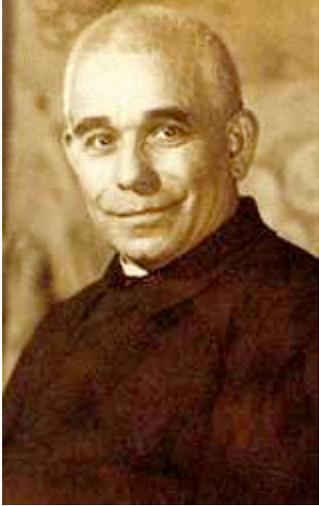


# Saint Luigi Orione

Form the book: "Portraits of Saints" (Ritratti di Santi) of Antonio Sicari ed. Jaca Book



"It was few days after the earthquake (1915, in Marsica, in Abruzzo). The most part of the victims was still under the rubbles. The rescues were hardly able to start. The frightened survivors lived in the vicinity of the destroyed houses in makeshift shelters. It was full winter, particularly cold that year. New tremors and snow storms threatened us (...).

During certain nights, the cries of the wild beasts did not let you sleep (...). One of that grey and freezing morning, after a sleepless night, I saw a very strange scene. A dirty and in bad condition small priest, with ten day's growth of beard, hanged about the rubbles, gathered round a band of children and boys, become without family. In vain the small priest asked whether there was a mean of transport to take that boys to Rome. The railroads were interrupted by the earthquake, there were no other vehicles for a so long trip.

In the meanwhile five or six cars arrived and stopped.

The King (Vittorio Emanuele III), with his retinue, was visiting the destroyed communes. As soon as the famous characters had gone down

their cars and had gone away, the small priest, without asking permission, began to hoist on one of them the boys by him taken. But, foreseeable as it was, the Carabinieri stayed to guard them objected, and since the priest insisted, a lively squabble born, to the point to catch the eye of the same Sovereign. Not at all frightened, the priest came forward and, with the hat in the hands, asked to the King to let him for a few time the free disposal of those car to take the orphans to Rome, or at least to the nearest railroad station still in activity. Given the circumstances, the King could not deny.

Together with the others, I saw with surprise and admiration the whole scene. As soon as the priest, with his load of boys, had gone away, I asked around me «Who is that extraordinary man?». And an old man, who had entrusted to him his little grandchild, answered me: «A certain don Orione, a rather strange priest.»".

In this way the writer Ignazio Silone had told in "Uscita di sicurezza" his first meeting with don Orione, happened when he, only fifteen-year old, missed home and family just during that terrible earthquake we are talking about.

Then, in 1915, that strange priest was already the beloved and respected founder of a religious institute that was concerned with the poor men of each kind. Nevertheless he had immediately come personally, among the Apennines, to look for the lost orphans among the cottages.

Sometimes he had to compete with the wolves that poor half-naked orphans whom he looked for, taking with him clothes, biscuits and gianduiotti, staying days and days soaked of water, running through paths full of snow to reach tumble-down villages on their mountains.

"Oh, these curs do not want just stop..."he explained to the children gathered on chance little truck that had scrambled up on Monte Bove, up to 1,300 metres, but there were just wolves that jumped around, trying to bite the terrified children.

It seemed a scene form a fairy-tale, to tell around the fire. It was, instead, the tragic reality: to rescue about ten children, don Orione wore out without food, in the cold, in the inhuman hard work, until he fell exhausted.

When other collaborators of his same institute came, they found him painfully feverish. He relied on their care murmuring: "In these days, two years of my life went away".

An other famous scholar of that time, baron Von Hügel, had the occasion to listen about these deeds from the mouth of his own daughter, who was an eye-witness. As a conclusion of his "Essay and Addresses on Philosophy and Religion" he remembered the experience of his daughter, al-

ready dead. He wrote: "When my older daughter, about eight months before her death, was able from Rome to arrive to the centre of the terrible devastation, just caused by an exceptionally violent earthquake, an impressive contrast stroke her spirit.

Among the death and the disorder don Orione moved, completely absorbed in the misfortune of that poor, a humble priest, a man to whom many looked to as a saint, come from the humbles and the poor, for the humbles and the poor.

He carried two children, one for each arm, and everywhere he went, he brought order, hope and faith in the middle of all that confusion and that desperation.

My daughter told me that this let everyone feel that Love was at the bottom to every things, a Love that just there, in that places, revealed through the full up, loving gift of himself, of that humble priest..."

To say the truth, don Orione had already a long experience of in which way to bring love in such calamities.

Just seven years before, an other earthquake had razed to the ground in few minutes the cities of Messina and Villa San Giovanni. Only in the Sicilian town, on 150,000 inhabitants, 80,000 of them died.

Already then he was in front line, organising the helps, installing his first headquarters in Reggio Calabria, in an abandoned wagon on the dead railroad line.

But well soon all the net of the help passed through his hands and it was him who co-ordinate the helps coming from the Pope and from the Royal Family.

He worked to the point that Pio X decided to appoint temporarily him, a little priest from Piedmont, general of a just formed religious Congregation: General vicar of the diocese of Messina.

As a consequence, he lived for two years in the archiepiscopal curia of that disaster-stricken city.

He was not the kind for the compromises and he was obliged to work in a region where the agreements were continually solicited and requested. There were therefore not missing of tribulation, harassments and attempts to slander him.

But don Orione was not the kind to give up. On the coat of arms of a bishop, he had read the ancient and ambitious witticism taken from the poems of the Latin poet Orazio: "Frangar nec flector" ("Also if broken, I will not let me subdue!"). He had commented: "I will not will let me neither break nor subdue!".

Pio X, who had entrusted to him that onerous commitment, sent him from Rome grieved messages: "Take to don Orion my benediction and say him to have patience, patience, patience, and that with the patience you can do miracles."

The miracles of don Orione were, in the meantime, the orphanage that he was able to open in Calabria and in Sicily.

Bu it is time to go to the origins of this adventure.

Who was defined as "father of orphans and of poor" born in Pontecurone, near Alessandria, in the 1872, from a vary humble family, that used to live in a rustic cottage, seized to the villa of Urbano Rattazzi, then famous politician.

His dad was a streets piver and boasted to be a "garibaldino" and also a little bit anticlerical; his mum earned a little money during the harvest-time when, at three a.m., she started to go to glean in the fields, bringing the little Luigi enveloped in a shawl.

He was the youngest of four children and the clothes arrived to him when the other three brothers have already well used them. It was, however, a honest poverty.

"That poor old countrywoman of my mother, don Orione will tell afterwards, got up at three in the morning and straight to work, and she seemed a spindle that worked, always she worked, she acted as a woman and, with her children, she could also acted as a man, because our father was away, working in Monferrato.

She sharpened the sickle for grass and she did this, without talking it to the grinder, she wove the cloth with hemp spinned by her, and my brothers shared so many sheets, so much beautiful linen, poor my mother... When she died, we put on her bride dress, after fifty-one years she was married; shed had it dyed black and it still cut its fine figure, and it was her most beautiful dress. You see, dear my children, how did our saint and beloved olds?"

But his mum was, above all, very much believer, and don Orione will always remember with emotion not only that she often went to take Eucharist, but that when she came back, she always said her children: "I prayed first for you and then for me. I received my Lord for you and for me." To the little Luigi seemed as his mum starved herself to give I to him, even when she take the Holy Communion!

He will also remember:

"My mother, also when me and my brother were already grown up, used to fix for us the seats in the church: "Because I want to see you all..." She wanted to know where we were in church and wanted to hear our voices praying. "My mother let us pray sitting down only when we will ill".

These are sketches of other times, but they make us breath the climate of unity, force and faith from which Luigi took that incredible resistance to the hard work that was characteristic of him, and that "Christian" passion for the poor men that never abandoned him.

When, at the end of his life, they obliged him to go in a boarding-house for convalescent in San Remo after different heath attacks, and after he had already received the last Sacraments, he will grumble: "It is not among the palms I want live and die, but among the poor that are Jesus Christ." Form many Christians, this love "to the poor that are Jesus Christ" born later, as maturation of the grow-up faith and not without an effort. For him it started naturally, as a never forgotten attachment, respect and veneration, to those poor Christians that were dad, mum and his brothers. He himself, besides, from ten to thirteen years old had helped his father in paving streets and carrying wheelbarrows, wandering far from home.

He already dreamed to join the Franciscans, because he used to consider them as the monks of poor and humbles that they wanted to help.

He tried in fact, at thirteen years old, but a strong pneumonia forced him to come back home.

They were able to find a place for him in the college of that Turinese priest that all used to consider as the apostle of abandoned youth. I refer to don Bosco to whom at the end of 1886, had a few more than one year of life..

When the little Orione arrived, he asked for a special permission in order to be able to be confessed by don Bosco, who usually devoted himself to the older boys, form fifteen years old.

To be sure of doing a good and complete confession, he had consulted some "forms" of "searching of soul" and he had copied almost in full. Only to the question: "Do you have killed?" he reply in the negative. He had copied all the other sins, filling up some notebooks.

But it is worth listening the story from his own mouth:

"With a hand in the pocket of the notebooks and the other to the chest, I was waiting, on my knees, trembling, my turn. « What will don Bosco tell, I was wondering, when I will read to him all this stuff?». My turn came. Don Bosco looked at me for a while and without I opened my mouth, stretching out a hand he said: «Give me then these your sins». I stretched one notebook, pinched on rolled up from the bottom of the pocket. He took it and without not even open it, he lacerated it.

«Give me the others». They suffered the same fate. «and now, he finished, your confession is made, do not think to what you have written and do not turn back no more to contemplate the past», and he smiled, as only him could smile".

To outline don Bosco's personality and the genius of his pedagogical method, a similar episode worth than many volumes.

There is no wonder if when the saint was taken seriously ill, there were six boys of the oratory that during a solemn Mess, in an explicit way, that offered their lives. Among them, there was the little Orione.

Also the mystery of the church emerges in all its beautiful when you look together, in an unique quick glance, the old and wise priest that confesses and educates the shy and scrupulous boy. Both of them had their hearts ardent of love for God and for the neighbour, both of them were decided for the sanctity. Now both of them are equally saints and venerated in the Church.

It was logic to wait then that Orione stayed with the Salesiani and he became, with the time, one of the most faithful and brilliant collaborators.

More than once don Bosco, after that famous confession, told him with intention looking him fixed in the eye: "Remember that we will always be friends."

Luigi, besides, was already preparing with a course of spiritual exercises to enter in the novitiate of the Salesiani, following a calling of which he had never doubted.

He started to have doubts during his prayers, when the possibility to join the diocesan seminary occurred. He turned out those doubts as a temptation, they became more twisted. He spent an entire night crying and praying, leaned to the grave of don Bosco, that was in the centre of the garden asking him three signs ("It was a boyish prank, he would have said later, but however...!"). One of the signs however, was very important: it concerned the return of his dad to the religious practice.

All three came true.

The last anxieties disappeared the next night, when he dreamed don Bosco that helped him, smiling with much paternal tenderness, to wear to cassock that he would have had to wear in seminary.

Now we can say that don Bosco, from the sky, knew why don Orione did not have to become a Salesiano: his work, in fact, was devoted only for the young people, that of don Orione, instead, had to be devoted the poor of each kind and the relief of every possibly poverty.

He would have been busy with all the "work of mercy" that, according to the catechism, are fourteen!

Something of all the other founders of religious institutes, also of the greatest, will be in him and in his activity. We will see it.

He had gone then to the seminary in Tortona, where he have completed grammar-school studies, showing, to said of all, a really model student: he used to excelled in studying, in charity, and in that contagious enthusiasm that would have been characteristic of him. "I was good, then!", he would tell years later, remembering always with nostalgia those years, during which he had learned to become grand of Christ and of Church.

When he started studying theology, his father died, and he lost also the little economic grant that his family could give him.

Fortunately, in Alessandria there was the use to offer, to the three poorest seminarists, the possibility to work as attendants in the Cathedral. They could attend to the lessons in the seminary, but they lived in some little rooms under the vault of the Cathedral near the bell tower. They served two or three Masses a day, they took care of the vestments on of the candles and they received a little salary, beyond same tips from the canonical.

It was not much, but it was enough to live; they need only to study more intensively, because the time flow away more speedily. In that attic, don Orione studied, prayed and worked... and he was preparing for his mission. He did not use the freedom to the strong discipline of the seminary to be dispelled, but to incite the fire that don Bosco had put in his heart. The little rooms under the vault became a rendezvous of urchins that Orione searched and took home in large number. Here he did some catechism, he amused them, playing hide-and-seek in the wide attics, and he did not missed the time of toasted chestnuts. In conclusion he did what he had seen doing in the don Bosco's oratory, but he did it in high, among the old wooden saints put on rest among the dust.

There was some problem obviously. Some time the old canonicals, from over there, heard in high some strange trampling; moreover, the sacristy had become very popular, not for devotes or penitents, but for queues of urchins that asked the way to "go up to Orione".

It could not last. Also in town, when he was seen walking with his noisy going, many used to look at him really perplexed, some also with annoyance and suspicion. There was also many problems: the little salary as a sacristan was no more enough since when he had started to help the more serious poverties of his boys.

However, on orders form above, that makeshift oratory on the vault of the Cathedral had to finish.

The boys used to meet in the street. They gathered on a little square and there Orione used to wait for them: then he took them up toward the ruined castle, playing and on the grass he did his catechism lessons: a travelling oratory.

It was Holy Week, a real time of passion for the poor seminarist that did not know how to do, but he knew that God asked him exactly that exceptional work.

Luckily the bishop of the city was a real father. From several time he had watched the strange apostolic creativeness of that young seminarist and he thought that the priests should have taken example and realize in their turn some oratories.

So he called Orione and put at his disposal the garden of the bishopric. To suffer, a little, was the old mother of the bishop that saw destroyed, in a Sunday, all her flowers, her flowerbeds, the well taken paths. Now there was only a playground, well flat and about ten shouting boys. As green there was only an old pine, because they said that over it the Virgin Mary appeared. But there was a need of swings and also the pine finished to give excellent boards.

Orione was sure that also the Virgin Mary were happy, she that now smiled form a beautiful statue, as a mum that looks pleased her children playing.

“And there was who grumbles, who found fault with, who laughed and laughed at and who said I was crazy”, he would have remembered many years later.

Criticisms do not leave bruises, but ruin good will and trust. Little more than one year later, the bishop communicated him the need to close the oratory, even if the boys were hundreds.

There was the politics and also the juvenile impulsiveness of our saint (“When I was young, he would tell nicely, I was also a little politic...”). To defence the Pope, attacked by anticlericals, the young had made a speech, in which, he tells. “I quoted Vittorio Emanuele II and I said what was not wise saying. They set the police on my tracks...”.

And now the Prefect, to silent the matter, demanded the closing of that oratory that, according to what he said, could become a haunt of rebels.

Luigi received the news with bowed head, he took the key and to put it in the hands of the statue of the Virgin Mary. Then he went up in his little room to cry. He stayed in the dark, with his forehead against the glasses of a little window that opened on to the courtyard, in front of the Virgin Mary. Let’s listen to his own account: “I stayed watching at the oratory that would not be opened any longer; crying and praying, because it seemed that all was over. I cried, like a child cries, with the abandon, the innocence and the faith of a child... and I rayed the Virgin Mary and I put me and the oratory in her hands...”

And so, crying and praying and making sacrifice f all, and giving everything to the Virgin Mary, without knowing I put my arms on the window-sill... and I fall asleep... and I dreamed this great and saint dream that I have never forgotten any more...

The description of the dream is wide, beautiful and it is a pity now to have to summarise it. He saw the walls of the garden disappear, the houses disappear, and make a big plain.

Of the walls of the garden stayed only a poplar over which there was a Virgin Mary of indescribable beauty, with her Baby in her arms, and her cloak, more light blue than the sky, were enlarging, until it had covered that huge plain in which there were thousand and thousand of boys, of every race and colour, as far as the eye can see, and their number increased, increased and among there were clericals, priests and nun...

We follow his account:

“The Virgin Mary turned to me showing me them. And I heard from that crowd the sweetest song of “Magnificat”... and all the boy were singing, everyone in his own language, but the different idioms had fused in one only wonderful choir. The Virgin Mary started singing... and I waked up.”

He had his heart full of peace.

The fact that that oratory had to close was not a problem any linger. It meant that he had to open another one bigger and with new prospects.

The occasion arrived very soon.

The bishop had just made build a good seminary that was revealed as too small for the large mount of requests.

There was also the problem of whom that were to poor to pay the charge.

Orione offered to open a kind of branch: a college in which to let study the poor boys, who in case could prepare there for the priesthood.

The bishop gave a generic permission, thinking that that clerical had no money, no house neither a college!

To be prudent, he took back the permission before the day ended. When, nevertheless, he called Luigi to tell him not to think any more to it, he was told that it was a pity. Everything was ready; the house had been found and the rent had been already paid for one year

How did he do? Just out the bishopric, a friend of him told him that his father let a house just out Tortona, for 400 Lire a year. Orione had "stopped" it immediately, time to pay one week. On the way home he had met an old woman he knew; they have talked of this and that, the idea of the college came out.

"A college? I put my grandson! How much do you take?"

"A little, what you give me"

"If I give you 400 Lire (all her savings), how long will you take him?"

"For all the grammar school!" exclaimed Orione starting for the joy for that evident symbol of Providence.

And the bishop stayed so thoughtful that he did not want to risk to opposing the sky.

One year later the house became inadequate and Orione took in the centre of Tortona, an abandoned convent. There was never money. They provided to the food with the fees, every family gave what they could, and with the offers that often arrived as miracles. As teacher there were the same founder who taught Italian, Story and Geography, and some theology students given by the diocesan seminary.

In the meantime, even if he was only a deacon, the bishop often sent him to preach in the parishes of the diocese.

At the end, in 1895, Orione became priest. In the history of the Church he represents a case rare to the point of being unique of a seminarist that becomes a founder of a religious institute. And this he was already, if you think that even some students from Turin and Genoa referred to that cleric.

The day of his ordination, the bishop let him to dress with the cassock six boarders that wanted to become priests "under the guide of don Luigi".

Moreover, monsignor authorized some seminarists that were attracted by Orione's job to leave the seminary and to start with him a kind of common life.

The "Little Work of the Divine Providence" born in this way.

Around this group of "sacred". Lived, as an unique family, both some poor boys that could not effort the fees of the seminary, and those who wish to take part of the nascent institute.

The manager's office, that of don Orione, was the entrance hall of the building!

It had not passed much time and it was necessary to move. A group went then of the Voghera hills, where it was organised as a "farming colony", this time with the aim to educate with the work those boys that do not have liking with the studying.

In 1889 the bishop of Noto, in Sicily, that had read an informative bulletin of the new Institute, wrote to don Orione, a twenty-seven-year-old little priest, ordained from just three years, to offer him a house where to open an Episcopal college for a least sixty students. He went personally in the island to organize the foundation; when he leaved to Tortona he took with him twelve clerics of the Sicilian diocese that wanted to take part of his Congregation.

In the same year he founded the "Hermits of the Divine Providence". In a very old abbey on the Pavese Apennines, he took some non-religious used to the work in the country, that wanted to devote themselves to the Lord, in the contemplation and in the work, ad the Benedictine.

In short, similar communities born, always positioned in the hermitages in the farming colonies, as a bearing group of prayer and work.

Similar communities opened in Piedmont, in Lombardy, in Umbria, in Lazio, in Sicily, where the disciples of don Orione broke up and let bloom again waste areas for some time unfruitful.

Among these sacred hermits there were also some blinds: the process of beatification is in process for one of them, the famous "Frate Ave Maria".

In 1915, Orione started to scatter Italy with nursing homes called "little Cottolengo". What that Cottolengo did in Turin on a large scale, he scatters in a smaller scale in all of Italy and in the world (mine foundation before his death!), to accept the most repulsive miseries, those who the society wants at all costs get out of its sight.

The sick people had to be organized in “different families”, according to the kind of illness, while the “Little Cottolengo” had to welcome only these who could not find in any other hospital or nursing home: the last of the lasts “of every nationality they are, of every religion they are, and even if they are without religion, because God is Father of everyone”.

Still in 1915, don Orione founded the “Little missionary nuns of Mercy”, as female branch of all his works: to the nuns were entrusted to kindergartens, the orphanages, the parish works, the girl’s education, the assistance to the poor and to the sick people, as well as the dealing with the female’s works in all the other institutes.

The first three girls to whom he gave the cassock, he called: Sister Faith, Sister Hope and Sister Charity.

Later he started a different female congregations, devoted to the care of the Sanctuaries and for the activities connected to the worship.

In 1927 he founded the “Sacramental Blind Nuns”: for the perpetual adoration and the endless prayer, to which he entrusted the aim to be support and root of all the other works.

We have already talked about the orphanages and the two earthquake we talked about gave a great impulse to their diffusion. Now we add: parishes, sanctuaries, schools, printing-works, nursing homes.

The foundations of houses and works to which don Orione turned his hands to before to die at sixty-eight years old were more that a hundred, not only in Italy but also in Brazil, in Argentina, in Uruguay, in Chile, in the USA, in England, in Greece, in Poland, in Albania and in Palestine.

He accepted also to go in the “roman Patagonia” as he as a joke called the suburb of Rome in the Appio neigh borough, where Pio X asked him to build a parish and a big school.

At the time of his death about 820 religious and several hundreds of nuns belonged to the different branches of his “Little Work of the Divine Providence”.

He defined everything “a humble congregation”, because he himself was humble.

He went all around the world dressed as the last of the poor, with the cassock mended and the shoes shapeless, without having neither a clock or a wallet, managing floods of money, without knowing whether there was money for the day after, feeling only a “servant of Providence”.

The name of his congregation was for him a son deep conviction that eh waited answers and gifts from the Providence like a child waits from his mother.

Visitors arrived with huge amount of money just when the bill were to pay, and they talked about strange internal impulses to which the cannot deny, and the good Orione smiled, because he had just finished to quarrel with the Virgin Mary’s or Saint Joseph’s statue.

Or, during the Mess, he occurred to think about the problems he had and to add in the liturgy the expression “Holy Virgin, pay at least some rent!”. After the Mess the exact sum, taken by an unknown, was in the sacristy waiting for him.

Or an ministerial inspector comes, sent by the anticlerical enemies to check the low economic entrusting of that school of priest; but he goes way without moving a finger, humiliated. He referred to the senior that he felt as pulling his legs, because on Orione’s desk he has seen parcels of bank-notes. Don Luigi, instead, tells laughing to his collaborators that on that table there was no money at all.

There is one entire book full of his “sacrifices”, included the simplest and most delicate ones.

The miracles blossomed in his hands. He himself told the listeners with quite candour, timorous only that the listeners were so fool to give to him the merit, who had get nothing to do with...

He hoped in this way that his collaborators learned to trust in the tender goodness of God.

In fact there were also miracles of tenderness.

He confided to his closes: “I tell you something I never told to anyone else and that I am ashamed in telling, but it is told to major glory of God: when, in the first time of the congregation, after long walking to go to preach in the villages, I went back home exhausted, and often I used to lie down on a strong bench of wood, God made me a special favour; sometimes the never-ending goodness of God made me have the impression, or gave me the sensation, that the bench sank, becoming smooth and tender, like a very smooth bench of rubber, like if I plunge a soft, soft mattress, in which my tired bones sank, receiving a very sweet rest.”

God Himself gave him the consolation that he never looked for, because it seemed to him to steal it to the poor.

He was very sad a summer afternoon, when he went in the house of novitiate and he found two novices that take a rest on an old sofa.

He made put in middle of the courtyard that "luxury object" and make it burst in presence of all.

He used to say that in his houses you need to "drudge from an Ave Maria to another".

There were hundreds of youth that asked to join his Congregation. And yet the "life's program" that he embodied and offered did not leave space for illusions: "these little and very poor Congregation is the rag of the Virgin Mary and of the Church of Rome..., it is the Congregation of the ragamuffin of God. Do you know what does people do with the rags? With the rags people dust, wash and rub the floors, remove the cobweb and polish shoes... Well, if you like to be a rag of God, a rag under the feet of God, under the pure feet of the Virgin Mary; if you like to be a rag under the feet of the Holy Mother Church and in the hands of your seniors, this is your place".

But he could use these expressions, because no one could misunderstand their meaning: don Ori- one described first of all himself, his unlimited desire to be used for the good of the Church and of the world, his dream to be managed by the hands of God and of the Holy Virgin without offering any resistance, it did not describe humiliation, but a dignity.

Then he never shrank to humiliate, even if he sometimes did it joking. Showing a photo that portrayed him astride a humble and patient donkey, he said with wit: "He and me, we are in two!". And the present were moved thinking to his patient perseverance that never abandoned him.

But the thing that struck and impressed was his love, without any reservation nor bound, to the vic- ar of Christ on the earth.

He wrote:

"Our creed is the Pope, our moral is the Pope; our love, our heart, the ground of our life is the Pope. For us the Pope is Jesus Christ: loving the Pope is the same thing; listening and following the Pope is listening and following Jesus Christ; giving the life for the Pope is giving the life for Je- sus Christ."

And he asked to add the three vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, a special fourth vow of "loy- alty to the Pope". At that age it was not allowed to him. Now, instead, the sons of don Ori- one, as the Jesuits, let out a fourth vow of loyalty to the Pope.

Their founder claimed that all his work for the poor and among the poor had this aim: to let born in the heart on the miserables "a very sweet love for the Pope".

He used to say: "The Congregation could not live, should not live except for the Pope: it must be in the hands of him, it must be a rag under the feet of him. Living, working and dying for love for the Pope...".

When he was asked the distinctive aim of his Institute, given that many were devoted to the mercy works, he answered that its special aim was to pull and join with a very sweet and a very strong bond of all the mind of the heart the sons of people and the working class to the Apostolic Seat".

He certainly helped personally the poor and the forlorn; but if they would have loved him and not the Pope, he would have considered a great foolish thing, because he, Ori- one, was nothing but a charitable hand that acted in the name of the Pope and addressed to him.

The Pope, for that matter, knew he could ask him everything, every sacrifice and every enterprise.

A so clerical conscience, absorbed on the ministry of Peter in the Church, had been never seen before, moreover in a founder so involved in the social needs.

This witness is still waiting to be understood and valued in the right way, moreover by those reli- gious that find in their involvement with the poor a justification to keep their "anti-roman complex". Someone now would twist their mouth in subscribing what that don Ori- one airily taught: "First of all the Pope and the Church... and then, a lot after, the bread and the life".

For him it was a dream being able to do the perpetual vows in the same hands of the Pope. He asked him as a very special grace during an audience, prepared to wait that the Pope would be kind enough to fix one day for the ceremony.

"Also now", answered smiling Pio X.

"Holy Father, as His Holiness knows, at least two witnesses are required..."

And the Pope smiling: "As witnesses we take my guardian angel and yours."

We have still to talk about his activity of preacher and of confessor that don Orione performed always gladly and with certain fantasy.

When it was about God and souls he knew even because a play-actor.

One evening he was invited in a village where the priests were particularly hated and mocked. It was raining and he arrived with muddy shoes and with dropping cassock. He went upstairs to the pulpit learning heavy as a drunk and mumbling in dialect, but in a way in which everyone could hear, the most common insults against priest, and making the gawky cry of a crow.

The priest tore his hair out, thinking he was become crazy.

But when he was on the pulpit, that humble priest, and everyone knew who he was he looked at them with unbelievable pride. Then he started: "So, in this way here you greet the priest, the minister of God, when he passes." At the end he spoke about the priesthood in a way to let them cry.

In another parish the popular missions were preached and the result was little.

For the conclusion don Orione asked to call ten confessors to the discouraged parish, only one priest seemed enough. He obeyed, anyway.

That last evening, when the church of the village had difficulty in filling, and the sacristan ringed resigned the bells, they saw suddenly coming in someone enveloped in a worn-out heavy-cloak, with a bad hat on his head; he flung himself at a bench and started moaning speaking up: "Look how I am! And try think that in my father's house I missed nothing...".

To cut a long story short: he was don Orione that was playing the parable of the "Prodigal son", and the people run, and someone went to call the absents.

When the church was full of people, that original priest from the pulpit talk about the forgiveness of God until make cry all of them.

Also the ten confessors, among all, cried, whose seemed anyway to small. All the village confessed that time.

We have arrived at the end of our story.

It was the 1940, and don Orione was in San Remo, a little sad because he had to die among the palms, instead among the poors.

He had arrived the 9<sup>th</sup> March and he was very restless: the room, even without all the needless furniture, seemed to him too much luxury! "I do not feel, I cannot stay here: make me the favour, look at the train timetable!" he said to a bother.

Then he calmed down, luckily in an angle there was a little statue of the Virgin Mary.

"Look how beautiful she is! – he said – do not you think the only thing I have to do is to close my eyes?"

He closed them three days later, saying: "Jesus, Jesus, I go!". For the last time he felt himself sent in a mission, stretched to a ready obedience.

The coffin was taken, in a real triumph, to Tortona, in a sanctuary he had built to the "Madonna della Guardia". In every city the funeral procession went through, Genoa, Novi, Alessandria, Milan, there was waiting for him a huge crowd.

In saint Ambrogio in Milan waiting for the coffin there was the saint cardinal Schuster.

A Franciscan writer that went on a bus through those streets, heard a dialogue between two workers that were working lying on the ground, and referred it to a newspaper:

"What's happened? Who is dead?"

"Don Orione"

"And who is don Orione?"

"He was a priest, but he was a good man".

Don Orione, certainly, would have smiled.