making his charisma fruitful, committed himself to imitate Jesus the Good Shepherd for the salvation of youth. It was embodied by strong women, in love with God, who, following the example of the Founder, were ready to endure every humiliation for the good of the young. It was lived by the FMA in the community dimension with creative fidelity, in a climate of joy and holy cheerfulness. Holiness was admired in its originality of the *Preventive System* and appreciated, due to its effectiveness, by the people who entered the radius of its radiance. It was sought by them through imitation due to the positive experience. It was also confused by some with extraordinary actions that should confirm and express it, while its strength lay in the extraordinary inner refinement, attentive to the young of the working class, and hidden behind an apparently ordinary life. The aspects that emerged from the *Positiones* are glimpsed in the light of the exemplarity of Don Bosco continued by our protagonists in the constitutive traits of his spirituality, expressed not only in the feminine but enriched by their educative

and spiritual motherhood.

1. *Sylwia Ciężkowska, fma1*