

# Monsignor Giuseppe Malandrino and the Servant of God Nino Baglieri

*Monsignor Giuseppe Malandrino, the ninth Bishop of the Noto diocese, returned to the House of the Father on 3 August 2025, the day on which the feast of the Patron Saint of the Diocese of Noto, Mary Ladder of Paradise, is celebrated. 94 years of age, 70 years of priesthood and 45 years of episcopal consecration are respectable numbers for a man who served the Church as a Shepherd with “the smell of the sheep” as Pope Francis often emphasised.*

## **Lightning rod of humanity**

During his experience as pastor of the Diocese of Noto (1906.1998 – 1507.2007), he had the opportunity to cultivate his friendship with the Servant of God Nino Baglieri. He almost never missed a “stop” at Nino’s house when pastoral reasons took him to Modica. In one of his testimonies, Monsignor Malandrino says: “...finding myself at Nino’s bedside, I had the vivid perception that this beloved sick brother of ours was truly a “lightning rod of humanity”, according to a concept of sufferers so dear to me and which I also wanted to propose in the Pastoral Letter on the permanent mission *You will be my witnesses*” (2003). Monsignor Malandrino writes: “It is necessary to recognise in the sick and suffering, the face of the suffering Christ and to assist them with the same care and with the same love of Jesus in His passion, lived in a spirit of obedience to the Father and in solidarity with his brothers”. This was fully embodied by Nino’s dearest mother, Mrs. Peppina. She, a typical Sicilian woman, with a strong character and great determination. She replies to the doctor who proposes euthanasia for her son (given his serious health conditions and the prospect of a life as a paralytic), “if the Lord wants him, he will take him, but if he leaves him to me

like this, I am happy to look after him for life.” Was Nino’s mother aware of what she was going to face at that moment? Was Mary, the mother of Jesus, aware of how much pain she would have to suffer for the Son of God? The answer, when read with human eyes, does not seem easy, especially in our 21<sup>st</sup> century society where everything is unstable, fluctuating, consumed in an “instant”. Mamma Peppina’s Fiat became, like Mary’s, a Yes of Faith and adherence to that will of God which finds fulfilment in knowing how to carry the Cross, in knowing how to give “soul and body” to the realisation of God’s Plan.

### **From suffering to joy**

The friendship between Nino and Monsignor Malandrino was already underway when the latter was still bishop of Acireale. In fact, as early as 1993, through Father Attilio Balbinot, a Camillian very close to Nino, he presented him with his first book, “From suffering to joy”. In Nino’s experience, the relationship with the Bishop of his diocese was one of total filiation. From the moment he accepted God’s Plan for him, he made his “active” presence felt by offering his sufferings for the Church, the Pope, and the Bishops (as well as priests and missionaries). This relationship of filiation was renewed annually on 6 May, the day of his fall, later seen as the mysterious beginning of a rebirth. On 8 May 2004, a few days after Nino celebrated the 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cross, Monsignor Malandrino went to his house. In memory of that meeting, he writes in his memoirs, “it is always a great joy every time I see him and I receive so much energy and strength to carry my Cross and offer it with so much Love for the needs of the Holy Church and in particular for my Bishop and for our Diocese. May the Lord always give him more holiness to guide us for many years always with more ardour and love...”. Again: “... the Cross is heavy but the Lord gives me so many Graces that make suffering less bitter and it becomes light and sweet; the Cross becomes a Gift, offered to the Lord with so much Love for the salvation of souls and the Conversion of

Sinners...". Finally, it should be emphasised how, on these occasions of grace, the pressing and constant request for "help to become a Saint with the daily Cross" was never lacking. Nino, in fact, absolutely wanted to become a saint.

### **An anticipated beatification**

Moments of great significance in this sense were the funeral of the Servant of God on 3 March 2007, when Monsignor Malandrino himself, at the beginning of the Eucharistic Celebration, devoutly bent down, albeit with difficulty, to kiss the coffin containing Nino's mortal remains. It was an homage to a man who had lived 39 years of his existence in a body that "did not feel" but which radiated joy of life in every way. Monsignor Malandrino emphasised that the celebration of the Mass, in the Salesian courtyard which had become an open-air "cathedral" for the occasion, had been an authentic apotheosis (thousands of people participated in tears) and it was clearly and communally perceived that they were not in front of a funeral, but a true "beatification". Nino, with his testimony of life, had in fact become a point of reference for many, young and old, lay people and consecrated persons, mothers and fathers of families, who, thanks to his precious testimony, were able to read their own existence and find answers that they could not find elsewhere. Monsignor Malandrino also repeatedly emphasised this aspect: "in fact, every encounter with the dearest Nino was for me, as for everyone, a strong and vivid experience of edification and a powerful – in its sweetness – spur to patient and generous giving. The presence of the Bishop gave him immense joy every time because, in addition to the affection of the friend who came to visit him, he perceived the ecclesial communion. It is obvious that what I received from him was always much more than the little I could give him." Nino's fixed "obsession" was to "become a saint"; having fully lived and embodied the Gospel of Joy in Suffering, with his physical ailments and his total gift for the beloved Church, ensured that everything did not end with his departure to the Heavenly Jerusalem, but

continued, as Monsignor Malandrino emphasised at the funeral. “... Nino’s mission now also continues through his writings as he himself had announced it in his spiritual Testament.” “... my writings will continue my testimony. I will continue to give Joy to everyone and to speak of the Great Love of God and the Wonders he has done in my life.” This is still coming true because “a city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house” (Matthew 5:14-16). Metaphorically, it is intended to emphasise that “light” (understood in a broad sense) must be visible, sooner or later; what is important will come to light and will be recognised.

To revisit these days – marked by the death of Monsignor Malandrino, by his funerals in Acireale (5 August, Our Lady of the Snow) and in Noto (7 August) with subsequent burial in the cathedral which he himself strongly wanted to be renovated after the collapse of 13 March 1996 and which was reopened in March 2007 (the month in which Nino Baglieri died) – means retracing this bond between two great figures of the Netine Church, strongly intertwined and both capable of leaving an indelible mark on it.

*Roberto Chiaramonte*

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## **Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the Mountain of La Salette**

*Don Bosco presents a detailed account of the “Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the mountain of La Salette,” which*

*occurred on 19 September 1846, based on official documents and the testimonies of the visionaries. He reconstructs the historical and geographical context – two young shepherds, Maximin and Mélanie, in the heights of the Alps – the miraculous encounter with the Virgin, her warning message against sin, and the promise of graces and providences, as well as the supernatural signs that accompanied these demonstrations. He recounts the spread of the devotion, its spiritual influence on the inhabitants and the whole world, and the secret revealed only to Pius IX to strengthen the faith of Christians and testify to the perpetual presence of miracles in the Church.*

### **Author's Protest**

In obedience to the decrees of Urban VIII, I protest that regarding what is said in this book about miracles, revelations, or other events, I do not intend to attribute any authority other than human; and in bestowing the title of Saint or Blessed upon anyone, I do so only according to opinion, excepting those things and persons already approved by the Holy Apostolic See.

### **To the Reader**

A certain and marvellous fact, attested by thousands of people and which all may still verify today, is the apparition of the Blessed Virgin, which occurred on 19 September 1846. (On this extraordinary event, many pamphlets and several newspapers printed at the time may be consulted, notably: "Account of the Apparition of Mary Most Holy," Turin, 1847; "Official Decree on the Apparition," etc., 1848; the booklet printed under the care of Fr. Giuseppe Gonfalonieri, Novara, Enrico Grotti.)

Our merciful Mother appeared in the form and figure of a great Lady to two shepherds – a boy of 11 years and a peasant girl of 15 – on a mountain in the Alps situated in the parish of La Salette in France. She appeared not only for the good of France, as the Bishop of Grenoble states, but for the good of

the whole world, to warn us of the great wrath of her Divine Son, kindled especially by three sins: **blasphemy, the profanation of Sundays, and eating meat on forbidden days.**

Other miraculous events follow, gathered from public documents or attested by persons whose faith excludes all doubt about what they report.

May these facts confirm the good in religion and refute those who, perhaps out of ignorance, would limit the power and mercy of the Lord by saying: "It is no longer the time of miracles." Jesus said that greater miracles would be performed in His Church than those He Himself worked, and He set neither time nor number. Therefore, as long as the Church exists, we shall always see the hand of the Lord manifesting His power through wondrous events, because yesterday, today, and always, Christ will be the one who governs and assists His Church until the end of time.

But these visible signs of Divine Omnipotence are always harbingers of grave events that reveal the mercy and goodness of the Lord or His justice and indignation, yet in such a way as to bring greater glory to Him and greater benefit to souls. Let us ensure they are for us a source of graces and blessings, an encouragement to a living faith, active faith, faith that moves us to do good and flee evil, making us worthy of His infinite mercy in time and eternity.

### **Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the Mountains of La Salette**

Maximin, son of Pierre Giraud, a carpenter from the village of Corps, was an 11-year-old boy. Françoise Mélanie, daughter of poor parents, also from Corps, was a 15-year-old girl. There was nothing remarkable about them: both were ignorant and rough, both tending cattle in the mountains. Maximin knew only the Our Father and Hail Mary; Mélanie knew little more, so much so that, due to her ignorance, she had not yet been admitted to Holy Communion.

Sent by their parents to tend cattle in the pastures, it was purely by chance that on 18 September, the eve of the great

event, they met on the mountain while watering their cows at a spring.

That evening, returning home with the cattle, Mélanie said to Maximin: "Who will be the first to reach the mountain tomorrow?" And the next day, 19 September, a Saturday, they ascended together, each leading four cows and a goat. The day was fine and clear, the sun bright. Around noon, hearing the *Angelus* bell, they made a short prayer with the sign of the Cross; then they took their provisions and ate by a small spring to the left of a stream. After eating, they crossed the stream, left their bags by a dry fountain, descended a little further, and fell asleep some distance apart, which was not usual for them.

Now let us hear the account from the shepherds themselves, as they gave it that evening to the owners and later thousands of times to thousands of people.

"We had fallen asleep..." recounts Mélanie. "I woke first and, not seeing my cows, woke Maximin, saying, 'Come, let's find our cows.' We crossed the stream, climbed a little, and saw them lying on the opposite side. They were not far. Then I went back down, and five or six steps before reaching the stream, I saw a brightness like the sun but more brilliant, though not the same colour, and said to Maximin, 'Come, come quickly and see this light below.' (It was between two and three in the afternoon.)

Maximin came down at once, asking: 'Where is this light?' I pointed to the small spring with my finger, and he stopped when he saw it. Then we saw a Lady in the midst of the light; she was seated on a pile of stones, her face in her hands. In fear, I dropped my stick. Maximin said: 'Hold your stick; if she does anything to us, I'll give her a good beating.'

Then the Lady rose, crossed her arms, and said, 'Come near, my children. Do not be afraid; I am here to give you great news.' We crossed the stream, and she advanced to where we had slept. She stood between us, weeping all the while she spoke (I saw her tears clearly). 'If my people will not submit, I am forced

to let go of the hand of my Son. It is so strong, so heavy, I can no longer restrain it.'

'How long I have suffered for you! If I wish my Son not to abandon you, I must pray to Him unceasingly; yet you take no heed. However much you pray or do, you can never repay the care I have taken for you.'

'I gave you six days to work; I reserved the seventh, and you will not grant it to me. This is what makes my Son's hand so heavy.'

'If the potatoes spoil, it is all your fault. I showed you last year (1845), yet you paid no heed, and finding spoiled potatoes, you blasphemed, mingling my Son's name with it.'

'They will continue to spoil, and by Christmas this year (1846), you will have none left.'

'If you have wheat, do not sow it; what you sow will be eaten by worms, and what grows will turn to dust when you thresh it.'

'A great famine will come.' (Indeed, a great famine occurred in France, with crowds of starving beggars flocking to cities by the thousands. While grain prices rose in Italy in early 1847, France suffered severe hunger throughout the winter of 1846–47. But the true scarcity of food, the real famine, was felt during the disasters of the 1870–71 war. In Paris, a grand personage hosted a lavish meal of meat on Good Friday. Months later, even the wealthiest citizens were reduced to eating vile food and the flesh of unclean animals. Many died of hunger.)

'Before the famine, children under seven will tremble and die in the arms of those holding them. Others will do penance for the famine.'

'The walnuts will spoil, and the grapes will rot...' (In 1849, walnuts spoiled everywhere, and grapes were ruined for over twenty years across Europe due to cryptogamic disease from 1849 to 1869.)



'If they convert, stones and rocks will turn into heaps of grain, and potatoes will spring from the earth.'

Then she said:

'Do you say your prayers well, my children?'

We both replied: 'Not very well, Lady.'

'Ah, my children, you must say them well morning and evening. When you have no time, say at least an Our Father and Hail Mary; when you have time, say more.'

'Only a few old women go to Mass; the others work all summer on Sundays. In winter, the young, when idle, go to Mass only to mock religion. In Lent, they go to the butchers like dogs.'

Then she asked: 'Have you seen spoiled wheat, my boy?'

Maximin answered: 'Oh no, Lady.' Unsure whom she addressed, I whispered,

'No, Lady, I have not seen any yet.'

'You must have seen some, my boy' (turning to Maximin). 'Once near the Coin area with your father. The field's owner told your father to see his spoiled wheat; you both went. You took some ears in your hands, and rubbing them, they turned to dust, and you returned. Half an hour from Corps, your father gave you bread, saying: 'Take, my son, eat bread this year; I know not who will eat it next if the wheat keeps spoiling.'

Maximin replied: 'Oh yes, Lady, now I remember; I had forgotten.'

Then the Lady said: 'Well, my children, you will make this known to all my people.'

She crossed the stream and, without turning, repeated: 'Well, my children, you will make this known to all my people.'

She then climbed about fifteen steps to where we had gone to find our cows, walking on the grass without touching it, her feet barely grazing the tips. We followed; I passed before her, Maximin slightly on the side. The beautiful Lady rose (Mélanie gestured, raising her hand a metre or more), hovering momentarily. She looked to Heaven, then earth; then we saw her no more—no head, arms, or feet—as if melting away, leaving only a light in the air, which then vanished.

I said to Maximin: 'Perhaps she is a great saint?' He replied:

‘Had we known, we’d have asked her to take us.’ I said: ‘What if she were still here?’ Maximin reached for the light, but it was gone. We looked carefully but saw nothing.

I said: ‘She does not wish us to see where she goes.’ Then we returned to our cows.”

This is Mélanie’s account. Asked how the Lady was dressed, she replied,

“She wore white shoes with roses around them—of all colours; yellow stockings, a yellow apron, a white dress covered in pearls, a white neckerchief edged with roses, a high cap slightly tilted with a crown of roses. She had a chain with a crucifix: on the right, pincers; on the left, a hammer; at the cross’s end, another large chain hung, like the roses around her neckerchief. Her face was white, elongated; I could not look long, for she dazzled us.”

Questioned separately, Maximin gave the same account without variation in substance or form, which we refrain from repeating here.

Innumerable and crafty questions were put to them, especially for two years, under interrogations lasting 5, 6, or 7 hours, aiming to confuse or trap them in contradictions. Surely no accused was ever so rigorously examined by courts of justice regarding an alleged crime.

### **Secret of the two little shepherds**

Immediately after the apparition, Maximin and Melanie, on their way home, questioned each other about why the great Lady, after saying “the grapes will rot,” had paused briefly before speaking and merely moved her lips without making audible what she was saying?

As they discussed this between themselves, Maximin said to Melanie: “She told me something, but forbade me to tell you.” They both realised they had each separately received a secret from the Lady, with the prohibition not to reveal it to others. Now consider, dear reader, whether children can keep silent.

It is incredible to recount how much was done and attempted to

extract this secret from them in any way possible. It is astonishing to read of the thousands upon thousands of attempts made for this purpose by hundreds upon hundreds of people over twenty years. Prayers, surprises, threats, insults, gifts, and seductions of every kind—all came to nothing; they remained impenetrable.

The Bishop of Grenoble, an octogenarian, felt it his duty to command the two privileged children to at least convey their secret to the Holy Father, Pius IX. At the name of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the two little shepherds promptly obeyed and resolved to reveal a secret that until then nothing had been able to wrest from them. They therefore wrote it themselves (from the day of the apparition onwards, they had been sent to school, each separately); then they folded and sealed their letter—all this in the presence of distinguished persons chosen by the bishop himself to serve as witnesses. The bishop then sent two priests to deliver this mysterious dispatch to Rome.

On 18 July 1851, they presented to His Holiness Pius IX three letters: one from Monsignor Bishop of Grenoble, accrediting these two envoys; the other two contained the secret of the two young children of La Salette. Each had written and sealed the letter containing their secret in the presence of witnesses who had attested to their authenticity on the envelope.

His Holiness opened the letters and began reading Maximin's. "There is truly," he said, "the candour and simplicity of a child." During this reading, a certain emotion manifested on the Holy Father's face; his lips tightened, his cheeks swelled. "It concerns," the Pope said to the two priests, "it concerns scourges with which France is threatened. She is not alone in guilt—Germany, Italy, all of Europe are guilty too, and deserve punishment. I greatly fear religious indifference and human respect."

### **Pilgrimage to La Salette**

The fountain near which the Lady—that is, the

Virgin Mary—had rested was, as we said, dry; and according to all the shepherds and villagers of those parts, it only gave water after heavy rains and the melting of snow. Now this fountain, dry on the very day of the apparition, began to gush the following day, and from that time the water has flowed clear and uninterrupted.

That barren, rugged, deserted mountain, inhabited by shepherds for barely four months a year, has become the stage for an immense gathering of people. Entire populations flock from all sides to this privileged mountain. Weeping with tenderness and singing hymns, they bow their foreheads to this blessed ground where Mary's voice resounded. They are seen kissing reverently the spot sanctified by Mary's feet, and they descend filled with joy, trust, and gratitude.

Every day, an immense number of faithful devoutly visit the site of the miracle. On the first anniversary of the apparition (19 September 1847), over seventy thousand pilgrims of every age, sex, condition, and even nation covered the surface of that land...

But what makes the power of that voice from Heaven felt even more is the remarkable change in morals among the inhabitants of Corps, La Salette, the entire canton, and all the surrounding areas—and it spreads still further afield... They have ceased working on Sundays; they have abandoned blasphemy... They attend church, heed their pastors' voices, receive the sacraments, and fulfil the Easter duty with edification—until then generally neglected. I omit the many striking conversions and extraordinary graces in the spiritual order.

On the site of the apparition now stands a majestic church with extensive buildings, where travellers, after satisfying their devotion, can comfortably refresh themselves and even spend the night if they wish.

After the event of La Salette, Melanie was sent to school, making marvellous progress in knowledge and virtue. But she always felt so inflamed with devotion to the Blessed Virgin

Mary that she resolved to consecrate herself entirely to Her. She entered the Discalced Carmelites, among whom, according to the journal *Echo de Fourvière* (22 October 1870), she was called to Heaven by the Holy Virgin. Shortly before her death, she wrote the following letter to her mother.

11 September 1870.

*Dearest and most beloved mother,*

May Jesus be loved by all hearts. This letter is not only for you but for all the inhabitants of my dear village of Corps. A family father, most loving towards his children, seeing that they forgot their duties, despised the law imposed on them by God, and became ungrateful, resolved to punish them severely. The spouse of the Father of the family begged for mercy and at the same time went to the two youngest children of the Father—the weakest and most ignorant. The spouse, who cannot weep in her spouse's house (Heaven), finds abundant tears in the fields of these wretched children. She expresses her fears and threats if they do not turn back, if they do not observe the Master's law. A very small number embrace the reform of the heart and set themselves to observe the holy law of the Father; but alas! The majority remain in sin and sink deeper into it. Then the Father sends punishments to chastise them and draw them from this state of hardness. These wretched children think to escape punishment—they seize and break the rods that strike them instead of falling to their knees, begging for mercy, and above all promising to change their lives. Finally, the Father, further angered, takes up a stronger rod and strikes—and will strike—until He is acknowledged, until they humble themselves and beg mercy from Him who reigns on earth and in Heaven.

You understand me, dear mother and beloved inhabitants of Corps: this Father is God. We are all His children; neither you nor I have loved Him as we ought; we have not kept His commandments as we should, now God chastises us. A great

number of our soldier brothers die; families and entire cities are reduced to misery; and if we do not turn to God, it is not over. Paris is very guilty for rewarding a wicked man who wrote against the divinity of Jesus Christ. Men have but one time to sin; but God is eternal and punishes sinners. God is angered by the multitude of sins and because He is almost unknown and forgotten. Now who can stop the war that does so much harm in France and will soon recommence in Italy? etc., etc. Who can halt this scourge?

We must: 1) recognise that in this war there is solely the hand of God; 2) humble ourselves and ask with mind and heart forgiveness for our sins; sincerely promise to serve God with mind and heart and obey His commandments without human respect. Some pray, asking God for the triumph of us French. No—this is not what the good God wants. He wants the conversion of the French. The Blessed Virgin came to France, and France did not convert. She is thus more guilty than other nations; if she does not humble herself, she will be greatly humbled. Paris, this hearth of vanity and pride—who can save her if fervent prayers do not rise to the heart of the good Master?

I remember, dear mother and beloved inhabitants, my dear village—I remember those devout processions you made to the sacred mountain of La Salette so God's wrath would not strike your land! The Holy Virgin heard your fervent prayers, your penances, and all you did for love of God. I think and hope you must now do even more—beautiful processions for France's salvation; that is, for France to return to God, for God waits only for this to withdraw the rod with which He scourges His rebellious people. Let us pray much—yes, pray; hold your processions as you did in 1846 and '47: believe that God always hears the sincere prayers of humble hearts. Let us pray much, pray always. I never loved Napoleon, for I remember his whole life. May the divine Saviour forgive him all the evil he has done—and still does!

Let us remember we were created to love and serve God, and

that outside this there is no true happiness. Mothers must raise their children Christianly, for the time of tribulations is not over. If I revealed their number and nature, you would be horrified. But I do not wish to frighten you; trust in God, who loves us infinitely more than we can love Him. Let us pray, pray—and the good, divine, tender Virgin Mary will always be with us: prayer disarms God's wrath; prayer is the key to Heaven.

Let us pray for our poor soldiers, for so many grieving mothers who have lost their children; let us consecrate ourselves to our good Heavenly Mother; pray for the blind who do not see it is God's hand now striking France. Pray much and do penance. Hold fast to the Holy Church and our Holy Father, her visible head and the Vicar of Our Lord Jesus Christ on earth. In your processions and penances, pray much for him. Lastly, remain at peace, love one another as brothers, promising God to keep His commandments—and truly keep them. And by God's mercy, you will be happy and die a good and holy death, which I desire for all, placing you under the protection of the august Virgin Mary. I embrace you heartily (relatives). My health is in the Cross. The Heart of Jesus watches over me.

Maria of the Cross, *victim of Jesus*

*First part of the publication, "Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the Mountain of La Salette with Other Miraculous Events, Collected from Public Documents by the Priest John Bosco," Turin, Oratory of St. Francis de Sales Printing Press, 1871*

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# The Venerable Monsignor Stefano Ferrando

*Monsignor Stefano Ferrando was an extraordinary example of missionary dedication and episcopal service, combining the Salesian charism with a profound vocation to serve the poorest. Born in Piedmont in 1895, he entered the Salesian Congregation at a young age and, after serving in the military during the First World War, for which he was awarded the Silver Medal for Valour, he dedicated himself to apostolate in India. As Bishop of Krishnagar and then Shillong for over thirty years, he tirelessly walked among the people, promoting evangelisation with humility and profound pastoral love. He founded institutions, supported lay catechists, and embodied the motto "Apostle of Christ" in his life. His life was an example of faith, surrender to God, and total self-giving, leaving a spiritual legacy that continues to inspire the Salesian mission worldwide.*

Venerable Bishop Stephen Ferrando knew how to combine his Salesian vocation with his missionary charism and episcopal ministry. Born on 28 September 1895 in Rossiglione (Genoa, diocese of Acqui) to Agostino and Giuseppina Salvi, he was distinguished by an ardent love of God and a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1904 he entered Salesian schools, first at Fossano and then at Valdocco in Turin where he got to know Don Bosco's successors and the first generation of Salesians, and undertook his priestly studies; in the meantime he nurtured the desire to leave as a missionary. On 13 September 1912, he made his first religious profession in the Salesian Congregation at Foglizzo. Called to arms in 1915, he took part in the First World War. For his courage he was awarded the silver medal for valour. Returning home in 1918, he took his perpetual vows on 26 December 1920. He was ordained a priest in Borgo San Martino (Alessandria) on



18 March 1923. On 2 December of the same year, with nine companions, he embarked in Venice as a missionary to India. On 18 December, after 16 days of travel, the group arrived in Bombay and on 23 December in Shillong, the place of his new apostolate. As novice master, he educated the young Salesians in the love of Jesus and Mary and had a great spirit of apostolate.

On 9 August 1934, Pope Pius XI appointed him Bishop of Krishnagar. His motto was "Apostle of Christ". In 1935, on 26 November, he was transferred to Shillong where he remained bishop for 34 years. While working in a difficult situation of cultural, religious and social impact, Bishop Ferrando worked tirelessly to be close to the people entrusted to him, working zealously in the vast diocese that encompassed the entire region of North East India. He preferred to travel on foot rather than by car, which he would have had at his disposal: this allowed him to meet the people, to stop and talk to them, to be involved in their lives. This live contact with people's lives was one of the main reasons for the fruitfulness of his evangelical proclamation: humility, simplicity, love for the poor led many to convert and request Baptism. He established a seminary for the formation of young Indian Salesians, built a hospital, erected a shrine dedicated to Mary Help of Christians and founded the first Congregation of indigenous sisters, the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (1942).

A man of strong character, he was not discouraged in the face of countless difficulties, which he faced with a smile and meekness. Perseverance in the face of obstacles was one of his main characteristics. He sought to unite the Gospel message with the local culture in which it was to be embedded. He was intrepid in his pastoral visits, which he made to the most remote places in the diocese, in order to recover the last lost sheep. He showed particular sensitivity and promotion for lay catechists, whom he considered complementary to the bishop's mission and on whom depended much of the fruitfulness

of the proclamation of the Gospel and its penetration into the territory. His attention to family pastoral work was also immense. Despite his numerous commitments, the Venerable was a man with a rich interior life, nourished by prayer and recollection. As a pastor, he was appreciated by his sisters, priests, Salesian brothers and in the episcopate, as well as by the people, who felt him deeply close to them. He gave himself creatively to his flock, caring for the poor, defending the untouchables, caring for the cholera patients.

The cornerstones of his spirituality were his filial bond with the Virgin Mary, his missionary zeal, his continuous reference to Don Bosco, as emerges from his writings and in all his missionary activity. The most luminous and heroic moment of his virtuous life was his departure from the diocese of Shillong. Archbishop Ferrando had to submit his resignation to the Holy Father when he was still in the fullness of his physical and intellectual faculties, to allow the appointment of his successor, who was to be chosen, according to his superiors' instructions, from among the indigenous priests he had formed. It was a particularly painful moment, experienced by the great bishop with humility and obedience. He understood that it was time to retire in prayer according to the Lord's will.

He returned to Genoa in 1969 and continued his pastoral activity, presiding over the ceremonies for the conferral of Confirmation and dedicating himself to the sacrament of Penance.

He was faithful to the Salesian religious life to the last, deciding to live in community and renouncing the privileges that his position as bishop might have reserved for him. He continued to be "a missionary" in Italy. Not "a missionary who moves, but [...] a missionary who is". His life in this last stage of life became a "radiating" one. He became a "missionary of prayer" who said: "I am glad I came away so that others could take over to do such wonderful works."

From Genoa Quarto, he continued to animate the mission in Assam, raising awareness and sending financial aid. He lived

this hour of purification with a spirit of faith, of abandonment to God's will and obedience, touching with his own hand the full meaning of the evangelical expression "we are only useless servants", and confirming with his life the *caetera tolle*, the sacrificial aspect of the Salesian vocation. He died on 20 June 1978 and was buried in Rossiglione, his native land. In 1987 his mortal remains were brought back to India.

In docility to the Spirit he carried out a fruitful pastoral action, which manifested itself in great love for the poor, in humility of spirit and fraternal charity, in the joy and optimism of the Salesian spirit.

Together with many missionaries who shared the adventure of the Spirit with him in the land of India, including Servants of God Francis Convertini, Costantine Vendrame and Orestes Marengo, Bishop Ferrando gave rise to a new missionary method: to be an itinerant missionary. Such an example is a providential warning, especially for religious congregations tempted by a process of institutionalisation and closure, not to lose the passion to go out to meet people and situations of the greatest material and spiritual poverty and destitution, going where no one wants to go and entrusting themselves as he did. "I look to the future with confidence, trusting in Mary Help of Christians... I will entrust myself to Mary Help of Christians who already saved me from so many dangers."

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## **Saint Monica, mother of Saint Augustine, witness of hope**

*A woman of unshakeable faith, of fruitful tears, answered by God after seventeen long years. A model of a Christian wife*

*and mother for the whole Church. A witness of hope who transformed herself into a powerful intercessor in Heaven. Don Bosco himself recommended to mothers afflicted by the unchristian lives of their children, to entrust themselves to her in prayer.*

In the great gallery of saints who have marked the history of the Church, Saint Monica (331-387) occupies a unique place. Not for spectacular miracles, not for the founding of religious communities, not for significant social or political undertakings. Monica is remembered and venerated primarily as a mother, the mother of Augustine, the restless young man who, thanks to her prayers, her tears, and her testimony of faith, became one of the greatest Fathers of the Church and Doctors of the Catholic faith.

But to limit her figure to the maternal role would be unfair and reductive. Monica is a woman who knew how to live her ordinary life – wife, mother, believer – in an extraordinary way, transfiguring daily life through the power of faith. She is an example of perseverance in prayer, of patience in marriage, of unshakeable hope in the face of her son's deviations.

News of her life comes to us almost exclusively from Augustine's Confessions, a text that is not a chronicle, but a theological and spiritual reading of existence. Yet, in those pages, Augustine draws an unforgettable portrait of his mother; not only a good and pious woman, but an authentic model of Christian faith, a "mother of tears" that become a source of grace.

### **Her origins in Tagaste**

Monica was born in 331 in Tagaste, a city in Numidia, [Souk Ahras](#) in present-day Algeria. It was a lively centre, marked by the Roman presence and an already rooted Christian community. She came from a well-to-do Christian family; faith was already part of her cultural and spiritual horizon.

Her upbringing was marked by the influence of an austere

nurse, who educated her in sobriety and temperance. Saint Augustine would write of her, *"I will not therefore speak of her gifts, but of Your gifts to her, who had not made herself alone, nor educated herself alone. You created her without even her father and mother knowing what daughter they would have; and the rod of your Christ, that is, the discipline of your Only Begotten, in a house of believers, a healthy member of your Church, instructed her in your fear."* (Confessions IX, 8, 17).

In the same *Confessions*, Augustine also recounts a significant episode. Young Monica had developed the habit of drinking small sips of wine from the cellar, until a servant reprimanded her, calling her "drunkard". That reprimand was enough for her to correct herself definitively. This apparently minor anecdote shows her honesty in recognising her sins, allowing herself to be corrected, and growing in virtue.

At the age of 23, Monica was given in marriage to Patricius, a pagan municipal official, known for his choleric character and marital infidelity. Married life was not easy. Living with an impulsive man distant from the Christian faith severely tested her patience.

Yet, Monica never fell into discouragement. With an attitude of meekness and respect, she gradually won her husband's heart. She did not respond harshly to outbursts of anger, nor did she fuel unnecessary conflicts. In time, her constancy bore fruit. Patricius converted and received baptism shortly before he died.

Monica's testimony shows how holiness is not necessarily expressed in sensational gestures, but in daily fidelity, in the love that slowly transforms difficult situations. In this sense, she is a model for many wives and mothers who live marriages marked by tensions or differences in faith.

### **Monica as a mother**

From the marriage, three children were born: Augustine, Navigius, and a daughter whose name we do not know. Monica

poured all her love upon them, but above all her faith. Navigius and her daughter followed a straightforward Christian path; Navigius became a priest; her daughter embarked on the path of consecrated virginity. Augustine, however, soon became the centre of her worries and tears.

Even as a boy, Augustine showed extraordinary intelligence. Monica sent him to study rhetoric in [Carthage](#), eager to ensure him a brilliant future. But along with intellectual progress came temptations: sensuality, worldliness, bad company. Augustine embraced the Manichaean doctrine, convinced he would find rational answers to the problem of evil. Furthermore, he began to live with a woman without marrying her, with whom he had a son, Adeodatus. Her son's deviations led Monica to deny him hospitality in her home. But she did not stop praying for him and offering sacrifices, *"from the bleeding heart of my mother, the sacrifice of her tears was offered to You for me night and day"* (Confessions V, 7,13) and *"she shed more tears than mothers ever shed at the physical death of their children"* (Confessions III, 11,19).

For Monica, it was a deep wound. Her son, whom she had consecrated to Christ in the womb, was going astray. The pain was unspeakable, but she never stopped hoping. Augustine himself would write, *"My mother's heart, struck by such a wound, would never heal, for I cannot adequately express her feelings towards me and how much greater her travail in giving birth to me in spirit was that with which she had given birth to me in the flesh."* (Confessions V, 9,16).

The question naturally arises, why did Monica not have Augustine baptised immediately after birth?

In reality, although infant baptism was already known and practised, it was not yet a universal practice. Many parents preferred to postpone it until adulthood, considering it a "definitive washing". They feared that if the baptised person sinned gravely, salvation would be compromised. Furthermore, Patricius still a pagan, had no interest in educating his son

in the Christian faith.

Today we clearly see that it was an unfortunate choice, since baptism not only makes us children of God, but also gives us the grace to overcome temptations and sin.

One thing, however, is certain, if he had been baptised as a child, Monica would have spared herself and her son much suffering.

The strongest image of Monica is that of a mother who prays and weeps. The *Confessions* describe her as a tireless woman in interceding with God for her son.

One day, a bishop of Tagaste – according to some, Ambrose himself – reassured her with words that have remained famous, “*Go, the son of so many tears cannot be lost.*” That phrase became Monica’s guiding star, the confirmation that her maternal sorrow was not in vain, but part of a mysterious design of grace.

### **A mother’s tenacity**

Monica’s life was also a pilgrimage in Augustine’s footsteps. When her son decided to secretly leave for Rome, Monica spared no effort. She did not give up the cause as lost, but followed him and sought him until she found him. She reached him in Milan, where Augustine had obtained a chair of rhetoric. Here she found a spiritual guide in Saint Ambrose, Bishop of the city. A deep harmony developed between Monica and Ambrose. She recognised in him the pastor capable of guiding her son, while Ambrose admired her unshakeable faith.

In Milan, Ambrose’s preaching opened new perspectives for Augustine. He gradually abandoned Manichaeism and began to look at Christianity with new eyes. Monica silently accompanied this process. She did not force the timing; she did not demand immediate conversions, but she prayed and supported him and remained by his side until his conversion.

### **Augustine’s conversion**

God seemed not to hear her, but Monica never stopped praying

and offering sacrifices for her son. After seventeen years, her pleas were finally answered – and how! Augustine not only became a Christian, but became a priest, bishop, doctor, and father of the Church.

He himself acknowledges it: *“But you, in the depth of Your designs, answered the vital point of her desire, without caring about the momentary object of her request, but taking care to make of me what she always asked You to do.”* (Confessions V, 8,15).

The decisive moment came in 386. Augustine, inwardly tormented, struggled against the passions and resistances of his will. In the famous episode in the garden of Milan, hearing the voice of a child saying *“Tolle, lege”* (“Take up and read”), he opened the Letter to the Romans and read the words that changed his life. “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Romans 13:14).

It was the beginning of his conversion. Together with his son Adeodatus and some friends, he retired to Cassiciaco to prepare for baptism. Monica was with them, sharing the joy of finally seeing the prayers of so many years answered.

On Easter night in 387, in Milan Cathedral, Ambrose baptised Augustine, Adeodatus, and the other catechumens. Monica’s tears of sorrow turned into tears of joy. She continued to serve him, so much so that in Cassiciaco Augustine would say, *“She cared as if she had been mother to all and served us as if she had been daughter to all.”*

### **Ostia: ecstasy and death**

After the baptism, Monica and Augustine prepared to return to Africa. Stopping in [Ostia](#), while waiting for the ship, they experienced a moment of intense spirituality. The *Confessions* narrate the ecstasy of Ostia: mother and son, looking out of a window, contemplated together the beauty of creation and ascended towards God, anticipating the beatitude of heaven.



Monica would say: *"Son, as for me, I no longer find any attraction for this life. I do not know what I am still doing here and why I am here. This world is no longer an object of desire for me. There was only one reason why I wished to remain a little longer in this life, to see you a Catholic Christian before I died. God has answered me beyond all my expectations. He has granted me to see you in His service and freed from earthly aspirations for happiness. What am I doing here?"* (Confessions IX, 10,11). She had reached her earthly goal.

A few days later, Monica fell seriously ill. Feeling the end near, she said to her children: *"My children, bury your mother here; do not worry about where. Only this I ask of you, remember me at the Lord's altar, wherever you may be."* It was the synthesis of her life: the place of burial did not matter to her, but the bond in prayer and the Eucharist.

She died at 56, on 12 November 387, and was buried in Ostia.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, her relics were transferred to a hidden crypt in the same [church of Saint Aurea](#). In 1425, the relics were translated to Rome, to the [Basilica of Saint Agostino in Campo Marzio](#), where they are still venerated today.

### **Monica's spiritual profile**

Augustine describes his mother with well-measured words:

*"[...] womanly in appearance, manly in faith, aged in serenity, maternal in love, Christian in piety [...]"*. (Confessions IX, 4, 8).

And again:

*"[...] a chaste and sober widow, assiduous in almsgiving, devout and submissive to Your saints; who did not let a day pass without bringing an offering to Your altar; who twice a day, morning and evening, without fail visited Your church, and not to confabulate vainly and gossip like other old women, but to hear Your words and to make You hear her prayers? Could You have disdained the tears of such a woman, who with them asked You not for gold or silver, nor for fleeting or fickle goods, but for the salvation of her son's soul, You who had made her*

*so by Your grace, refusing her Your help? Certainly not, Lord. Indeed, You were beside her and heard her, working according to the order by which You had predestined to work.”* (Confessions V, 9,17).

From this Augustinian testimony, a surprisingly contemporary figure emerges.

She was a woman of prayer; she never ceased to invoke God for the salvation of her loved ones. Her tears become a model of persevering intercession.

She was a faithful wife; in a difficult marriage, she never responded with resentment to her husband's harshness. Her patience and meekness were instruments of evangelisation.

She was a courageous mother. She did not abandon her son in his deviations, but accompanied him with tenacious love, capable of trusting in God's timing.

She was a witness of hope; her life shows that no situation is desperate, if lived in faith.

Monica's message does not belong only to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It still speaks today, in a context where many families experience tensions, children stray from faith, parents experience the fatigue of waiting.

To parents, she teaches not to give up, to believe that grace works in mysterious ways.

To Christian women, she shows how meekness and fidelity can transform difficult relationships.

To anyone who feels discouraged in prayer, she testifies that God listens, even if the timing does not coincide with ours.

It is no coincidence that many associations and movements have chosen Monica as the patroness of Christian mothers and women who pray for children far from faith.

### **A simple and extraordinary woman**

The life of Saint Monica is the story of a woman both simple and extraordinary. Simple because lived in the daily life of a family; extraordinary because transfigured by faith. Her tears and prayers shaped a saint and, through him, profoundly

influenced the history of the Church.

Her memory, celebrated on 27 August, on the eve of the feast of Saint Augustine, reminds us that holiness often passes through hidden perseverance, silent sacrifice, and hope that does not disappoint.

In Augustine's words, addressed to God for his mother, we find the synthesis of her spiritual legacy: *"I cannot say enough how much my soul owes to her, my God; but you know everything. Repay her with your mercy what she asked of You with so many tears for me"* (Conf., IX, 13).

Saint Monica, through the events of her life, achieved the eternal happiness that she herself defined: *"Happiness undoubtedly consists in reaching the goal and one must have confidence that we can be led to it by a firm faith, a living hope, an ardent charity."* (On Happiness 4,35).

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## **To the heights! Saint Pier Giorgio Frassati**

"Dearest young people, our hope is Jesus. It is He, as Saint John Paul II said, 'who awakens in you the desire to make something great of your life [...], to improve yourselves and society, making it more human and fraternal' (XV World Youth Day, Prayer Vigil, 19 August 2000). Let us remain united to Him; let us remain in His friendship, always, cultivating it with prayer, adoration, Eucharistic Communion, frequent Confession, generous charity, as the blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis, who will soon be proclaimed Saints, taught us. Aspire to great things, to holiness, wherever you are. Do not settle for less. Then you will see the light of the Gospel grow every day, in you and around you" (Pope Leo

XIV – homily for the Youth Jubilee– 3 August 2025).

Pier Giorgio and Fr. Cojazzi

Senator Alfredo Frassati, ambassador of the Kingdom of Italy to Berlin, was the owner and director of the Turin newspaper La Stampa. The Salesians owed him a great debt of gratitude. On the occasion of the great scandalous affair known as “The Varazze incidents”, in which an attempt was made to tarnish the honour of the Salesians, Frassati had defended them. While even some Catholic newspapers seemed lost and disoriented in the face of the heavy and painful accusations, La Stampa, having conducted a rapid inquiry, had anticipated the conclusions of the judiciary by proclaiming the innocence of the Salesians. Thus, when a request arrived from the Frassati home for a Salesian to oversee the studies of the senator’s two children, Pier Giorgio and Luciana, Fr. Paul Albera, Rector Major, felt obliged to accept. He sent Fr. Antonio Cojazzi (1880-1953). He was the right man: well-educated, with a youthful temperament and exceptional communication skills. Fr. Cojazzi had graduated in literature in 1905, in philosophy in 1906, and had obtained a diploma enabling him to teach English after serious specialisation in England.

In the Frassati home, Fr. Cojazzi became more than just the ‘tutor’ who followed the children. He became a friend, especially to Pier Giorgio, of whom he would say, “I knew him at ten years old and followed him through almost all of grammar school and high school with lessons that were daily in the early years. I followed him with increasing interest and affection.” Pier Giorgio, who became one of the leading young people in Turin’s Catholic Action, listened to the conferences and lessons that Fr. Cojazzi held for the members of the C. Balbo Circle, followed the Rivista dei Giovani with interest, and sometimes went up to Valsalice in search of light and advice in decisive moments.

A moment of notoriety

Pier Giorgio had it during the National Congress of Italian

Catholic Youth in 1921: fifty thousand young people parading through Rome, singing and praying. Pier Giorgio, a polytechnic student, carried the tricolour flag of the Turin C. Balbo circle. The royal troops suddenly surrounded the enormous procession and assaulted it to snatch the flags. They wanted to prevent disorder. A witness recounted, "They beat with rifle butts, grab, break, tear our flags. I see Pier Giorgio struggling with two guards. We rush to his aid, and the flag, with its broken pole, remains in his hands. Forcibly imprisoned in a courtyard, the young Catholics are interrogated by the police. The witness recalls the dialogue conducted with the manners and courtesies used in such contingencies:

- And you, what's your name?
- Pier Giorgio Frassati, son of Alfredo.
- What does your father do?
- Italian Ambassador in Berlin.

Astonishment, change of tone, apologies, offer of immediate freedom.

- I will leave when the others leave.

Meanwhile, the brutal spectacle continues. A priest is thrown, literally thrown into the courtyard with his cassock torn and a bleeding cheek... Together we knelt on the ground, in the courtyard, when that ragged priest raised his rosary and said, 'Boys, for us and for those who have beaten us, let us pray!'"

He loved the poor

Pier Giorgio loved the poor. He sought them out in the most distant quarters of the city. He climbed narrow, dark stairs; he entered attics where only misery and sorrow resided. Everything he had in his pockets was for others, just as everything he held in his heart. He even spent nights at the bedside of unknown sick people. One night when he didn't come home, his increasingly anxious father called the police station, the hospitals. At two o'clock, he heard the key turn in the door and Pier Giorgio entered. Dad exploded:

- Listen, you can be out during the day, at night, no one says

anything to you. But when you're so late, warn us, call!

Pier Giorgio looked at him, and with his usual simplicity replied:

– Dad, where I was, there was no phone.

The Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul saw him as a diligent co-worker; the poor knew him as a comforter and helper. The miserable attics often welcomed him within their squalid walls like a ray of sunshine for their destitute inhabitants. Dominated by profound humility, he did not want what he did to be known by anyone.

Beautiful and holy Giorgetto

In the first days of July 1925, Pier Giorgio was struck down by a violent attack of poliomyelitis. He was 24 years old. On his deathbed, while a terrible illness ravaged his back, he still thought of his poor. On a note, with handwriting now almost indecipherable, he wrote for engineer Grimaldi, his friend. Here are Converso's injections, the policy is Sappa's. I forgot it; you renew it.

Returning from Pier Giorgio's funeral, Fr. Cojazzi immediately wrote an article for the Rivista dei Giovani. "I will repeat the old phrase, but most sincerely: I didn't think I loved him so much. Beautiful and holy Giorgetto! Why do these words sing insistently in my heart? Because I heard them repeated; I heard them uttered for almost two days by his father, by his mother, by his sister, with a voice that always said and never repeated. And why do certain verses from a Deroulède ballad surface, "He will be spoken of for a long time, in golden palaces and in remote cottages! Because the hovels and attics, where he passed so many times as a comforting angel, will also speak of him." I knew him at ten years old and followed him through almost all of grammar school and part of high school... I followed him with increasing interest and affection until his present transfiguration... I will write his life. It is about collecting testimonies that present the figure of this young man in the fullness of his light, in spiritual and moral truth, in the luminous and contagious testimony of goodness

and generosity.”

The best-seller of Catholic publishing

Encouraged and urged also by the Archbishop of Turin, Monsignor Giuseppe Gamba, Fr. Cojazzi set to work with good cheer. Numerous and qualified testimonies arrived, were ordered and carefully vetted. Pier Giorgio's mother followed the work, gave suggestions, provided material. In March 1928, Pier Giorgio's life was published. Luigi Gedda writes, “It was a resounding success. In just nine months, 30,000 copies of the book were sold out. By 1932, 70,000 copies had already been distributed. Within 15 years, the book on Pier Giorgio reached 11 editions, and was perhaps the best-seller of Catholic publishing in that period.” The figure illuminated by Fr. Cojazzi was a banner for Catholic Action during the difficult time of fascism. In 1942, 771 youth associations of Catholic Action, 178 aspiring sections, 21 university associations, 60 groups of secondary school students, 29 conferences of St. Vincent, 23 Gospel groups... had taken the name of Pier Giorgio Frassati. The book was translated into at least 19 languages. Fr. Cojazzi's book marked a turning point in the history of Italian youth. Pier Giorgio was the ideal pointed out without any reservation; one who was able to demonstrate that being a Christian to the core is not at all utopian or fantastic.

Pier Giorgio Frassati also marked a turning point in Fr. Cojazzi's history. That note written by Pier Giorgio on his deathbed revealed the world of the poor to him in a concrete, almost brutal way. Fr. Cojazzi himself writes, “On Good Friday of this year (1928) with two university students I visited the poor outside Porta Metronia for four hours. That visit gave me a very salutary lesson and humiliation. I had written and spoken a lot about the Conferences of St. Vincent... and yet I had never once gone to visit the poor. In those squalid shacks, tears often came to my eyes... The conclusion? Here it is clear and raw for me and for you; fewer beautiful words and more good deeds.”

Living contact with the poor is not only an immediate implementation of the Gospel, but a school of life for young people. They are the best school for young people, to educate them and keep them serious about life. How can one who visits the poor and touches their material and moral wounds with their own hands waste their money, their time, their youth? How can they complain about their own labours and sorrows, when they have known, through direct experience, that others suffer more than them?

Not just existing, but living!

Pier Giorgio Frassati is a luminous example of youthful, contemporary holiness, 'framed' in our time. He testifies once again that faith in Jesus Christ is the religion of the strong and of the truly young, which alone can illuminate all truths with the light of the 'mystery' and which alone can give perfect joy. His existence is the perfect model of normal life within everyone's reach. He, like all followers of Jesus and the Gospel, began with small things. He reached the most sublime heights by forcing himself to avoid the compromises of a mediocre and meaningless life and by using his natural stubbornness in his firm intentions. Everything in his life was a step for him to climb; even what should have been a stumbling block. Among his companions, he was the intrepid and exuberant animator of every undertaking, attracting so much sympathy and admiration around him. Nature had been generous to him: from a renowned family, rich, with a solid and practical intellect, a strong and robust physique, a complete education, he lacked nothing to make his way in life. But he did not intend to just exist, but to conquer his place in the sun, struggling. He was a man of strong character and a Christian soul.

His life had an inherent coherence that rested on the unity of spirit and existence, of faith and works. The source of this luminous personality lay in his profound inner life. Frassati prayed. His thirst for Grace made him love everything that fills and enriches the spirit. He approached Holy Communion



every day, then remained at the foot of the altar for a long time, nothing being able to distract him. He prayed in the mountains and on the road. However, his was not an ostentatious faith, even if the signs of the cross made on public streets when passing churches were large and confident; even if the Rosary was said aloud, in a train carriage or in a hotel room. But it was rather a faith lived so intensely and genuinely that it burst forth from his generous and frank soul with a simplicity of attitude that convinced and moved. His spiritual formation was strengthened in nocturnal adorations, of which he was a fervent proponent and unfailing participant. He performed spiritual exercises more than once, drawing serenity and spiritual vigour from them.

Fr. Cojazzi's book closes with the phrase: "To have known him or to have heard of him means to love him, and to love him means to follow him." The wish is that the testimony of Pier Giorgio Frassati may be "salt and light" for everyone, especially for young people today.

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## **The Seven Joys of the Madonna**

At the heart of St. John Bosco's educational and spiritual work, the figure of the Madonna holds a privileged and luminous place. Don Bosco was not only a great educator and founder but also a fervent devotee of the Virgin Mary, whom he venerated with deep affection and to whom he entrusted all his pastoral projects. One of the most distinctive expressions of this devotion is the practice of the "Seven Joys of the Madonna," presented in a simple and accessible way in his publication "The Well-Provided Young Man," one of the most widely circulated texts in his spiritual pedagogy.

A Work for the Souls of the Young

In 1875, Don Bosco published a new edition of "The Well-Provided Young Man for the Practice of His Duties in the Exercises of Christian Piety," a manual of prayers, spiritual exercises, and rules of Christian conduct designed for boys. This book, written in a sober and fatherly style, aimed to accompany young people in their moral and religious formation, introducing them to a full Christian life. It also included devotion to the "Seven Joys of the Most Holy Mary," a simple yet intense prayer structured in seven points. Unlike the "Seven Sorrows of the Madonna," which is much more well-known and widespread in popular piety, Don Bosco's "Seven Joys" focus on the joys of the Most Holy Virgin in Heaven, the result of an earthly life lived in the fullness of God's grace.

This devotion has ancient origins and was particularly dear to the Franciscans, who spread it from the 13th century onwards, as the Rosary of the Seven Joys of the Blessed Virgin Mary (or Seraphic Crown). In the traditional Franciscan form, it is a devotional prayer composed of seven decades of Hail Marys, each preceded by a joyful mystery (joy) and introduced by an Our Father. At the end of each decade, a Glory Be is recited. The joys are: 1. The Annunciation by the Angel; 2. The Visitation to St. Elizabeth; 3. The Birth of the Saviour; 4. The Adoration of the Magi; 5. The Finding of Jesus in the Temple; 6. The Resurrection of the Son; 7. The Assumption and Coronation of Mary in Heaven.

Drawing from this tradition, Don Bosco offers a simplified version, suited to the sensibilities of young people.

Each of these joys is meditated upon through the recitation of a Hail Mary and a Glory Be.

### The Pedagogy of Joy

The choice to propose this devotion to young people was not merely a personal preference of Don Bosco but fits entirely within his educational vision. He was convinced that faith should be transmitted through joy, not fear; through the beauty of goodness, not the dread of evil. The "Seven Joys"

thus become a school of Christian gladness, an invitation to recognise that, in the life of the Virgin, God's grace manifests as light, hope, and fulfilment.

Don Bosco was well aware of the difficulties and sufferings many of his boys faced daily: poverty, family abandonment, job insecurity. For this reason, he offered them a Marian devotion that was not limited to tears and sorrow but was also a source of consolation and joy. Meditating on Mary's joys meant opening oneself to a positive vision of life, learning to recognise God's presence even in difficult moments, and entrusting oneself with confidence to the tenderness of the heavenly Mother.

In "The Well-Provided Young Man," Don Bosco writes touching words about Mary's role: he presents her as a loving mother, a sure guide, and a model of Christian life. Devotion to her joys is not merely a devotional practice but a means to enter into a personal relationship with the Madonna, to imitate her virtues, and to receive her maternal help in life's trials.

For the saint from Turin, Mary is not distant or inaccessible but close, present, and active in the lives of her children. This Marian vision, strongly relational, permeates all Salesian spirituality and is reflected in the daily life of the oratories: environments where joy, prayer, and familiarity with Mary go hand in hand.

### A Living Legacy

Even today, devotion to the "Seven Joys of the Madonna" retains its spiritual and educational value. In a world marked by uncertainties, fears, and fragility, it offers a simple yet profound way to discover that Christian faith is, above all, an experience of joy and light. Don Bosco, a prophet of joy and hope, teaches us that authentic Christian education involves valuing affections, emotions, and the beauty of the Gospel.

Rediscovering the "Seven Joys" today also means recovering a positive outlook on life, history, and God's presence. The

Madonna, with her humility and trust, teaches us to cherish and meditate in our hearts the signs of true joy, the kind that does not fade, because it is founded on God's love.

In a time when even young people seek light and meaning, Don Bosco's words remain relevant: "If you wish to be happy, practice devotion to the Most Holy Mary." The "Seven Joys" are, then, a small ladder to Heaven, a rosary of light that unites earth to the heart of the heavenly Mother.

Here is also the original text taken from "The Well-Provided Young Man for the Practice of His Duties in the Exercises of Christian Piety," 1875 (pp. 141-142), with our own titles.

## The Seven Joys That Mary Enjoys in Heaven

### 1. Purity Cultivated

Rejoice, O immaculate Spouse of the Holy Spirit, for the contentment you now enjoy in Paradise, because through your purity and virginity you are exalted above all the Angels and elevated above all the saints.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

### 2. Wisdom Sought

Rejoice, O Mother of God, for the pleasure you experience in Paradise, because just as the sun here on earth illuminates the whole world, so you, with your splendour, adorn and make all of Paradise shine.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

### 3. Filial Obedience

Rejoice, O Daughter of God, for the sublime dignity to which you were raised in Paradise, because all the hierarchies of Angels, Archangels, Thrones, Dominions, and all the Blessed Spirits honour, revere, and acknowledge you as the Mother of their Creator, and at your slightest command, they are most obedient.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

### 4. Continuous Prayer

Rejoice, O Handmaid of the Most Holy Trinity, for the great power you have in Paradise, because all the graces you ask of your Son are immediately granted; indeed, as St. Bernard says, no grace is granted here on earth that does not pass through your most holy hands.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

#### 5. Humility Lived

Rejoice, O most august Queen, because you alone deserved to sit at the right hand of your most holy Son, who sits at the right hand of the Eternal Father.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

#### 6. Mercy Practised

Rejoice, O Hope of sinners, Refuge of the afflicted, for the great pleasure you experience in Paradise in seeing that all who praise and revere you in this world are rewarded by the Eternal Father with His holy grace on earth and with His immense glory in Heaven.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

#### 7. Hope Rewarded

Rejoice, O Mother, Daughter, and Spouse of God, because all the graces, all the joys, all the delights, and all the favours you now enjoy in Paradise will never diminish; indeed, they will increase until the day of judgment and last for eternity.

Hail Mary and Glory Be.

#### Prayer to the Most Blessed Virgin

O glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of my Lord, source of all our consolation, through these your joys, which I have recalled with the greatest devotion I could muster, I beg you to obtain for me from God the remission of my sins and the continual help of His holy grace, so that I may never render myself unworthy of your protection but rather have the fortune to receive all those heavenly favours you are accustomed to bestow upon your servants, who devoutly remember these joys

that overflow from your beautiful heart, O immortal Queen of Heaven.

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# Salesian House of Castel Gandolfo

*Amidst the green hills of the Castelli Romani and the tranquil waters of Lake Albano lies a place where history, nature, and spirituality converge in a unique way: Castel Gandolfo. In this setting rich in imperial memory, Christian faith, and scenic beauty, the Salesian presence stands as a steadfast point of welcome, education, and pastoral life. The Salesian House, with its parish, educational, and cultural activities, continues the mission of St. John Bosco, offering believers and visitors an experience of a living and open Church, immersed in an environment that invites contemplation and fraternity. It is a community that, for nearly a century, has walked in service of the Gospel at the very heart of Catholic tradition.*

## **A place blessed by history and nature**

Castel Gandolfo is a jewel of the Castelli Romani, located about 25 km from Rome, nestled in the natural beauty of the Alban Hills and overlooking the picturesque Lake Albano. At an altitude of about 426 metres, this place stands out for its mild and welcoming climate, a microclimate that seems prepared by Providence to receive those seeking rest, beauty, and silence.

Even in Roman times, this territory was part of the *Albanum Caesaris*, an ancient imperial estate frequented by emperors

since the time of Augustus. However, it was Emperor Tiberius who first resided here permanently, while later Domitian built a splendid villa, the remains of which can still be seen in the papal gardens. The Christian history of the place began with Constantine's donation to the Church of Albano, a gesture that symbolically marked the transition from imperial glory to the light of the Gospel.

The name Castel Gandolfo derives from the Latin *Castrum Gandulphi*, the castle built by the Gandolfi family in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. When in 1596 the castle passed to the Holy See, it became the summer residence of the Popes, and the bond between this place and the ministry of the Successor of Peter became deep and lasting.

### **The Vatican Observatory: contemplating the heavens, praising the Creator**

Of particular spiritual significance is the Vatican Observatory, founded by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 and relocated in the 1930s to Castel Gandolfo due to Rome's light pollution. It testifies to how even science, when directed towards truth, leads to praising the Creator.

Over the years, the Observatory has contributed to major astronomical projects such as the *Carte du Ciel* and the discovery of numerous celestial objects.

With further deterioration of observing conditions even in the Castelli Romani, in the 1980s scientific activity shifted primarily to the Mount Graham Observatory in Arizona (USA), where the *Vatican Observatory Research Group* continues astrophysical research. Castel Gandolfo, however, remains an important centre of study. Since 1986, it has hosted the *Vatican Observatory Summer School* every two years, dedicated to astronomy students and graduates from around the world. The Observatory also organises specialist conferences, public outreach events, meteorite exhibitions, and presentations of historical and artistic materials on

astronomical themes, all in a spirit of research, dialogue, and contemplation of the mystery of creation.

### **A church at the heart of the city and of the faith**

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Pope Alexander VII entrusted Gian Lorenzo Bernini with the construction of a palatine chapel for the employees of the Pontifical Villas. The project, initially conceived in honour of St. Nicholas of Bari, was ultimately dedicated to St Thomas of Villanova, an Augustinian canonised in 1658. The church was consecrated in 1661 and entrusted to the Augustinians, who administered it until 1929. With the signing of the Lateran Treaty, Pope Pius XI entrusted the same Augustinians with the pastoral care of the new Pontifical Parish of St. Anne in the Vatican, while the Church of St. Thomas of Villanova was later entrusted to the Salesians.

The architectural beauty of this church, a product of Baroque genius, serves faith and the encounter between God and man. Today, numerous weddings, baptisms, and liturgies are celebrated here, attracting faithful from all over the world.

### **The Salesian house**

The Salesians have been present in Castel Gandolfo since 1929. In those years, the village experienced significant demographic and tourist development, further enhanced by the beginning of papal celebrations in the Church of St. Thomas of Villanova. Every year, on the Solemnity of the Assumption, the Pope celebrated Holy Mass in the pontifical parish, a tradition begun by St. John XXIII on 15 August 1959, when he walked out of the Pontifical Palace to celebrate the Eucharist among the people. This custom continued until the pontificate of Pope Francis, who discontinued summer stays in Castel Gandolfo. In 2016, the entire complex of the Pontifical Villas was transformed into a museum and opened to the public.

The Salesian house was part of the Roman Province and, from 2009 to 2021, of the Central Italy Salesian Circumscription. Since 2021, it has been under the direct responsibility of the



Central Office, with a Director and community appointed by the Rector Major. Currently, the Salesians present come from various nations (Brazil, India, Italy, Poland) and are active in the parish, chaplaincies, and oratory.

The pastoral spaces, though belonging to the Vatican City State and thus considered extraterritorial, are part of the Diocese of Albano, in whose pastoral life the Salesians actively participate. They are involved in diocesan adult catechesis, teaching at the diocesan theological school, and in the Presbyteral Council as representatives of consecrated life.

In addition to the parish of St. Thomas of Villanova, the Salesians also manage two other churches: Mary Help of Christians (also called "St. Paul," after the name of the neighbourhood) and Madonna del Lago, desired by St. Paul VI. Both were built between the 1960s and 1970s to meet the pastoral needs of the growing population.

The parish church designed by Bernini is now a destination for numerous weddings and baptisms celebrated by faithful from around the world. Every year, with the necessary permissions, dozens, sometimes hundreds, of celebrations take place here. The parish priest, in addition to leading the parish community, is also chaplain of the Pontifical Villas and provides spiritual accompaniment to Vatican employees working there.

The oratory, currently run by laypeople, sees the direct involvement of the Salesians, especially in catechesis. On weekends, feast days, and during summer activities like Estate Ragazzi, Salesian students residing in Rome also collaborate, offering valuable support. At the Church of Mary Help of Christians, there is also an active theatre, with parish groups organising performances—a place of encounter, culture, and evangelisation.

## **Pastoral life and traditions**

Pastoral life is marked by the main feasts of the year: St John Bosco in January, Mary Help of Christians in May with a procession in the St. Paul neighbourhood, the feast of the Madonna del Lago—and thus the Feast of the Lake—on the last Saturday of August, with the statue carried in procession on a boat across the lake. This latter celebration is increasingly involving neighbouring communities, attracting many participants, including motorcyclists, with whom moments of encounter have been initiated.

On the first Saturday of September, the patronal feast of Castel Gandolfo is celebrated in honour of St. Sebastian, with a large town procession. Devotion to St. Sebastian dates back to 1867, when the town was spared from an epidemic that severely affected nearby villages. Although the liturgical memorial falls on 20 January, the local feast is celebrated in September, both in memory of the protection received and for practical and climatic reasons.

On 8 September, the patron of the church, St. Thomas of Villanova, is celebrated, coinciding with the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On this occasion, the feast of families is also held, aimed at couples who married in Bernini's church. They are invited to return for a communal celebration, a procession, and a shared meal. The initiative has been well received and is becoming a lasting tradition.

### **A curiosity: the letterbox**

Next to the entrance of the Salesian house is a post-box, known as the "Mailbox of Correspondence," considered the oldest still in use. It dates back to 1820, twenty years before the introduction of the world's first postage stamp, the famous *Penny Black* (1840). It is an official mailbox of the Italian Post Office still in operation, but also a symbolic invitation to communication, dialogue, and opening one's heart. The return of Pope Leo XIV to his summer residence will surely increase its use.

Castel Gandolfo remains a place where the Creator speaks through the beauty of creation, the proclaimed Word, and the witness of a Salesian community that, in the simplicity of Don Bosco's style, continues to offer welcome, education, liturgy, and fraternity, reminding those who approach these lands in search of peace and serenity that true peace and serenity are found only in God and His grace.

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## Don Bosco and the Church of the Holy Shroud

*The Holy Shroud of Turin, one of Christianity's most revered relics, has a thousand-year history intertwined with that of the House of Savoy and the Savoyard city. Arriving in Turin in 1578, it became an object of profound devotion, with solemn exhibitions linked to historical and dynastic events. In the 19th century, figures such as Saint John Bosco and other Turin saints promoted its veneration, contributing to its widespread appeal. Today, preserved in Guarini's Chapel, the Shroud is at the centre of scientific and theological studies. In parallel, the Church of the Holy Shroud in Rome, linked to the House of Savoy and the Piedmontese community, represents another significant place, where Don Bosco attempted to establish a Salesian presence.*

The Holy Shroud of Turin, improperly called the "Santo Sudario" in Italian due to the French custom of calling it "Le Saint Suaire" was owned by the House of Savoy since 1463, and was transferred from Chambery to the new Savoy capital in 1578.

In that same year, the first exposition was held, commissioned by Emanuele Filiberto in homage to Card. Charles

Borromeo who came to Turin on pilgrimage to venerate it.

### **Expositions in the 19th century and veneration of the Shroud**

In the 19th century, the Expositions in 1815, 1842, 1868 and 1898 are particularly worthy of note: the first for the return of the Savoy family to their states, the second for the wedding of Victor Emmanuel II to Maria Adelaide of Habsburg-Lorraine, the third for the wedding of Umberto I to Margaret of Savoy-Genoa, and the fourth for the Universal Exhibition.

The nineteenth-century Turin saints, Cottolengo, Cafasso and Don Bosco, were devotees of the Holy Shroud, emulating the example of Blessed Sebastiano Valfré, the apostle of Turin during the siege of 1706.

The *Biographical Memoirs* assure us that Don Bosco venerated it in particular at the Exposition in 1842 and 1868, when he also brought the boys from the oratory to see it (BM II, 91; IX, 70-71).

Today, the priceless canvas, donated by Umberto II of Savoy to the Holy See, is entrusted to the Archbishop of Turin's "Pontifical Custodian" and kept in the sumptuous Guarini Chapel behind the Cathedral.

In Turin there is also, in Via Piave at the corner of Via San Domenico, the Church of the Holy Shroud, built by the Confraternity of the same name and rebuilt in 1761. Adjacent to the church is the "Sindonological Museum" and the headquarters of the "Cultores Sanctae Sindonis" Sodality, a centre for sindonological studies to which Salesian scholars such as Fr Natale Noguier de Malijay, Fr Antonio Tonelli, Fr Alberto Caviglia, Fr Pietro Scotti and, more recently, Fr Pietro Rinaldi and Fr Luigi Fossati, to name but the main ones, have made valuable contributions.

### **The Church of the Holy Shroud in Rome**

A [Church of the Holy Shroud](#) also exists in Rome along the street of the same name that runs from Largo Argentina parallel to Corso Vittorio. Constructed in 1604 to a

design by Carlo di Castellamonte, it was the Church of the Piedmontese, Savoyards and Niçois, built by the Confraternity of the Holy Shroud that had sprung up in Rome at that time. After 1870 it became the special church of the House of Savoy.

During his stays in Rome, Don Bosco celebrated Mass in that church several times and formulated a plan for it and the adjacent house in line with the purpose of the then extinct Confraternity, dedicated to charitable works for abandoned youth, the sick and prisoners.

The Confraternity had ceased operating at the beginning of the century and the ownership and administration of the church had passed to the Sardinian Legation to the Holy See. By the 1960s, the church was in need of major renovations, so much so that in 1868 it was temporarily closed.

But already in 1867 Don Bosco had come up with the idea of proposing to the Savoy Government to hand over the use and administration of the church to him, offering his collaboration in money to complete the restoration work. Perhaps he foresaw the entry of the Piedmontese troops into Rome not far away and, wishing to open a house there, he thought of doing so before the situation precipitated making it more difficult to obtain the Holy See's approval and the State's respect for agreements (BM IX, 192, 223, 301).

He then presented the request to the government. In 1869, during a stopover in Florence, he prepared a draft agreement which, on reaching Rome, he presented to Pius IX. Having obtained his assent, he moved on to the official request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but, unfortunately, the occupation of Rome then came to jeopardise the whole affair. Don Bosco himself saw the inappropriateness of insisting. Taking on a Roman church belonging to the Savoy by a religious Congregation with its Mother House in Turin at that time, could have appeared an act of opportunism and servility towards the new Government.

After the breach of Porta Pia, with a minute dated 2 December 1871, the Church of the Most Holy Shroud was

annexed to the Royal House and designated as the official seat of the Palatine Chief Chaplain. Following Pius IX's interdict on the Chapels of the former Apostolic Palace of the Quirinal, it was in the Church of the Shroud that all the sacred rites of the Royal Family took place.

In 1874 Don Bosco again tested the ground with the Government. But, unfortunately, intemperate news leaked from the newspapers definitively put a stop to the project (BM X, 532-533).

With the end of the monarchy on 2 June 1946, the entire Shroud complex passed under the management of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic. In 1984, following the new Concordat which sanctioned the abolition of the Palatine Chapels, the Church of the Shroud was entrusted to the Military Ordinariate and has remained so to this day.

However, we would like to recall the fact that Don Bosco, in seeking a favourable opportunity to open a house in Rome, set his eyes on the Church of the Holy Shroud.

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## **Female education with Saint Francis de Sales**

*The educational thinking of Saint Francis de Sales reveals a profound and innovative vision of the role of women in the Church and society of his time. Convinced that the education of women was fundamental for the moral and spiritual growth of the entire community, the holy bishop of Geneva promoted a balanced education that respected female dignity but was also attentive to fragility. With a paternal and realistic gaze, he was able to recognise and value the qualities of women, encouraging them to cultivate virtue, culture, and devotion.*

*Founder of the Visitation with Jane de Chantal, he vigorously defended the female vocation even in the face of criticism and prejudice. His teaching continues to offer relevant insights into education, love, and freedom in choosing one's own life.*

During his trip to Paris in 1619, Francis de Sales met Adrien Bourdoise, a reformist priest, who reproached him for paying too much attention to women. The bishop calmly replied that women were half of humanity and that by forming good Christian women, there would be good young people, and with good young people, there would be good priests. After all, did not St. Jerome devote a great deal of time and various writings to them? Francis de Sales recommended the reading of his letters to Madame de Chantal, who found in them, among other things, numerous instructions "for educating her daughters". It can be deduced that, in his eyes, the role of women in education justified the time and attention devoted to them.

### **Francis de Sales and the women of his time**

"We must help the female sex, which is despised," the Bishop of Geneva once said to Jean-François de Blonay. To understand Francis de Sales' concerns and thinking, it is necessary to place him in his own time. It must be said that a number of his statements still seem very much in line with the thinking of the current time. In the women of his time, he deplored "this feminine tenderness towards themselves," their ease "in pitying themselves and desiring to be pitied," a greater propensity than men "to give credence to dreams, to be afraid of spirits, and to be credulous and superstitious," and above all, the "twists and turns of their vain thoughts." Among the advice he gave to Madame de Chantal on the education of her daughters, he wrote without hesitation, "Remove vanity from their souls; it is born almost at the same time as sex."

However, women are endowed with great qualities. He wrote about Madame de La Fléchère, who had just

lost her husband, "If I had only this perfect sheep in my flock, I would not be distressed at being the shepherd of this afflicted diocese. After Madame de Chantal, I do not know if I have ever met a stronger soul in a female body, a more reasonable spirit and a more sincere humility." Women are by no means the last in the practice of virtue. "Have we not seen many great theologians who have said wonderful things about virtue, but not in order to practise it, while, on the contrary, there are many holy women who cannot speak of virtue, but who nevertheless know very well how to practise it?"

Married women are the worthiest of admiration, "Oh my God! How pleasing to God are the virtues of a married woman; for they must be strong and excellent to endure in such a vocation!" In the struggle to preserve chastity, he believed that "women have often fought more courageously than men."

Founder of a congregation of women together with Jeanne de Chantal, he was in constant contact with the first religious. Alongside praise, criticism began to rain down. Pushed into these trenches, the founder had to defend himself and defend them, not only as religious women, but also as women. In a document that was to serve as a preface to the Constitutions of the Visitandines, we find the polemical vein he was capable of displaying, directing himself no longer against 'heresiarchs' but against malicious and ignorant 'censors':

*The presumption and inappropriate arrogance of many children of this century, who ostentatiously condemn everything that is not in accordance with their spirit [...], gives me the opportunity, or rather compels me, to write this Preface, my dearest Sisters, to arm and defend your holy vocation against the barbs of their pestilent tongues, so that good and pious souls, who are undoubtedly attached to your lovable and honoured Institute, may find here how to repel the arrows shot by the temerity of these bizarre and insolent censors.*



Perhaps foreseeing that such a preamble might damage the cause, the founder of the Visitation wrote a second, softened edition, with the aim of highlighting the fundamental equality of the sexes. After quoting Genesis, he commented as follows, "Woman, therefore, no less than man, has the grace of having been made in the image of God; equal honour in both sexes; their virtues are equal."

### **The education of daughters**

The enemy of true love is "vanity". This was the flaw that Francis de Sales, like the moralists and educators of his time, feared most in the education of young women. He points out several manifestations of it. Look at "these young ladies of the world, who, having established themselves well, go about puffed up with pride and vanity, with their heads held high, their eyes open, eager to be noticed by the worldly."

The Bishop of Geneva amuses himself a little in mocking these "society girls", who "wear loose, powdered hats", with their heads "shod like horses' hooves", all "plumed and flowered beyond description" and "laden with frills". There are those who "wear dresses that are tight and very uncomfortable, just to show that they are slim; this is true madness that mostly makes them incapable of doing anything."

What then are we to think of certain artificial beauties transformed into "boutiques of vanity"? Francis de Sales prefers a "clear and clean face;" he wants "nothing affected, because everything that is embellished is displeasing." Should we therefore condemn all "artifice"? He readily admits that "in the case of some defect of nature, it must be corrected so that the correction can be seen, but stripped of all artifice."

And perfume? the preacher asked himself when speaking of Mary Magdalene. "It is an excellent thing," he replied, "even the one who is perfumed perceives something excellent in it," adding, as a connoisseur, that "Spanish musk

is highly prized throughout the world." In the chapter on "decency in dress," he allows young women to wear clothes with various adornments, "because they may freely desire to be pleasing to many, but with the sole purpose of winning a young man with a view to holy matrimony." He concluded with this indulgent observation, "What do you want? It is only fitting that young ladies should be a little pretty."

It should be added that reading the Bible had prepared him not to be harsh in the face of female beauty. In the lover of the *Song of Songs*, admired "the remarkable beauty of her face, like a *bouquet* of flowers." He describes Jacob who, meeting Rachel at the well, "wept tears of joy when he saw a virgin who pleased him and enchanted him with the grace of her face." He also loved to tell the story of St. Brigid, born in Scotland, a country where "the most beautiful creatures one can see" are admired; she was "an extremely attractive young woman," but her beauty was "natural," our author points out.

The Salesian ideal of beauty is called 'good grace,' which designates not only "the perfect harmony of the parts that make something beautiful," but also the "grace of movements, gestures, and actions, which is like the soul of life and beauty," that is, goodness of heart. Grace requires "simplicity and modesty." Now, grace is a perfection that comes from within the person. It is beauty combined with grace that makes Rebecca the feminine ideal of the Bible. She was "so beautiful and graceful at the well where she drew water for the flock," and her "familiar goodness" inspired her to give water not only to Abraham's servants but also to his camels.

## **Education and preparation for life**

In the time of St. Francis de Sales, women had little opportunity to pursue higher education. Girls learned what they heard from their brothers and, when the family could afford it, attended a convent. Reading was certainly more common than writing. Colleges were reserved for boys, so

learning Latin, the language of culture, was practically forbidden to girls.

We must believe that Francis de Sales was not opposed to women becoming educated, but on condition that they did not fall into pedantry and vanity. He admired Saint Catherine, who was "very learned, but humble in her great knowledge," Among the bishop of Geneva's female interlocutors, the Lady of La Fléchère had studied Latin, Italian, Spanish, and the fine arts, but she was an exception.

In order to find their place in life, both socially and religiously, young women often needed special help at a certain point. Georges Rolland reports that the bishop personally took care of several difficult cases. A woman from Geneva with three daughters was generously assisted by the bishop, "with money and credit; he placed one of her daughters as an apprentice with an honest lady in the city, paying her board for six years, in grain and money." He also donated 500 florins for the marriage of the daughter of a printer in Geneva.

The religious intolerance of the time sometimes caused tragedies, which Francis de Sales tried to remedy. Marie-Judith Gilbert, educated in Paris by her parents in the 'errors of Calvin,' discovered the book *Filotea* at the age of nineteen, which she dared to read only in secret. She took a liking to the author, whom she had heard about. Closely watched by her father and mother, she managed to be taken away by carriage, was instructed in the Catholic religion, and entered the Visitation Sisters.

The social role of women was still rather limited. Francis de Sales was not entirely opposed to women's involvement in public life. He wrote in these terms, for example, to a woman who was given to intervene in public affairs, both appropriately and inappropriately:

*Your sex and your vocation allow you to repress evil outside yourselves, but only if this is inspired by good and accomplished with simple, humble, and charitable remonstrances*

*towards transgressors and by warning your superiors as far as possible.*

On the other hand, it is significant that a contemporary of Francis de Sales, Mademoiselle de Gournay, an early feminist *ante litteram*, an intellectual and author of controversial texts such as her treatise *L'égalité des hommes et des femmes* (The Equality of Men and Women) and *La plainte des femmes* (The Complaint of Women), expressed great admiration for him. She devoted her entire life to demonstrating this equality, gathering all possible evidence on the subject, without forgetting that of the "good and holy bishop of Geneva".

### **Education to love**

Francis de Sales spoke a lot about God's love, but he was also very attentive to the manifestations of human love. For him, in fact, love is one, even if its 'object' is different and unequal. To explain God's love, he could do no better than start from human love.

Love arises from the contemplation of beauty, and beauty can be perceived by the senses, especially by the eyes. An interactive phenomenon is established between the gaze and beauty. "Contemplating beauty makes us love it, and love makes us contemplate it." The sense of smell reacts in the same way; in fact, "perfumes exercise their unique power of attraction through their sweetness."

After the intervention of the external senses, the internal senses take over, the imagination and fantasy, which exalt and transfigure reality. "By virtue of this reciprocal movement of love towards sight and sight towards love, just as love makes the beauty of the beloved more resplendent, so the sight of the beloved makes love more enamoured and pleasant." We can then understand why "those who have painted Cupid have blindfolded him, affirming that love is blind." At this point, love-passion arrives; it makes us "seek dialogue, and dialogue often nourishes and increases

love;" moreover, "it desires secrecy, and when lovers have no secrets to tell each other, they sometimes take pleasure in telling them secretly;" and finally, it leads us to "utter words that would certainly be ridiculous if they did not spring from a passionate heart."

Now, this love-passion, which perhaps boils down to nothing more than 'amorucci' (little loves) and 'galanterie' (gallantries), is exposed to various vicissitudes, to such an extent that it prompts the author of the *Filotea* to intervene with a series of considerations and warnings about "frivolous friendships that are formed between people of the opposite sex and without any intention of marriage." Often, they are nothing more than "abortions or, rather, semblances of friendship."

St. Francis de Sales also expressed his views on kissing, wondering, for example, along with the ancient commentators, why Rachel allowed Jacob to embrace her. He explains that there are two kinds of kisses: one bad, the other good. Kisses that are easily exchanged between young people and that are not bad at first can become so later because of human frailty. But a kiss can also be good. In certain places, it is required by custom. "Our Jacob embraces his Rachel very innocently; Rachel accepts this kiss of courtesy from this man of good character and clean face." "Oh!" concluded Francis de Sales, "give me people who have the innocence of Jacob and Rachel, and I will allow them to kiss each other."

On the question of dancing, which was also on the agenda, the Bishop of Geneva avoided absolute commands, as did the rigorists of the time, both Catholic and Protestant, while still showing great prudence. He was even harshly reproached for writing that "dances and ballroom dancing are in themselves indifferent things." As with certain games, they too become dangerous when one becomes so attached to them that one can no longer detach oneself from them. Dancing "must be done for recreation and not for passion; for a short time and not to the point of exhaustion and dizziness." What is more

dangerous is that these pastimes often become occasions that provoke "quarrels, envy, mockery, and love affairs."

### **The choice of lifestyle**

When the little daughter grows up, "the day comes when it is necessary to talk to her, I mean to refer to the decisive word, the one in which one tells young women that one wants to marry them off." A man of his time, Francis de Sales largely shared the idea that parents had an important role in determining their children's vocation, whether to marriage or religious life. "One does not usually choose one's prince or bishop, one's father or mother, and often, not even one's husband," noted the author of *Filotea*. However, he clearly states that "daughters cannot be given in marriage as long as they say no."

The current practice is well explained in this passage from the *Philothea*: "For a marriage to truly take place, three things are necessary with regard to the young woman who is to be given in marriage. First, that the proposal be made to her; second, that she accepts it; and third, that she consents to it." Since girls often married at a very young age, their emotional immaturity is not surprising. "Girls who marry very young truly love their husbands, if they have them, but they never cease to love their rings, their jewellery, and their friends with whom they have so much fun playing, dancing, and acting foolishly."

The problem of freedom of choice arose equally for children who were destined for religious life. La Franceschetta, daughter of the Baroness of Chantal, was to be placed in a convent by her mother, who wanted her to become a nun, but the bishop intervened. "If Franceschetta willingly wants to be a nun, fine; if not, I do not approve of her will being anticipated by decisions that are not hers." Moreover, it would not be appropriate for the reading of St. Jerome's letters to lead the mother too much in the direction of severity and coercion. He therefore advised her to "use moderation" and to proceed with "gentle inspiration".

Some young women hesitate between religious life and marriage, without ever making up their minds. Francis de Sales encouraged the future Mrs. de Longecombe to take the step of marriage, which he wanted to celebrate himself. He did this good work, her husband would later say, in response to his wife's request "that she wished to marry by the hands of the bishop, and without his presence, she would never have been able to take this step, because of the great aversion she felt towards marriage."

### **Women and 'devotion'**

Unfamiliar with any form of feminism *ante litteram*, Francis de Sales was aware of the exceptional contribution of femininity on a spiritual level. It has been pointed out that by encouraging devotion in women, the author of *Philothea* also encouraged the possibility of greater autonomy, a "private life for women".

It is not surprising that women have a particular disposition for 'devotion'. After listing a number of doctors and experts, he was able to write in the preface to *Teotimo*: "But in order that it may be known that this kind of writing is better composed with the devotion of lovers than with the doctrine of the wise, the Holy Spirit has caused many women to perform wonders in this regard. Who has ever better manifested the heavenly passions of divine love than Saint Catherine of Genoa, Saint Angela of Foligno, Saint Catherine of Siena, and Saint Matilda?" The influence of Chantal's mother in the writing of the *Teotimo* is well known, particularly in the ninth book, "your ninth book on the *Love of God*," according to the author's expression.

Could women get involved in matters concerning religion? "Here is this woman who acts as a theologian," says Francis de Sales, speaking of the Samaritan woman in the Gospel. Must we necessarily see this as disapproval of women theologians? Not necessarily. Especially since he strongly affirms, "I tell you that a simple and poor woman can love God as much as a doctor of theology." Superiority does not always

reside where one thinks it does.

There are women who are superior to men, starting with the Blessed Virgin. Francis de Sales always respected the principle of order established by the religious and civil laws of his time, to which he preached obedience, but his practice testified to a great freedom of spirit. Thus, for the government of women's monasteries, he believed that it was better for them to be under the jurisdiction of the bishop rather than dependent on their religious brothers, who risked weighing excessively on them.

The Visitation Sisters, for their part, would not depend on any male order and would have no central government, each monastery being under the jurisdiction of the local bishop. He dared to give the unexpected title of 'apostles' to the sisters of the Visitation setting out on a new foundation.

If we interpret the thinking of the Bishop of Geneva correctly, the ecclesial mission of women consists in proclaiming not the word of God, but 'the glory of God' through the beauty of their witness. The heavens, prays the psalmist, tell of God's glory only by their splendour. "The beauty of the heavens and the firmament invites men to admire the greatness of the Creator and to proclaim his wonders;" and "is it not a greater wonder to see a soul adorned with many virtues than a sky studded with stars?"

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## **Venerable      Ottavio      Ortiz Arrieta Coya, Bishop**

*Octavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya, born in Lima, Peru, on 19 April 1878, was the first Peruvian Salesian. As a young man, he trained as a carpenter, but the Lord called him to a higher*



*mission. He made his first Salesian profession on 29 January 1900 and was ordained a priest in 1908. In 1922, he was consecrated bishop of the diocese of Chachapoyas, a role he held with dedication until his death on 1 March 1958. Twice he refused appointment to the more prestigious see of Lima, preferring to remain close to his people. A tireless shepherd, he travelled throughout the diocese to personally know the faithful and promoted numerous pastoral initiatives for evangelisation. On 12 November 1990, under the pontificate of St John Paul II, his cause for canonisation was opened, and he was granted the title of Servant of God. On 27 February 2017, Pope Francis recognised his heroic virtues, declaring him Venerable.*

The Venerable Bishop Ottavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya spent the first part of his life as an Oratory boy, a student and then became a Salesian himself, engaged in the works of the Sons of Don Bosco in Peru. He was the first Salesian formed in the first Salesian house in Peru, founded in Rimac, a poor neighbourhood, where he learned to live an austere life of sacrifice. Among the first Salesians to arrive in Peru in 1891, he got to know the spirit of Don Bosco and the Preventive System. As a Salesian of the first generation he learnt that service and the gift of self would be the horizon of his life; that is why as a young Salesian he took on important responsibilities, such as opening new works and directing others, with simplicity, sacrifice and total dedication to the poor.

He lived the second part of his life, from the beginning of the 1920s, as bishop of Chachapoyas, an immense diocese, vacant for years, where the prohibitive conditions of the territory added up to a certain closure, especially in the most remote villages. Here the field and the challenges of the apostolate were immense. Ortiz Arrieta was of a lively temperament, accustomed to community life; moreover, he was delicate of spirit, to the point of being called "pecadito" in his younger years, for his exactitude in detecting

shortcomings and helping himself and others to amend themselves. He also possessed an innate sense of rigour and moral duty. The conditions under which he had to carry out his episcopal ministry, however, were diametrically opposed to him: loneliness and the substantial impossibility of sharing a Salesian and priestly life, despite repeated and almost pleading requests to his own Congregation; the need to reconcile his own moral rigour with an increasingly docile and almost disarmed firmness; a fine moral conscience continually put to the test by coarseness of choices and lukewarmness in following, on the part of some collaborators less heroic than himself, and of a people of God that knew how to oppose the bishop when his word became a denunciation of injustice and a diagnosis of spiritual evils. The Venerable's path towards the fullness of holiness, in the exercise of the virtues, was therefore marked by hardships, difficulties and the continual need to convert his gaze and heart, under the action of the Spirit.

While we certainly find episodes in his life that can be defined as heroic in the strict sense, we must also, and perhaps above all, highlight those moments in his virtuous journey when he could have acted differently, but did not; giving in to human despair, while renewing hope; being content with great charity, but not fully willing to exercise that heroic charity that he practised with exemplary fidelity for several decades. When, twice, he was offered a change of See, and in the second case he was offered the primatial See of Lima, he decided to remain among his poor, those whom no one wanted, truly on the periphery of the world, remaining in the diocese he had always espoused and loved as it was, committing himself wholeheartedly to making it even a little better. He was a 'modern' pastor in his style of presence and in his use of means of action such as associationism and the press. A man of decisive temperament and firm convictions of faith, Bishop Ortiz Arrieta certainly made use of this "don de gobierno" (gift of leadership) in his leadership, always combined, however, with respect and charity, expressed with

extraordinary consistency.

Although he lived before the Second Vatican Council, the way in which he planned and carried out the pastoral tasks entrusted to him is still relevant today: from the pastoral care of vocations to the concrete support of his seminarians and priests; from the catechetical and human formation of the youngest to the pastoral care of families through which he met married couples in crisis or cohabiting couples reluctant to regularise their union. Bishop Ortiz Arrieta, on the other hand, did not only educate by his concrete pastoral action, but by his very behaviour: by his ability to discern for himself, first of all, what it means and what it entails to renew fidelity to the path taken. He truly persevered in heroic poverty, in fortitude through the many trials of life, and in radical fidelity to the diocese to which he had been assigned. Humble, simple, always serene; between the serious and the gentle; the gentleness of his gaze let all the tranquillity of his spirit shine through: this was the path of holiness he travelled.

The beautiful characteristics that his Salesian superiors found in him before his ordination to the priesthood – when they described him as a ‘Salesian pearl’ and praised his spirit of sacrifice – returned as a constant throughout his life, including as a bishop. Indeed, Ortiz Arrieta can be said to have “made himself all things to all people, in order to save someone at any cost” (1 Cor 9:22): authoritative with the authorities, simple with children, poor among the poor; meek with those who insulted him or tried to delegitimise him out of resentment; always ready not to return evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good (cf. Rom 12:21). His whole life was dominated by the primacy of the salvation of souls: a salvation to which he would also like to actively dedicate his priests, whose temptation to retreat into easy security or entrench themselves behind more prestigious positions, to commit them instead to pastoral service, he tried to fight. He can truly be said to have placed himself in that “high” measure of Christian life which makes him a pastor who

embodied pastoral charity in an original way, seeking communion among the people of God, reaching out to those most in need and witnessing a poor evangelical life.