

# The St. Luigi Scrosoppi



Passages from the book: "Beato Luigi Scrosoppi": care of the Sisters of Providence

## Two Families and one Tradition



Father Luigi, was born from excellent backgrounds: one of the greatest graces that can occur to who blossoms in this miserable earth. We can go back to his two grandfathers, maternal and paternal.

The first, Giovanni Battista Lazzarini, was a well off business man, but the most important thing is that he was a man of great faith. A vivid Franciscan faith. Born in Borgo Grazzano in Udine, since he was a little boy he had attended the S. Francesco della Vigna church, which has now disappeared. That church was almost a Marian Sanctuary, especially vowed to the cult of the Immaculate Conception. In this spirit, had grown Antonia, the mother of Luigi. But to the Franciscan mercy and the tenderness towards the Immaculate, other vicissitudes came about adding another inner force to her: that of Christian sorrow. She was given in marriage in Malborghetto, to Francesco Filafarro, a noble master of iron-foundry, she then had to escape from the hordes of Massena and not only did she lose all her belongings but she also lost her second child, Giovanni Battista and a little after, her husband, that was reduced as a pork-butcher merchant. In this mist of misfortune, that were very tumultuous times, many people would have lost their faith but on the contrary, her faith strengthen. We can say that Luigi from his maternal side, was the son of that faith tested to the ardour of sorrow.

There was in Udine, another centre of intense religious fervour. It was the Oratory of the Crucified or of Christ, a laical gathering of glorious spiritual traditions. They gathered in the said Oratory which was in front of the thirteenth century S. Francesco church.

The paternal grandfather, Giuseppe Scrosoppi, was a member of the Oratory since he was a young boy. Just before his death, in 1801, he registered his two sons, Domenico and Giuseppe. The registration of Domenico, Luigi's father, was done some months previous to his matrimony with Antonio Lazzari – widow of Filafarro.

Both of his backgrounds absorbed the lymph of the Franciscan humus: this expanded to the smile of the Immaculate and he strengthen himself with the streaming blood of the Cross. Such reasons and spiritual directions were just a germ, in his two grandfathers, in his mother and father of that blossoming that almost exploded in Luigi.

## A Brother of Ardour



November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1800 was really a sad Commemoration of the Dead day for Antonia Lazzarini. In April, she had lost her mother, Angela Dossi and she was there praying for her and on the tomb of her late husband, Francesco Filafarro. She didn't have anything else left than her son, Carlo which was then 14 years old. Across the Viacanale she retook her way to Friuli towards her native Udine.

What to do with the young Carlo? Someone recommended him to start in the business field. Mother Antonia had passionately prayed that he be of God. There was something very ardent in this prayer. We can certainly

notice the faith in this pious woman, strengthen rather than weakened from her sorrow.

Her prayer was executed. Since, with the surprise of all, Carlo said – (he never said it before to nobody) that he wanted to become a priest. He already made his first studies in Klagenfurt; he continued in the seminary in Udine.

All who have known the future Father Carlo, were in accordance to confirm, besides his intelligence, he had strong mercy, rare qualities of spiritual director, his extraordinary courtliness manners – he always hid his noble background – and of his entrustly gestures.

Nevertheless, under all this sweetness, there was an iron temperament, which well suits who is named “Santo di Ferro” (Iron Saint) : S. Carlo Bartolomeo (Saint Charles Bartolomeo).

That temperament was shown in a choice that almost tasted as a challenge. The Philippine Congregation in Udine was already under the threat of suppression when on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1806, Carlo asked to be admitted in that congregation. On September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1809 he was ordained as priest from mons. Baldassare Rasponi, archbishop of Udine, that some months before Napoleon from his camp in St. Polten had commanded to shoot. While he was being ordained priest, Pio VII was more than three months kept as a prisoner and also the church where he was baptised was ruined by the French bombardments on May 17 of that year. Luigino Scrosoppi was around five years old when his stepbrother celebrated his first mass; a mass which recalled the catacombs and not improbable promises of chains and martyrdom.

Father Carlo had a natural instinct to drag everyone on his way. He would light up everyone he would encounter. Not of fatuous fires, but of a flame which reached the inner souls and burned an entire life. This is why father Luigi would always live by his side and almost in his shadow. A part from his background of strong faith, he had the gift of having a Brother of Ardour.

In reality, Father Carlo was the centre of this new family. When in 1810, the Philippine Congregation became suppressed, but saved for the cult the church of S. Maria Maddalena (now Palazzo delle Poste), Father Carlo remained the spiritual apostle of that church. His stepfather, Domenico, in order to consent him a much more easier service, bought in 1811 a house close by. So Luigino more than ever frequented that temple and would “go about innocent and pious” amongst the Father Worshipers. There he made his first communion; and his master, his guide and his angel was precisely Father Carlo.

## **Adolescent**

Where were events that struck Luigi as an adolescent? Many events will still remain unknown. The life of everyone is a mysterious and unspeakable patchwork. However some are.

Maybe the providential young soul elasticity didn't consent him to be aware of. Neither the clamour of the Austrian and Napoleonic armies occurring in 1809 for Friuli, nor the horror of the Pope's imprisonment didn't touch him in no way; he surely heard these events at home and they burden on him like dark mysterious clouds. But with his proper childish intuition, he understood that his stepbrother was rising to the alter amongst the thrones and he wasn't afraid of this.

Later on, instead he couldn't be aware – in 1813 at 9 years old- that something important was happening with the fall of Napoleon. Another time was in 18145, in Scrosoppi's home, the prolonged ringing of the bells for the return of Pio VII in Rome. It seemed like to touch with hand the truth of Christ's words: The powers of hell will not prevail. Therefore in Friuli, as all over, there was an unexpected and consoling religious awakening.

It seemed that they returned at a religious gold period. The Christian part of Friuli had known splendid times under the three last patriarchs of Aquileia. Then the sky had all of a sudden darkened suppression of the Jesuits, oppressive Venetian church laws, and the French revolution. The good remained dismayed: cruelty and immorality had spread impudently. Luigino's heart had certainly heard, from the lips of Father Carlo, the joyous thrill of the Christian rebirth.

But immediately, until from 1814, it began the crescent years of scarcity, to which was added in 1817 an epidemic of typhus, until then unknown. In the spring of that year, it was not difficult

to find some poor person – maybe a child or an adult dead of starvation or of disease under the porches of the city. The hungry came down in sad processions from the mountains. In the old seminary they collected hundreds of children.

All that was spoken about was hunger and death. One day the same father Carlo returned staggering to his home with a great fever. Since he knew German, he had been entrusted with the spiritual cure of the sick in the Military hospital. He totally donated himself. Everyone was afraid for his life, but the Providence had other designs. Then the long and difficult convalescence began.

Luigino had just made his first Communion. It can be said that he at the same time knew the Food of Paradise and the hunger of this earth. He was then thirteen years old. Which enormous impression had to be made on his mind with the vision of so many poor, the tormented vision of many of his mates that just dragged their way through! The sight of such miseries and the fraternal heroism had a decisive importance on adolescent Luigi. Which was the test? All the whole life that followed.

### **Amongst the cedars of Lebanese**



The young Luigi grew-up amongst the cedars of Lebanon. From the house of via Aquileia (now known as Via Vittorio Veneto) about 50 meters separated him from the church of S. Maria Maddalena, where the ministry of the suppressed Philippine Fathers continued their work.

There he knew clergymen of eminent virtue. First amongst all the venerando provost father Massimo da Brazzacco, that all the city considered like an old patriarch and father Gaetano Salomoni, burning spirit of charity, that had founded the house of the Derelitte and which father Carlo will become his right-handed after his recovery. In seminary, then, where he went to study, he found other souls all of God. And just in the difficult years of the adolescence and the first youthful years, Luigi grabbed hold of - it is the word! - to other eminent ecclesiastics, in whose hands were then the fates of the diocese.

It would be enough to remember great monsignor Mattia Capellari, friend of future Pope Gregorio XVI, that held his apostolic positions with great boldness to the Josephine's pretensions of the Austrian government.

They will be succeeded by, not second for virtue and for sacerdotal largeness, the adorn monsignor Mariano Darù, which fraternally loved father Carlo and father Luigi.

Between the contemporaries, it is then, perhaps possible to forget the three pearls of the Friuli clergy, inseparable friends of father Luigi? Father Pietro Benedetti, very cultured and devoted, founder of the Infant School; monsignor Domenico Sameda, general vicar and confessor of the Blessed father Luigi; and Father Fantoni, the "dimidium animae meae " of father Luigi, wise and gentle collaborator until his death.

In such a saint company atmosphere, the figure of father Luigi enunciates for two singular phenomena. There was a period of his life, from 1856 and onwards, that in the presence of the entire city he appeared to be the centre, the soul, the tip of diamond of that saint maniple and the church of S. Maria Maddalena directed from him and hated from his adversaries was considered, like a heart-felt Catholic fortress and having the most vivid spirituality.

While still in life and after his death, although for doctrine or other dowries, was inferior those brothers, on all, he arose like a beacon for the light of the holiness.

More than ever the words of the Holy Mother came true: God looked at his humbleness and in him accomplished great things.

## **To Become a Capuchin?**

In 1819, father Luigi began to collaborate with father Gaetano Salomoni in the Derelitte house and in 1822, he personally took over the direction.

Father Luigi gave a hand to his brother for that holy work up till 1826, when he was still a deacon, would hold catechism lessons and other cultural matters, a sort of astronomy.

Consecrated priest on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1827, Father Luigi entirely dedicated himself to the Derelitte house and he became the "priest searcher".

Just in that period, (it was a significant moment of his life) around 1830, a Capuchin convent re-opened in Udine.

The new convent was only a few steps away from the Derelitte house. Being the closeness to the convent or his Franciscan inclination, derived from his grandparents and parents, he had the desire to become a Capuchin.

Deep down in his soul, there was no doubt about his Franciscan faith.

How to explain this ambition?

To those souls that generously give themselves to God, it happens sometime to feel an unspeakable dissatisfaction, as if one didn't give himself totally. "I have become a priest – must have said to himself Father Luigi – to become a saint and to sanctify. But, after three years, who I'm I and what have I done as good works? "Isn't it better for me to retreat in a convent in order to live in perfect meditation and in prayer?"

We must not forget that Luigi was a man that never left things half done or go down to compromises. He lived the great part of the day amongst very poor girls; but after he would then return to his home, where he lived a very comfortable life as it was used for those middle upper class families. It was certain, not for his fault that he sometimes felt out of place in that society. As soon as father Carlo died, he dissolved the house and took the road for totally poverty. But two great reasons must have reached him like voices from paradise. In that period, with the retreat of the vice-director Father Bearzi, the Derelitte house was going through a very big crisis. In this good deed the brother was all-alone.

A little after this, in 1831 a first epidemic of cholera exploded. The needs were increasing and the orphans multiplied. "They asked bread, but there was no one there that would give it to them". At the moaning of the poor and on the torment of charity, father Luigi put forth his ascetic ambitions. He will realise his said ambitions later on, reforming the Philippine Congregation without abandon the good deeds. Saint Francis had greatly said: Pax et Bonum!

Once the choice had been made and once his interior crisis had been overcome, Father Luigi had donated body and soul to Charity. As it was in his nature and as it was in his grace. God wanted that he dedicate himself to the Derelitte house?

He totally put himself in this without saving himself whatsoever.

## **In his heart the most poor**

Father Carlo, was more superior than him in intelligence and in experience. Father Carlo attended in the work for more than ten years and still this work languished. He didn't even have a proper headquarter.

There were two salary teachers for the few girls that were gathered. The house and the teachers were maintained from the free charities of some pious aristocratic ladies.

But we know how these things go. The first enthusiasms weakened and the work languished. This was almost fainting out, when, Father Luigi, a young priest of 26 or 27 years old, renounced to the convent in order to dedicate himself to the house. He therefore decides to buy the house and the attached property. He then had executed to make a layout drawing and another daring one, till he reached the present building dimensions, for that time very majestic. He then recruited volunteer personnel to start the new institution.

What had happened again? Nothing, absolutely nothing, except for the presence of his younger brother on his side, 18 years younger than him, but a motor and a porter of new boldness.

Father Luigi dedicated himself to the Derelitte house, because it already existed and it needed to be saved and strengthened. But the choice for the road of charity, took him also

towards other undertakings. In the future he didn't exclude any charity institutions connected to his congregation, that even Rome would recall him to a certain delimitation. Charity for him embraced everything. It was sufficient that it dealt with deeds for the poor and poor deeds, perhaps refused by others.

Poor sisters, the assisted poor; poor that helped the poor: this was his ideal and his programmed.

His realism made him see that the path to charity was difficult and bitter; moreover, he quickly experimented this, when going around for charity in the city or in Friuli he would be teased, often slapped and sometimes the people would instigate the dogs against him.

Therefore, no romanticism, not even spiritual tones. Later on he would make his, the motto of Saint Paolo of the Cross: "To be silent, to operate, to suffer", he had put this in practise to the service of Charity right from the beginning.

What therefore moved and supported him? Jesus, a boundless love for Jesus! He really seriously took the words of the Gospel: - I was hungry and you gave me to eat..., I was nude and you gave me clothing.... He really saw Jesus in the poor, he saw him in the orphan girls. Such a vision would repay him of the bitter salt of those denied alms, bad charities and of those up and down tough flights of stairs, perhaps, only to collect scorns.

### **God's unforeseeable needs**

It is natural that parents usually desire the continuation of the family name. This is why it is a feast when a baby boy is born.

In the house of Scrosoppi these worries even if legitimate, were never expressed. Of the three sons, one of the first marriages, the other of the second marriage, the parents didn't keep one for themselves. They donated them all to our Lord. Mother Antonia was certainly enthusiastic: she prayed for Carlo's vocation and she saw blossom with great joy, the vocations of Giovanni Battista and of Luigi. Not even Mr. Domenico, as we know, made any objections. Indeed, he was very happy.

They therefore made themselves priest. But what priests?

Father Carlo had registered himself at the Philippine Congregation, and it was a rule of the congregation, that all his members carry out the priest ministry free *and for love of God*.

Father Luigi put himself on the same road.

Indeed, after both had thrown them into the charity deeds, these poor two fellows didn't have anything left and would ask for help at home.

Mr. Domenico Scrosoppi, had put away a certain fortune, and thus, is natural that in similar cases, the trend to continuously rise and the desire that the sons accumulate and increase the family's jewel-case. Instead, no, Father Carlo and Father Luigi they threw themselves on that sacrificed work amongst the poor that only promised to consume the substances accumulated with great fatigue.

Only Father Giovanni Battista will take another more brilliant road, until he becomes an archpriest in Sacile.

Only Father Luigi had thrown everything, which regarded the century behind his back refused any type of vanities and loved to descend rather than to ascend. He behaved in such a way that his life became a saint challenge against the pride of that social middle class in which he belonged to. Who knows how many people shook their heads and said to mother Antonia: "That son of yours is exaggerating. It is not convenient to his condition". Many people thought that he was a little stupid. Imagine him begging as priorly said. A priest of a rich family would go around the city with a knapsack on his shoulders or pushing a small handcart; that entered in the grocery, in the bakery; that knocked on the doors of the well-off families. It is the son of Lady Antonia – whispered the maid of the countess. Imagine him sitting on ram-shackled cart going through the villages driven by a donkey. Things that have never been seen, since then!

Maybe, even mother Antonio must have said to him: "Father Luigi is it really necessary that you do this? – And he that was stubborn in good will: "Yes mother, it is necessary".

Not only did he show his “descending” for the above, but in all of his life in how he dressed and behaved with others. His slippers were famous. If he were to be given new shoes, one could bet that he would give them to a poor person. Even a dress, a new dress would find shoulders of a poor altar boy and he would go about ragly dressed. And later on, when he went to visit the hospitals directed by his sisters, would often ask for a handkerchief or a shirt, but those pertaining to the most beggar of the patients.

The social class, the decorum of the social conditions, and the family lustre were meaningless words for Father Luigi! Something else was moving him; for something else he was searching for.

### **The most beautiful gifts from our Lord**

In The Gospel the Virgin Mary diffuses her bright light as a sign of redemption and of sanctified elevation of the women’s condition and in the Gospel no woman was cut a bad figure. Not even the adulterer and nonetheless Magda the sinner. It is well known that the women must be grateful to Christianity for its elevation. At one hundred and sixty years from the Foundation of the Derelitte House it has been proclaimed male and female equality. What difference from them.

The poorest girls of the population, specially in the city or in other districts, the miserable young girls, that, orphan would fall in cruel hands like the Cosetta of Victor Hugo, or would be thrown in the streets and they were really a lot.

The convulsing years of the French revolution and of the succeeding war years, had greatly worsen their condition. Those girls look like they were irreparably condemned.

Father Luigi had dedicated himself to this particular apostolate amongst the poorest girls of the city and for him; the salvation of these souls had become an authentic crusade.

For this he wanted the construction of a big house that would be able and capable of all the needs. For this reason the door was always open to them in sign of hospitality.

Father Luigi received the little orphan girls as a “gift of the providence”. This is how he considered them and how he wanted the other girls and sisters to greet them.

Sometimes Father Luigi would have a little girl under his mantle and would say to the other girls, “Guess what I have under here?”. He would reply by himself, “A gift that God has sent to us”.

The more they were poor and abandoned, the more he would express his fatherly mercy and when he consigned them to the sisters he would say, “These are the most beautiful gifts of God, treat them with great care!” Sometimes, these girls would arrive to the house like as if they were little lost birds. One day, a little six-year-old boy accompanied to the hall his little sister and then he left her there and ran away. But the person, who specialized in bringing these “gifts” to Father Luigi, was the priest of S. Quirino, the merciful monsignor Filipponi.

One day a mother stricken by misery had threaten suicide if the priest wouldn’t have taken her child. The good priest, alarmed, took the little girl and ran to Father Luigi. He knew that there wasn’t any more space, but as he reached Father Luigi’s room he opened his mantle where he had hidden the little girl. Father Luigi and the girl looked at each other and smiled, monsignor Filipponi left content, that little girl had found a father. The new bed was soon prepared: it was the linen basket.

## **Father Luigi's concrete Education**

In the house the girls received a good education. They would have become good family mothers, or they would have been allocated in service at some safe families. On this point he was very strict.

On time he found out that a young girl was in danger. He immediately took her away, even if it was from a family that he had received some benefits. His total devotion had thrown malice and grudge upon himself. One day an angry man entered his studio. The porter heard him literally strike Father Luigi. Maybe because she was afraid she ran out and cried for help, and not seeing any mysterious person leave the house, she imagined it to be the devil. It was surely someone that Father Luigi had strapped the prey from. When they went to him – he said, “It is nothing, it is nothing” and imposed silence.

Father Luigi was an eminently practical and simple man. He didn't lack culture or cultural interests. But in his educative apostolate he didn't search for theoretical exquisiteness.

He was also interested in other educative experiences as per example the kindergarten of the Aporti and of the good work of the Canossiane. Nevertheless, he needed only a few directive lines. He had a sharp discernment of the hearts of which he was exceptionally gifted, a great good sense and a strong hand, united with paternal sweetness.

First of all, Father Luigi, with all his heart wanted to nourish all those young girls that usually arrived so lean and suffering from rickets. He wanted that they grew-up strong and healthy. Another thing that was in his heart is that he wanted them to be workers. In that period it was in force to cultivate silkworms. He therefore, organized an agricultural colony with fitted mulberry-trees outside the Ronani porta; and constructed a silkworm factory and a spinning-mill in the house. He then made a laboratory for confectioning gloves, socks and sweaters. But above all, cutting, sewing and embroidery work, because these would have been necessary arts in whatsoever positions these young girls would find themselves in their future lives.

With regards to the school education in that period it was neither general nor obligatory. However, Father Luigi had introduced the programme in his home and he would personally be occupied with the limited girls and would teach them to write and read.

Father Luigi in their character formation didn't admit falsehood or malice; he in fact, understood the lively girls and even the scampy ones, on condition that they are honest and open; he in some way preferred them. Naturally he gave the maximum importance to a solid religious formation.

We can clearly understand the “type” of girl that Father Luigi wanted that they become: healthy, worker, sincere, honest. Without precious arabesques but able to be the “strong woman” praised by the scriptures.

## **The first collaborators**

To direct the orphan girls, Father Carlo and Father Luigi had recruited some good young girls, but they were more like tailors. Good people, but with a secure spirit of sacrifice and hard workers, that were able to bring forth good housewives and housekeepers.

Naturally Father Carlo called the most chose and fine. But Father Luigi had recruited the most humble ones.

One was called Orsola Baldassi da Buia.

One day Father Luigi was going through the village of that great parish in search of wood for the new construction or maybe for corncobs, when some impolite men started to seriously bother him. Orsola, deeply touched by this humble priest started scolding those villains and she then took the bridles of the donkey and the search restarted under her guidance. She then began to follow Father Luigi in his works.

The other was an illegitimate young woman, called Giovanna Maria. Father Luigi while passing through the street saw her carding in front of a home and invited her to work in his house. She replied that it was impossible for her, because of her birth (illegitimate), but she accepted after Father Luigi's long insistence, saying that she would have worked for free for a certain period at the orphan's service. But she ended-up remaining in the same congregation.

To serve the Lord – Farther Luigi- thought, who would better serve the orphans than those that have known what poverty and loneliness is all about.

When this work had achieved a certain stability, Father Carlo was uncertain on what to do.

He first tried to give a finishing tone to the Maestre group, by calling a certain sister Giovanna Colloredo, she was of noble background. He then filed the documentation to entrust this work to an already tested congregation, which were the Conoissiane of the Rosminiane. He finished in giving up to his smaller brother that probably said: What are we going around here and there? These are heart of girls, but have spirit of sacrifice and have immolated themselves for years. We have faith in them! They will improve themselves with God's grace.

So on Christmas day in 1845 the Congregation was born besides the cradle of baby Jesus.

### **Jesus lives and is present in the poor**

We can say that Father Luigi was essentially active. We also know that he sought a contemplative life, and if he was indefatigable – he was defined “hard-working” by a document of the Udine Curia dated 1849. It was also certain that he lived an everlasting union with God in a ceaseless prayer, much absorbed in celestial things that he strapped the sign of the cross to each person he saw pass by.

He gave this example of teaching to the sisters, which he inspired the same love of prayer. He asked the sisters a strong and concentrated interior life.

But although they were dedicated to the educative works, to the sick and to the poor, he gave with his simple way in directives, in such a way as to fully keep in parallel the human way of working and that sort of celestial touch with God.

One day a nicely girl was brought to the convent by her father, at sight, it was clear that she was not born for hard work. Father Luigi, thought, well we shall see her capabilities, but nonetheless, she didn't last more than two months.

There was need to work, there was need to attend the sick. But Jesus must remain alive and present amongst them.

Did you clean the feet of the sick? – would ask a sister to the first trials in the hospital. Yes, Father- she would reply. Did you also kiss their feet? The young sister remain struck dumb. It is easy to say, beautiful to say it, but to kiss them in reality was a very different thing. No my dear daughter, you must really kiss their feet, because they are Jesus's feet. You must see Jesus in your sick. To encourage her he would kiss their feet in her presences.

The saints have these “exaggerations”: the truth is that they take things seriously. If they say that Jesus is in the poor, they really see him in them.

The sisters of the first and second generations, those grown in their Father's shadow, were characterized by this double spirit of immolation – interior and exterior.

Those that didn't fall in the epidemics of cholera and smallpox – and they were many – they consumed themselves rapidly, almost burned by the flames of charity that their Father had lighted-up in their hearts.

### **In Christ's Mystery**

The ascetic and spiritual formation of Father Luigi was decisively Christ centric and in the sweet mystery of Christ gave the first place to the Eucharist.

With the Eucharist he cultivated the cult of the Cross, specially in the practise of the via Crucis that he would do everyday, going down and dragging his knees on the nude pavement, kissing the earth at every station elevating his arms wide open in contemplation and in prayer.

Exceptional was moreover his love and tenderness for Saint Joseph; he was a carpenter of Nazareth and master of the house. One of his statues was placed in the entrance and it still there. Father Luigi would sometimes put a bag around Saint Joseph's neck when things went wrong and would say, "Saint Joseph help us". He adored all three, Jesus, Mary and Joseph and this was a singular thing because he constructed a little church in Orzano in their honour and this is where he wanted to be buried. He would find all three in the Bethlehem cave and ideally in such a cave that in 1845 the Sisters of the Providence congregation was finally born. In 1837, this congregation had its pre-announcement.

### **Humbleness, Humbleness, Humbleness**

Mercy was the nourishment and breath of his should. True mercy that was the basis of this virtue and of all the virtues. But which first of all? Of humbleness.

Here Father Luigi plunged the plough in himself and in the sister's souls. He plunged it like Saint Filippo Neri did. There was once a sister that really liked appearance and did everything to always look neat and tidy towards others. One day, Father Luigi, had to conduct her with another sister to the hospital of Portogruaro. They travelled all the way with a horse carriage and this meant going through the dusty and dirty streets. One could imagine how dirty they would be upon their arrival. Who knows? Probably, this poor sister would reset herself prior to entering the hospital. What did Father Luigi do? When this sister resettled herself, he threw his old and faded cloak on her and would present her this way to her sisters. But up to here humility of the exterior has been treated. Father Luigi, above all wanted the interior humbleness. Sometimes he would appear very harsh and excessive in giving these humble tests. Sister Elena Zucolli and sister Cecilia Piacentini had tried his very harsh ways and both became Mother Superiors. If he acted this way with the sisters, he would have and did this first with himself.

Father Luigi totally succeeded in hiding himself, that with the death of his brother Father Carlo, no one thought of him as being the spiritual inheritor of his projects, but only of Father Pietro Benedetti. Father Luigi, was considered a very good hard worker but no more than this. His spiritual capacity could only be measured as the years passed by.

### **Liberty but only for Charity**

Lets go back in history. Maybe, back to the Venetian jurisdiction laws way back in 1766; for which the dying republic wanted to put their hands and noses in the ecclesiastic matters. Or maybe back to Maria Teresa, empress and queen and of his weird son Giuseppe II, nicknamed the "sacristan king". Or even Napoleon, which in some way had restored the Catholic religion – certainly not disinterestedly – went and searched in the martyrology for a Saint Napoleon martyr, and August 15<sup>th</sup>, feast of the Assumption of the Virgin – had ordered that the eulogy be kept of that Saint (in his name), instead of the Virgin Mary. Or even the emperor of Austria, Francesco I, declaiming himself – his imperial apostolic majesty – continued to be the sacristan nonetheless like Giuseppe II.

We can only think that the political upheavals, armies that went up and down, emperors and empresses that wanted Tedeum sung in the churches; today together, tomorrow apart without talking of the Popes dragged in prison, had caused towards the civil authorities, tiredness in the population and mistrust in the clergy. It was even worse if we could have seen the close authorities, the local government office workers and the so called half-sleeved, that passed from one regime to another, remaining far away and disdainful towards the religion and the church.

These people didn't think twice to put a spoke in the wheel of any Christian initiatives.

This is why we can understand that Father Carlo and Father Luigi wanted that their work be free from any government intrusions. They wanted to be able to freely and calmly move on the wings of faith of their promoters and of the spontaneous alms of the good Christians.

They were not embarrassed by any probable control, but what they didn't tolerate on a much high level, was the religious liberty and above all the jealous of the Christian charity liberty.

Father Luigi and Father Carlo struggled with the Austrian and Italian government to be left free in their charity work.

Father Luigi was ready to render unto Caesar that which is of Caesar. Respect, obedience and taxes. Father Luigi never begged and nagged anything to the civil authorities. If they gave him something he would gratefully accept it. He never asked.

With the arrival of the public schools in Primiero of Trento and in Cormons of Gorizia, there was the necessity that he obey the Austrian government dispositions and he was obliged that the some of the sisters obtain a teacher's diploma. Father Luigi obeyed.

In conclusion, Father Luigi never asked anything to anyone, but gave a lot to the society. He saved many young girls from destruction and he made these girls useful social elements. With regards to help, he was satisfied with anything he received by the Providence through the private charity. Above all the small change he received from the less wealthy, because the rich found this hard to do; and if they gave, sometimes very much, then it would have been more a trouble than a joy.

### **Under the canons fire**

Father Luigi was initially favourable of the Risorgimento motives. His deep down sense of justice saw him see with joy, the beginning of the peaceful revolution of 1848. Everyone has what he deserves, says the simple people and the devil deserves nothing.

Friuli was in Italy. If the Austrian would have left Italy and gone home in peace it would have been a blessing by God. But unfortunately it wasn't so. Udine was besieged and cannonades started. What did Father Luigi do? To the sisters that never had experienced the horrors of the war and were really dismayed, ordered that they recruit themselves in order to help all the people collected at the injured centre. To encourage them he put around his neck a sacred imagine and said: The Providence shall assist you all!

Amongst the orphans there was a crippled girl. He never forgot her. He placed her on a stretcher and near one of the more courageous sisters. He was everywhere encouraging and praying. The sisters improvised themselves as nurses and were admired by the whole city. They also assisted the Austrian Colonel Carlo Smola that broke his leg at gate Aquileia and he always cherished a vivid gratitude towards those angels of charity. In consequence of the risorgimento movement things went as they did. Father Luigi stood firm with the Pope. He admired and loved him even more when he was misunderstood and persecuted then at times of the hosanna.

He remained close to the Pope not only for indefectible ecclesiastic discipline, not only because he saw the impurities that polluted the national cause, but above all because – for another time – he intended to affirm the right and necessity of full practising liberty of the Pope. He never interfered nor did he know about politics or anything about jurisdiction matters.

In reality, he was yelling in a world of sectarians and deaf: Set Christ free and the person that represents him.

### **Without Bounds**

It is very natural that a congregation thinks to develop itself and to flourish their works.

Father Luigi didn't know these limits; he never knew what they were.

The only thing that he was worried about was to do good deeds and only good deeds; that they work for God's glory and the salvation of all the souls. Sure he attended with all his efforts to the Sisters of the Providence congregation or of Saint Zita, Institute for the deaf-mute – or others who offered. But he didn't retain that this horizon would have been exclusive.

He was very softhearted towards the old diocesan priests. Many times he tried to open an old people's home, but without results. He charged a young priest, father Luigi Costantini da Cividale, to buy a home on his account for such a purpose. It didn't work out, but just to have dreamed about it demonstrated how much his heart was open to all saint initiatives.

In 1877 it was thought to establish in Udine, a local catholic newspaper. There were three or four local anticlerical newspapers. In the notes of Father Luigi a piece of paper is conserved where by hand he numerated all the typographical characters of one page and the necessary expenses for the printing agency in Rome. The newspaper director of the "Il Cittadino Italiano", upon his death said that Father Luigi was one of their main upholders.

Amongst such woolliness of that time there was need of young people. So therefore, archbishop monsignor Casasola, calls from Venice father Giovanni Dal Negro in order for him to establish a charitable institution for the children. Afterwards a College was established "Giovanni da Udine" for youngsters of wealthy and middle class families. For such works a lot of money was needed. One of the first to give was father Luigi. And there he was signing bills upon bills.

He even assumed other people's commitments, provided that the works continued.

### **All of Jesus and all for Jesus**

Father Luigi was a healthy person. But however, he suffered from recurring rheumatic fevers, herpes, an ulcer wound in a leg that in his late years would often make him fall on the ground. He didn't cure himself nor did he want anyone to cure "his Father key brother". He cured himself with his knotted cord and whip.....

He didn't grant himself any hobbies, let say listen to music, to love literature or history, to pass sometime in the bird catching ground like many others did or spend some time to talk with other priests. Certainly not! Church and work, work and prayer, tirelessness without any parenthesis. Apart from the from the inspection and consolation journeys, one could have found him at the table writing letters or book keeping; in his "poor" study room, that was moreover a bazar where he would collect all that might have been useful, from nails to ropes...

Or he would make his good-natured, substantial and essential conferences to the sisters, especially to the novitiates, substituting himself to the sick Mother Superior. It must be noted that he left Father Fantoni to work as he wanted without any point of jealousy and was happy that the sisters considered Father Fantoni as their father. Or naturally one could have found him in front of the Holy or on his knees in front of the via Crucis. There was only one entertainment that we know of and that was to organize little shows that would cure himself, especially for carnival. Here he would invite the benefactors; he would invite his father which would have a really good time. Father Luigi would stay just for a while then he would go back to his study.

Father Luigi wanted to be and was all of Jesus. He ignored all the rest and for him this was of no importance. He wanted to repeat the words of Saint Paul: "I only know one thing, Jesus Christ and this cross".

### **.... but whisper, in life and in death**

The synthesis of the Scrosoppian spirituality is net and complete if to the total dedication another quality is added which is "whispering". Not only without clamorous manifestations, but with the precise will to love and search for concealing, to become neglected and to be put aside. He wanted a solid mercy not an ostentatious one.

When the Sisters of the Providence made their solemn entry in the Commons house at the beginning of 1866, Father Luigi was not present. He was only present some days prior to see that everything was in order. He didn't want to be present at the inauguration and o the eve he left for Udine.

He loved to live in the shadow – in the real sense of the word – of his brother Father Carl up on till his death in 1854.

There hasn't remained many of his oral traditions of the congregation sisters. There was one well formed tradition: that was that he loved the hided life and he taught everyone to love this. He had always insisted that one must operated and leave; but the first thing the put forth was "to keep quiet". But we can say to "be kept quiet". The love for hideness, which characterizes his whole life, also reflected in his burial dispositions. He made them prepare his funeral in the cappellina of Orzano, modelled on the church type of Nazareth. We can say that he wanted to see by himself, because he didn't trust his friends nor the sisters; who knows what chaos they would have Father around him. Who had observed what he did and thought it to be inopportune and that his "daughters" and those who admired him could not have gone frequently to pray on his grave and that the best burial place was in Udine were he carried out his apostolate. He replied: But I want to be buried in Orzano, in the peaceful and silence of the countryside where all the people can forget his poor sinner. What have I been if not a mishap. It is good therefore that as least when I'm dead I'm out of the way! The only thing that he wanted was to disappear, so that only God could be glorified.

### **Prodigies of the Providence**

We can ask ourselves if supernatural events ever occurred in Father Luigi's life. This man that put his hands on the plough and never looked behind himself, This man that renounced everybody and everything for God, didn't he receive some gifts those which seem to charism the soul of the saints? We shall only point out some things.

Of the so-called "prodigies of the Providence", the apostolate of Father Luigi had blossomed right from the beginning.

What could one do when he doesn't have bread, nor food nor money to give to the creditors? Nothing, but to go to church and pray. Pray Saint Gaetano, the saint with prodigious faith of the Providence; pray S. Giuseppe of which Father Luigi was very devoted to and considered him as a secure solver for every difficult situation; pray Mother Mary, which he called "the mother". Prayer, this is the great secret of the miracles!

A chain of testimonies narrated that he always sent the little girl orphans in the small church to pray and ask in the moment of need; and would resent them in the church to thank for the grace received.

He would also go as soon as he had time. And when God would put him to the test, by delaying a grace, he would sometimes go on the altar step and knock on the little tabernacle door.

One day sister Giovanna went to the granary to get some wheat for the miller, but there wasn't any wheat left. Se ran to Father Luigi to tell him that there wasn't wheat. Father Luigi said: Go to the granary and fill the sacks. The sister repeated: Father, there isn't anymore! He said to her – Go and see and you will find! The sister obeyed and she went. As soon as she opened the door and to her great surprise she saw the wheat in such a quantity. She filled the sacks and there was much more left.

Another episode is given directly from an ocular testimony: Angela Martinis that lived in Father Luigi's institute from 1865 to 1877.

"One day we were all together in the refectory for lunch; but the tables were unprepared, because there wasn't any food. What does our good Father do? He called us all together with such words as to be patient and confide in the divine Providence which all of us were deeply touched. We then prayed all together.

Within a few minutes a carriage full of all goods arrived to the institute. Promptly all the food was prepared and it was very good and plentiful. We lunched happily, thanked S. Gaetano and went in the backyard for recreation".

Short of money and wheat one of the sisters worried goes to Father Luigi. "Go" says Father Luigi, "take all the wheat that is needed, the Providence shall look over".

The sister obeys while Father Luigi after having prayed, hides a votive image of S. Gaetano under a small bulk of wheat which was left.

Within two month the new harvest was ready, but the sister went to the granary to get the wheat and this wheat never finished.

This phenomena ceased when the new harvest came.

Sometimes Tita the master builder would arrive to ask the salaries for these workers. Father Luigi would shake the alms-box and would reply with an eloquent silence – Lets pray together, Tita!

After praying, he would take the alms-box shake it and to their surprise there was money inside. Father Luigi confessed, "We have had very difficult moments, but the Providence never had abandoned us".

One of the powerful magnets of the divine Providence, is to forget ones needs and to think for the needs of others. Father Luigi knew this.

One day a man came to the House of the Derelitte to give a gold marengo to Father Luigi and sister Strazzolini followed him because she hand an urgency to use this money for the house. But when she went to Father Luigi, he, in the meanwhile gave this gold coin to a poor fellow. Please keep quiet sister, he said to her. Our God shall foresee. In fact after a short while an unexpected sum came (they didn't know from who) for the orphans and sisters.

Even strange recoveries didn't fail to come. Sister Angela Rodaro, mother superior of the Trento hospital, when wrapped in Father Luigi's cloak, recovers from rheumatic pains and she didn't suffer anymore from this.

Sister Filomena was about to die at Portogruaro, but Father Luigi says NO, you must get well and go to Udine and attend the silkworm factory. She totally recovers.

Prophecies? Sister Orsola Del Medico returns to Udine with sister Filomena and Father Luigi. Sister Filomena is well, but Father Luigi tells her frankly that she must prepare herself to go to Paradise. After a short while she dies.

He repeated to himself: "I will not die up on till I have completed 12 works – and this happened!

There were many happenings around Father Luigi – like donations from who knows where and mystical matters. When he would go into ecstasy he would be seen in different places at the same time like, Udine, Primiero, Tesero and Trento; most of the times when he was in ecstasy his body would lift itself from the ground – facts of levitation.

In one case we can talk about "luminescence" of his face. Another case was the so-called "mystical run". He was seen praying on his knees and an instant after was on the altar step praying with his arms wide opened – in the act of talking with someone – that Father Luigi was gifted with the intuitions of the hearts is well known. The director of the seminary monsignor Antivari, would often send the person of uncertain vocation to him. What Indias! What Indias! – says to one of the sisters that wanted to become a missionary – here is your India. Would say to one and to others the secret reasons of melancholy - would demonstrate to know passed things that no one of them had every expressed and concealed temptations or hidden escapades. Knowing and fearing of his gift, some of the persons would stay apart from him.

## **A Saint has died**

When Father Luigi died on Passion Thursday April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1884, at 10:40 p.m., all the city of Udine acclaimed him as a saint. His remains were exposed in the little church of Saint Gaetano. Immediately so many people gathered around him and wanted to get some pieces of his cloth or locks of his hair and the sisters were obliged to lift his coffin so that no one could disturb him.

The funeral mass was celebrated on Saturday morning by the general vicar monsignor Domenico Someda, who for many years was his confessor. Monsignor Someda publicly confessed his certainty that Father Luigi was now in heavenly glory.

The Catholic daily "Il Cittadino Italiano" wrote about his grave comparing it to those were pilgrims usually go. The masonic daily wrote such an eulogy never written before by them, concentrated on the charity that better describes the life of a saint; they were recognized as a true adversary and even more, a leader of the tolerant catholics. The same testimony was written by other non catholic dailies.

The death register of the Remanzacco parish which at that time depended Orzano, described the funeral as being a procession for a saint and expressly alluded to the hope that one day Father Luigi be placed amongst the saints.

The sisters and in Orzano started talking about some graces obtained by his intercession.

## **Graces and favours received**

A mother received the grace for the recovery of her only child after a triduum for imploring his intercession on Easter feast, April 15, 1884.

About one month later, a sixteen-month boy died and his father was so much afflicted that he tried suicide several times.

Mother Eletta Valussi ran to the grave of Father Luigi and implored him to obtain the Christian resignation for this poor man. In fact in that same hour this man became tranquil and the day after had the force to accompany his boy to the grave; showing himself so calm that he provoked such a surprise among his fellow-villagers that knew about his desperation.

In the summer holidays august – september 1884, in Orzano there was great talking about a recovery from a cancerous wound. This recovery was attributed to the prayers made on Father Luigi's grave.

The fame of Father Luigi's sanctity spread, spread as the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence expanded in various regions in Italy and in South America and with this expansion so was the devotion towards Father Luigi.

Invoked with faith he obtained from God many recoveries of various different sicknesses or in aid in difficult and severe situations. Many of these recoveries were accompanied by signed reports of the graced and by medical certifications.

The recovery was usually accompanied by conversion of numerous people that through Father Luigi had re-found that God that they strayed from.

Of these graces and favours, however, had been considered relatively lately; nevertheless, a hundred of them had been registered.

## **The Miracles**

On January 31<sup>st</sup> 1981, the cause of beatification of Father Luigi Scrosoppi had reached its goal with the acknowledgement of two miracles attributed to his intercession.

Who were the graced? One was a 21-year-old man and a 20-month baby boy.

In 1923, Rocco Sartorelli of Tesero a locality of Trento, at the age of 8 received a bad contusion in his left hand. At first, it seemed to be nothing but a contusion but after many treatments the terrible diagnosis was made: chronic fistulous osteomyelitis from probable TBC nature. Thirteen years of sickness, eight surgeries and repeated proposal for amputating the hand.

In 1934, however, when the young man encountered the mother superior of Tesero, a sister of the Providence, a hope had lightened him and his relatives: to invoke to God the recovery by intercession of Father Scrosoppi. From that date in intervals, a chorus of prayers made by his relatives and friends, guided by Rocco's mother, ascended directly to God.

It seemed that the prayers were not heard, because after the last medication dated June 6 1936, he was attended for surgery the morning after. He was lying on the surgery bed while his hand was being unbandaged to the surprise and astonished of the surgeon and all medical staff. Although the bandage was full of puss, Rocco's hand was completely healed. My holy Mother exclaimed the surgeon – but it's completely healed. He was sent to his room and after a few days he was working in the fields.

A little boy named Siro Marizzoli was perfectly born on September 2<sup>nd</sup> 1942 in Belgioioso a locality in Pavia. On October 11<sup>th</sup> he suddenly got sick. The doctor saw the seriousness of the illness and wanted a consultation with the director of the Paediatric clinic of the University of Pavia. This illness case was judged to be very serious. They suggested that he be placed in clinic but with little hope of surviving. The diagnosis was terrible: severe encephalitis (with bulbar phenomena). The attacks were continuous and so severe that the doctors suggested that the little boy be brought home to die; his father went and took all the dispositions for his burial.

One of the sisters of the Providence, a nurse in that wing had invited Siro's mother to pray God with Father Luigi's intercession. "If we obtain the grace" – she added - "will serve for his beatification".

His mother and father prayed. All the sisters of the Policlinic prayed. Suddenly, on October 16<sup>th</sup>, his general conditions got much better and on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, Siro left the clinic totally healed.

He grew-up healthy and studied. He became an accountant clerk and today he has his own family.

From those dates and on, the two families Sartorelli and Marizzoli with there new respective families, have never forgotten their devotion towards Father Luigi.

## **PRAYER**

*O merciful Father*

*That through our Lord Jesus Christ you support humanity  
With the gift of your Spirit, we thank you for the force to  
Love that you have granted to the Blessed Luigi Scrosoppi.*

*In him, we admire the light of the priesthood sanctity,  
the life appeal consecrated to you  
and the total dedication to the needy and weak.*

*With trust we ask you that in the Church, the sanctity of your ministers be radiated, the  
flourishing of the presbyterate and religious vocations  
And to affirm the choices of serving the poor.*

*Amen*

### **Father Luigi becomes a mendicant**

The house of the Derelitte was going through a tough period: the balances were depended on the population and the "benefactors" tired, seemed to have forgotten that, between those walls the needy were the same every day; the economic scarcity were becoming very painful, the girls got thinner and Father Carlo and Father Luigi were asking themselves how to keep everything afloat.

What the two brothers had in mind was not a big house but a small one that looked on the street and that was 17 metres in front and 5 meters in height and 8 metres in depth. In the back there was a yard which they could grow vegetables for their girls. Everything was goodly organized with a pinch of fantasy and improvisation: the granary, for example, was used as the dormitory. In the countryside surroundings the girls, joyful and vivacious, despite the melancholy name "derelitte", would jump around never fed up of bread, games and love.

The owner of the property was a certain Mrs. Paola Florenzis. At the beginning of the 1800's the property was passed on to the Casa delle Convertite, but from 1815 to 1822 the rent was paid by a count Alvisè Ottelio, so that his name as the benefactor had remained bonded to the institute, known also as the "work of Ottelio". When the contract lease had expired, Father Carlo had become the director of the Derelitte, he burden himself with the payment of the rent which was punctually paid every six months- from January 31<sup>st</sup> to July 31<sup>st</sup>.

Father Carlo, therefore, paid the rent and was the director of the institute: Father Luigi in the meanwhile was suffering and was taking to heart all the problems of the little girls. This house represented the only protection and friendship that they had. At this point all those faces of the girls didn't visit his thoughts occasionally, but were present everyday, because he was no more a visitor but one of the responsible of the institute.

The institute must restart to live. Father Carlo attempted to have some economic help from the Austrian government. Father Luigi did something more: he personally paid for a series of gestures he did.

It was on March 1829, a bitter and windy beginning of spring in the serene countryside of Udine that only some passes away had the mountains. During that season that had the flavour of the beginning of spring, Father Luigi learned a new "job": put forth his hand as the poor mendicant along side the city and countryside streets. He would ask money, bread, all sorts of vegetables and meat: this later was the one the young girls were in need of. He asked dominating his redness: Udine was his city and at every angle of every street he would encounter people who knew him. He would receive unbelieving and mocking glimpses, and the gang of youth whistles would be his daily bread. On all the faces it was possible to read the same question: Father Luigi that young calm priest that came from a wealthy family, with excellent manners and a life without adventures nor radicalisms – was he becoming insane?

Every step he made in the streets of Udine was becoming in such a way, a break from his tranquil past and a calm challenge to the orderly mentality of the conventional thinkers; a victory in the imitation and in the misfortunes of the humble God.

He would return home with his one horse carriage full of presents and he would see the young girls run towards him and cling to his cassocks: "Father Luigi, give us something". That confident yelling recompensed him of the bitterness he swallowed along his itineraries.

In Udine the people would whisper and laugh; the people of the countryside had become more rude: that unconventional mendicant was becoming a contradiction sign: he would encounter generosity replies and insults and they were two different rich genders that Father Luigi was patiently accumulating. One day, in a little town near Udine, a certain person that

Father Luigi reverted to gave him a slap: Father Luigi for his hot and impulsive nature – succeeding in smiling to him: “This is good for me, but what will you give me now for my little orphans? The man didn’t accept such a reaction from him and he became red. That day, Father Luigi’s one horse carriage was more full of things then before and many presents were given by that hand that slapped Father Luigi.

Father Luigi spent his force and temperament in this way; persevering in his unsafe journeys. Nonetheless, while his charity calling brought results to his intimate, he had a strange stop: towards 1830, Father Luigi somehow thought of detaching what he had undertaken.

There was a capuchin convent not too far from the house of the Derelitte. He would often pass by there and during his passing he thought of the Franciscan spirituality that had fascinated him.

Mendicant for the Derelitte, but was still the protected son of Mrs. Antonia and he felt the fracture that was coming in his life: he had entered a demanding path and had dared to use a new behaviour, but in the evening he would go back to his paternal home, finding his antique ways and the calm human values that all of a sudden seemed a limit to the freedom of the spirit.

The frock, a rule, a comunitary life oriented towards the search of perfection had repaid Luigi’s anxiety. This would have been a safety on his journey of the evangelic integrity of which this young man attended with great fire and patience.

Then slowly this thought transformed: Father Luigi deeply understood his vocation. Father Luigi understood that he must open all the ways by himself and that this was his task.

He understood that his real point of referring in his life was not the capuchin’s convent but that little house that was not too far away. Where in that granary the winter wind would whisper through, would find sleep those most unprotected human beings of Udine. The abandoned girls: this first love of Father Luigi, wasn’t it maybe, a rule and a vocation?

In that time he would write in two big books where he collected all reflections and news that interested him. At the voice “vocation” we find some revealing lines:

“To become saints it is not necessary to retreat in religion or in hermits. Saint Agostino in a sermon made to the religious in the desert, said: He we are in solitude; nonetheless, nor the prayers nor the liturgical songs makes us saints, but it is the good deed practice that makes the place and us saints. If in fact the places could sanctify who lives in them, nor man nor angel would have precipitated from their dignity”.

The idea of sanctity formulated up till now may seem in contrast with the image that one day, the people may make of Luigi Scrosoppi; attentive and alert in the smallest particulars of all the rules. Tenaciously bound to the letter that cherishes the spirit.

From the lines that we have read, we can see all his interior vocation not for this more soft; on the contrary, deeply exigent and tied to an integral donation. Slowly detaching himself from his Franciscan dream, Father Luigi meditated on this reality. Maybe suffering for having renounced that humble horizon of perfection that was suggested to him by the images of the convent? His ministry was intended to be developed in straight contact with the world and towards the most poor: it took an hour of evidence that illuminated his entire life. His gradual and radical renunciation of all earthly things made him take a decision in 1830, from a serene and bright comprehension that it is not the place that renders a person saint, but to “operate well sanctifies the place and us”.

## Birth of the Congregation

Under the guide of Father Luigi the small group of young teachers were working seriously. But however a precise problem was present: was it convenient to maintain the first project? Or to be oriented towards a new minimum congregation, born for the work of the Derelitte, from it – for it?

In a first moment, the autonomy aim remained clear only for Father Luigi; he had the desire to take the first steps for the constitution of a new congregation, even if he shared Father Carlo's project with regards to some existing religious families, in particular the Rosminiane. In fact, as we said, Father Carlo remained with the idea to entrust all to the religious of another name. There could have been a split-up inside the House, if Father Luigi didn't renounce his way of seeing things, up on till the same circumstances – the Providence – had guided Father Carlo according to the same light. Silence and difficult collaboration at times heroic; uncertain slow years that, one year after the other, saw the events maturing according to wills unforeseen by man.

Lets go back a little in time for reconstructing all the moments of this evolution: the first attempt to entrust the House to another religious congregation is to be traced at the period of the reconstruction of the building; In 1835 Father Carlo had some contacts with Maddalena di Canossa, founder of the "Daughters of Charity" of Verona; and agreed with her to entrust the house, as soon as the works were completely finished. The agreement was reached and was precise; but Maddalena di Canossa died in that same year and so did the agreement that was so dear to Father Carlo. One year later, Father Carlo talked about this problem to a sister named Marianna Teresa Cossali of the S. Vito al Tagliamento monastery.

Sister Cossali started the negotiations with the religious order, but those negotiations didn't undergo the desired way. The requested sisters would have dedicated themselves to the refined education of the rich girls and more, they had the obligation of the monastery and of their solemn vows. How can they be put together with the country teachers of the Derelitte, which are daily supple; in the house of the Providence with its makeshift chapel with its door always open for the gifts and the need of charity?.

Father Carlo nostalgically thought of the sisters of Maddalena of Canossa and took contact with the Mother Superior, sister Angela Bragato; but the agreement reached with the later Maddalena di Canossa was never renewed.

In 1840 a hope was announced of a vocation bearer of all those elements of which the community was lacking; experience already matured in the religious life, complete education, remarkable personality. Giovanna, in the world countess Giulia di Colloredo, relative of the first government officer of the Derelitte, count Fabio Colloredo. She had been a dismissed sister for so many years and she decided to leave for reasons unknown to us. When Giovanna decided in 1841 to enter the Derelitte, it looked like that through her a certain transformation and community growth would have happened; her arrival for the religious group was a great day of hope.

Margherita Gaspardi's, the mother with grey hair, disinterested and humble, who had guided the group up till then, was ready to give her resignations and to leave her place to the newly sister. Her generous gesture arose admiration; very touched, the bishop of Lodi, personally intervened to ask that her task as the mother superior be prolonged; in reality, Giovanni Colloredo became mother superior only on March 18, 1842, after getting familiar with the new environment and acquainted with the personalities of the other sisters.

It was the eve of Saint Giuseppe; the saint most dear to Father Luigi had personally in silence attended to the authority transition lived in the spirit of service. A little bit of apprenticeship was necessary even for Giovanna Colloredo and maybe she never closely touched the fatigue and poverty during her religious experiences.

Then suddenly everything was starting to work serenely; while the presence of the mother superior gave a new work impulse, nevertheless, without revealing that constructive capacity that defines formation force in which Father Carlo and Father Luigi had hoped.

Sister Giovanna Colloredo had brought a sort of cultural and social distinctions; but contemporarily new sisters were entering in the Derelitte house, that, as the “first” sisters were fresh daughters of the population, without any dowry nor education than that of the heart. We know very little of their past; we only know that they were young and enthusiastic and constituted the real backbone of the institute, many were “selected” by Father Luigi according to his characteristic logics. He wanted to find the most humble and poor, aiming to a precise dowry; the faith and the capacity to love with sacrifice and to live in the Derelitte framework, which could have daunted anyone that didn’t take it seriously. Father Luigi maybe knew that the only young girls that were already tempered by a tough life could have happily persisted.

Orsola Baldasso, of which we have talked about before, was the first of a true party; two young Carnic girls entered in the institute in 1837-38 and they brought a note of rough sincerity; Giovanna Ariis, tertiary, and Maddalena Morassi, lay sister. Maddalena had a clear mountain type voice and would fill the house with her simple songs that sometimes would arrive to bother the other people in the institute...but her spontaneity disarmed the impatient that sometimes would scold her.

In 1842, after the nomination of sister Giovanna Colloredo, Father Luigi made another of his “selections”, which is a singular example of his supernatural intuition of the souls. One day he saw a girl at the door who was teasing: maybe he intended to talk to her or maybe he knew who she was, but he never got close to her; he reverted some words to her, he invited her to collaborate in the Derelitte house.

Giovanna, that was her name, she was used to being ignored and avoided, because the mentality of that time considered her disabled – she was the daughter of unknown people. She never thought about entering a religious order, because that step in her condition was seriously difficult. Seeing that she was invited with such simplicity, at first she tried to resist, but Father Luigi had understood that Giovanna in reality was made to live that life. She dedicated herself to the agricultural work, to the silkworms and to all the simplest activities. Her contribution was a particle of many particles which would have built the house of the orphans; who better then her would have understood? Giovanna was the first to dedicated herself with enthusiasm to the other young girls who she saw herself and her suffering.

The forth novice of Father Luigi was Domenica Batigello, who entered in 1844; she remained a tertiary all her life in order to mendicate food for herself, thus leaving more food available for orphans that were hungry; a commitment that didn’t need any skills, but a big heart, humbleness and the readiness of sacrifice. Domenica had these virtues and her years passed without any fatigue. This is how the institute was structured: the agriculture assigned to sister Giovanna, the search for alms assigned to sister Domenica, the kitchen and housekeeping to sisters Maddalena and Giovanna Ariis: Orsola Baldasso, then, the first of this group, fulfilled her jobs with such pure energy. Such were the novice of Father Luigi, the “infantry” that he established and accepted with agreement the directives given by Giovanna Colloredo, the mother superior. The domestic reality of the new institute began by the encounter of one sister with another, in the shadow of the strong concordance between Father Carlo and Father Luigi, which were the first to give the perfect example of fraternity and Christian collaboration.

Father Carlo and Father Luigi had therefore hoped in sister Giovanna Colloredo to spiritually bind the growing group; on the other hand, a short while after her office of Superior, they restarted to search for an adult congregation that would fully step in the works; they reverted this time to the group of nuns bound to a great personality. The sisters of the Providence founded by Antonio Rosmim.

Antonio Rosmim, although not having as yet reached the heights in thoughts and activity, was considered an authoritative figure in Italy during the 1800. Father Carlo had the occasion to

meet him various years before, when he came to Udine and had founded the group of the "Society of Friends": in fact, Father Carlo Filafarro was the promoter and director. Therefore a solid bound already was existing, founded on a personal knowledge and an experience of collaboration between Antonio Rosmin and the brother of Luigi Scrosoppi. The bishop held the idea of the transferring, his approval didn't wait, and while obtaining the consent of the imperial court was way longer. That delay seemed to be an increasing difficulty and a heavy obstacle; in reality, the period between the project and its activation permitted the maturing of the new events, which in some way changed the ideas of the two priests of Udine.

In the first place a fact of political and bureaucratic orders. The Sardinian provenance of the Rosminiane sisters and the figure of their founder, disliked from Austria, would have made the life of the Derelitte institute more difficult and would have put into danger that autonomy (which was so important to the brothers) from government interfering.

The failure of this project didn't displease the sisters. The majority of which didn't desire to be absorbed by another congregation and had also expressed to abandon the Derelitte house, if so would have happened.

It was at this point that Father Luigi moved by the Holy Spirit, understood that in that situation all evident project signals came from the Providence.

Father Carlo a man of faith and humbleness, in the project failure saw God's will and was his intuition to leave to his brother, Luigi the hard mission to mould that little group of sisters and to give life to a new religious family.

From this moment the paternal commitment more delicately and seriously weighs on Father Luigi. Father Carlo, is beside him with his experience and his collaborations evident above all in the writing up of the first "General Rules for the Sisters of the Derelitte Institute", printed in 1848.

On September 10<sup>th</sup> 1845, expiry date of the three-year mandate, sister Giovanna Colloredo renounced the charge of mother superior. She silently returned with her cultural and experience to the sister's rank. The congregation of Udine was finally constituted on Christmas of the same year: "authorized from the Ordinary Diocesan" fifteen sisters put on the brown dress and on the same day eleven of them "without obligating themselves to vows, firmly proposed to observe with their might the three virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience", under the protection of Saint Gaetano of Thiene, chosen as the family friend in a touching ceremony for its simplicity.

Very hard and difficult times from February 1<sup>st</sup> 1837 to December 25<sup>th</sup> 1845. However, this experience made them stronger than ever and were ready to spiritually abandon themselves in what God had foreseen for them.

### **The Elderly Sisters**

A spring of fresh and pure water spurts up there from the rocks in between the mountain; bouncing and sprouting from rock to rock and while running and singing to the shadow of the pines. It increases on its path; but its travel is always brave and the chant increases. It is necessary that at a certain moment, at the bottom of the valley, the force subdues and the wave runs more calmly and yet always fertile between the short riverbank and therefore between the powerful riverbanks. Heaven help if it would continue impetus from the spring!

It fell on Mother Cecilia Piacentini, elected mother superior on October 12 1880, to canalise the congregation and give it a secure and constant rhythm according to the constitution rules definitively approved by the Holy See in 1892. She was therefore, justly called the "co-founder" in the beautiful biography written by sister Margherita Makarovic. But here I wish to recall one by one the spring sisters, those that in traditional speech are called the "Elderly Sisters".

I wish to recall one by one. But what can I write in a short article, though only a cold list of names, which would not say anything to the leader and wouldn't know the figures of these heroines?

In truth, I have remembered some of them in my preceding articles. Like sister Orsola of the donkey, or sister Filament the little porters, or the “dragon” sister Hosanna, or the “Providence porter” sister Dominica, or the humble sister Giovanna taken away from her sadly condition and elevating her as Christ’s bride. Minutely studying the life of Father Luigi, it happened that I would dwell sometimes – I wish to say without any alternatives – to contemplate the sisters that lived with him and I remained enchanted. Maybe it was Father Luigi who made me make these “stops” to admire his dear spiritual sisters. But I was searching for Father Luigi’s impressions in the sisters.

In 1942, in the mist of war, I went to Tertian in the Mother House of the Orienting. Since I returned alive from Russia, I proposed myself to develop a small hospital in Frilly – which has blossomed today in S. Maria la Longer – the smaller House of F. Ozona, born between my hands in 1933. I wanted to ask Father Strip if he would have accepted. While I was waiting for him I fixed my sight on the image of Father Orion (servant of God), which was not the first time I saw this image. Later that day I went to the orphanage, which at that time was besides the Madonna Della Guardia Sanctuary.

It is impossible to live along side with a saint for such a long time without receiving somewhat of an impression of his powerful spirit. This is what happened to those ventured sisters which Father Luigi formed and moulded.

If I tried to imagine all the sisters, I could only but only see Father Luigi.

There were the sisters of the “first generation” up on till the death of Father Carlo (1854), or of the mother superior Lucia De Giorgio (1855), which can be called “the pioneers of the Heroine spring”. The “second generation”, from 1855 to 1872, where the vocation blossomed and tempered itself in difficult and tough times. The “third generation”, from 1872 to 1875, grew-up in a serene and calm period.

The first group that from 1837 to Christmas 1845 – exclusively formed by young common girls who knew how to handle needle and thread or to use the carpet beater, but they didn’t know how to use a pen and ink; they were always ready to work hard in their worn out habits, nourished simply more of mortifications rather than maize porridge. They rested on big straw sacks or paper bags.

Nevertheless, the Elderly Sisters, those that were impressed by Father Luigi, remained strongly characterized by some dowries and virtues: an antique faith, indefatigable works, golden simplicity in doing and thinking (and speaking), a to the bone poverty and a spirit of sacrifice.

Are these not the lines of Father Luigi? Wasn’t there in every girl his “essentiality” and “authenticity”? Christ, work, humbleness and his simplicity: This is all and it’s enough!

### **The First Swarms of the Providence Sisters**

Primiero, Fiera di Primiero, today wish to say many things: names that recall various well-known touristic stations, frequented by numerous people. In that period, that is to say around 1865, the surrounding nature was in its total splendour and it was intact; not invaded by vacationers or skiers. However in this area there were neither streets nor hotels and only a few houses scattered around which were difficult to reach.

The city of Primiero counted about 1000 souls, one church and even a small hospital. There was an original priest – of fervent and beautiful spirit – Father Giuseppe Sartori.

Father Giuseppe Sartori was the hospital director and the patients would range from 4 to 5.

Oh don't believe that there wasn't any sick people in Primiero. The reason was another. The hospital was merely kept and was disgusting to the people.

A poor man didn't have anyway of curing himself, because he just couldn't. When someone in the family had to go to the hospital – this person would have rather wanted to go directly to the cemetery – because they were so alike.

The poor priest was sincerely displeased for this, but really, with his mere possibilities at hand couldn't resolve these problems. Someone talked to him about certain sisters founded by Father Luigi Scrosoppi and this "someone" was nonetheless than monsignor Teloni, the great preacher invited in Primiero for a mission.

Father Sartori was so impressed by the description of these sisters that he couldn't even sleep and thought that his could resolve his problem. On October 18, he wrote to the mother superior Teresa Fabris asking for help and his request was granted. Mother Teresa on Oct. 25 wrote to the bishop of Trento asking for his approval and blessing. He rewrote praising one and the other advising that there was the need of the pontifical approval of the sisters and the consent on behalf of the Austrian government.

They had the first document, but to obtain the second document a cousin of Father Sartori residing in Innsbruck got in charged and everything went on smoothly; then all of a sudden the file got tangled up bureaucratically but for a short time. In the whole, everything went well enough.

It was clear that the air of the Providence was blowing.

On February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1866, four sisters guided by the vicar general and accompanied by the blessing of their co-sisters, moved from Udine to reach Fonzaso.

The greetings and blessings were very touching and the departing sisters felt similar to our astronauts of today; at that time three days were needed to arrive from Udine to Primiero. The first day they took a train up-to Treviso and there they stayed for the night. The second day they took a stagecoach up-to Feltre where they took the "rapid" one up-to Fonzaso; when they arrived to Fonzaso they stayed over night. They awoke on the third day and started the adventure.

They searched for the alpine guide which would have pilot them on foot or on donkeys up and down the mountains.

The sisters walked till they could, exchanging glances without making any comments: Were we going? The landscape would open and close in front of them.

The "donkey train" that is to say the donkeys would follow the procession and when the group arrived to the mountain the moment came for the big decision: each sister had to chose an animal. Naturally none of the five sisters had ever rode before and the first experience near a ravine was not encouraging.

Someone wanted to walk others were encouraged: they were travelling for God, they were doing this only for him; he would have protected them.

Therefore with a divine thought gave them that great courage and all of a sudden their good humour exploded from those pure souls.

The priest was enchanted. In spite of his good humour, Father Sartori had lived days of anxiety. What will they say – he thought – these sisters which live in the city, now will find themselves in the mountains where everything is lacking? and he recommended himself to the Providence. The Providence was replying, because those sisters were what Father Sartori was in need of. He thanked Father Luigi and God from the bottom of his heart for having moulded such sisters, which were always open to sacrifice.

Finally after many stunts they arrived at the Austrian boundary. Only then they felt as queens when they rode the carriage, which passed through the villages called Imer and Mezzano. As per a spell the people united themselves on the sister's passage.

The church bells were ringing and people fired firecrackers. The good countryside people never saw sisters of charity and celebrated them with great touching enthusiasm.

When they arrived in Primiero, they saw green triumphal arcs with written greetings. They never thought of receiving such a hospitality. Finally they arrived to the hospital. There was absolutely nothing. The people greeted the sisters in their houses and after 8 days were able to accommodate themselves in the hospitals.

In the hospital they found 4 patients and 1 assistant. The patients were very happy to see that they had five sisters to cure them. It was the beginning of a new era for that hospital. Father Sartori executed the administration affair, the necessary expense in order to transform the poor rooms in a regular hospital and little by little the finances started to flow-in. Many years were needed, but the miracle came true: the 6 – 7 bed hospital was transformed in 60 beds and all were occupied.