

FOUNDERS



Beato LUIGI GUANELLA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Brother Roger Shultz (1915-2005)

A SAINT OF OUR TIME

Chiara Lubich (1920-2008)

A LIFE FOR UNITY

Henri-Pierre Grouès (The Abbé Pierre 1912-2002)

FAREWELL, ABBÈ PIERRE, PROPHET OF WEAKNESS

Saint John of God (1495-1550)

THE IMPULSIVE LOVER

Saint Aloysius Guanella (1842-1915)

NOAH'S ARK

Fr. Luigi Giussani (1922-2005)

HUNGRY FOR BEAUTY

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Brother Roger Shultz (1915-2005)

A SAINT OF OUR TIME

A strange and unexpected tragedy ended the long life of Brother Roger Shultz, the founder of the ecumenical “monastery” of “Taize”. An icon to tens of thousands of youth, humble and stubborn, childlike and cunning, mystical and realistic, he was a pioneer in the ecumenical field and never wavered in his self-imposed lifelong mission: to work towards the reconciliation of all Christians.

Tears of the sky

Thousand of people, most of them young, gathered in Taize’, in France, on Tuesday, August 23, 2005, for the solemn funeral of Brother Roger Shultz, the founder of the “ecumenical monastery” of the same name and an internationally renown religious figure who had fallen victim of a deranged woman only a week before. Brother Roger’s sudden and tragic death was a shock to the whole world but especially to many hundreds of World Youth Day pilgrims who were spending some days at Taize’ on their way to Cologne and to their first encounter with newly elected Pope Benedict XVI.

The crowd in the hills of Eastern France, under leaden and showery skies, reflected the spirit, and also the popularity, of Brother Roger Shultz. Notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather, the atmosphere was festive even if subdued. Eventually about fifteen thousand people gathered in and around the huge monastery chapel.

Brother Roger’s simple coffin, a wooden icon lying upon it, was carried into the church by the Taize’ brothers. It was followed by a group of Romanian children who had been visiting the community when Brother Roger was killed.

Although Roger Shutz was a Protestant, he received a Catholic funeral in accordance with his own wishes. Brother Roger had pursued many ecumenical dreams during his long life, but in death one of them came true: his funeral was a Catholic mass presided over by Cardinal Walter Kasper, the president of the Vatican's Council for the Unity of Christians. Brother Roger's many friends, including President Horst Kohler of Germany and the retired archbishop of Paris, Jean-Marie Lustiger, attended the liturgy.

During his homily, Cardinal Kasper said: "Yes, the springtime of ecumenism has flowered on the hill of Taizé". In this way repeating a famous expression of Pope John XXIII, his first meeting with Brother Roger, many years before.

"She does not know what she did"

Ninety-year old Brother Roger had been mortally stabbed by a Romania woman on Tuesday, April 17. The attack took place at around nine in the evening, during vespers, in the Reconciliation Church when more than 2,500 youths were present. According to the reconstruction of the crime, the woman managed to gain access to the brothers' choir; she approached Brother Roger and knifed him three times in the neck and in the back. At first, no one noticed anything: the victim remained seated and it was only after a while that people became aware of the pouring blood.

Bro. Roger was taken home where efforts by a doctor from among the crowd to assist him proved useless. Brother Roger died immediately afterwards. Romanian officials and acquaintances of Luminita Solcan, 36, said that she was a highly intelligent woman who had plunged into paranoia and religious mania after the death of her father seven years before and had been turned away by several convents. During the funeral, Brother Roger's successor, Fr. Alois Lesser, a Roman Catholic priest from Germany, prayed for forgiveness: "With Christ on the cross we say to you, Father, forgive her, she does not know what she did".

A dream become true

The Taizé' monastic community encompasses at present more than 100 members from 30 countries and virtually every major Christian denomination, with a presence also in Brazil, Senegal and South Korea. The

four Roman Catholic priests from among the members concelebrated the funeral Mass with Cardinal Kasper.

Pope Benedict, in his message, called the killing: “A very sad piece of news which touches me all the more in that I received only yesterday a moving letter from him. “The Pontiff also revealed: “In the letter that Brother Roger wrote, he had expressed the desire to come to Rome as soon as possible to meet with me and to tell me that the Taize’ community wished to walk along in communion with the Holy Father. “The pope included: “We know for sure that Brother Schutz is in the hands of God’s everlasting kindness and love; he has reached eternal joy”.

The generous words of Benedict XVI remind us of a circumstance that did not escape the attention of the world media: the protestant Brother Roger received Communion from the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger at Pope John Paul II’s funeral in St. Peter’s Square. Although intercommunion is forbidden at Taize’ – only Catholic Priest are allowed to celebrate the Eucharist – characteristically, even during Brother Roger’s funeral, communion was given to all the people who came for it without discrimination. Was it carelessness or culpable negligence of Church laws? I don’t think so. I think that, perhaps, exceptionally, just for once, Brother Roger’s dream became true for all!

Under the shadow of the great Cluny

Roger Schutz was born in the Swiss Jura, in 1915, the youngest son of a Lutheran pastor and a French protestant mother from Burgundy. As a young man, he showed an interest in Catholic spiritual writers, like Blaise Pascal and others. When he began his theological studies at the University of Lausanne, he chose as the subject for his thesis: “Is Saint Benedict’s ideal of the monastic life in conformity with the Gospel?”

In 1940, he visited the village of Taize’, in Burgundy, only a 10-minute drive from Cluny, the size Europe’s largest and best-known monastic abbey before its destruction during the French Revolution. With the idea of founding a protestant monastic community, he bought two derelict houses and there he started helping the war victims: abandoned children, Jews fleeing Nazi persecution on their way to Switzerland, members of the resistance.

He was forced to flee from the Gestapo in 1942, after being denounced to the collaborationist Vichy regime. Back in Switzerland, he was joined by a group of ecumenically minded friends among whom Max Thurian, “theologian” of the Swiss Reformed Church. Together with them he returned in 1944 to Taize to set up a community. As he explained: “I discovered my Christian identity by reconciling within myself my protestant origins and my faith in the Catholic Church”.

Five years later, the first brothers took the three traditional monastic vows, in a slightly modified form: celibacy, sharing of possessions and acceptance of authority. Brother Roger drew up the first rule of Taize’, which was summed up in the phrase: “Preserve at all times an interior silence to live in Christ’s presence and cultivate the spirit of the Beatitudes: joy, simplicity, mercy.” The community did not seek official recognition, and although it was viewed with suspicion by the mainstream churches, both protestant and Catholic, it grew rapidly. The brothers numbered 12 in 1950, 65 in 1965.

In 1969, the head of the French hierarchy, Cardinal Marty, authorized Catholics to join the community. Today, Catholics are in the majority and some protestant felt that Taize’ has sold out to the Catholic Church. Brother Roger never concealed his Catholic sympathies. He always defended clerical celibacy and even accepted the “universal ministry of the Pope” in the perspective of a reunited Church.

The attraction of a Catholic Mass

Brother Roger was on excellent terms with Rome. John XXIII defended the community when he was nuncio in France and, when he became Pope, he invited Roger and Max Thurian to attend the Second Vatican Council as observers. Pope John Paul II visited Taize’ in 1986, “impelled”, as he put it, “by an interior need”. He congratulated the members of the Taize community for “desiring to be themselves a “parable of unity”.

If Brother Roger never concealed his inclination towards the Catholic Church, yet he never took the final step to join in, thinking that his vocation was to remain on the threshold in order to be a bridge-maker for his protestant brothers or maybe because he did not think necessary to renounce his roots in order to be in union with the Catholic Church. That was not the

Chiara Lubich (1920-2008)

A LIFE FOR UNITY

Chiara Lubich, who died aged 88, was one of the most inspiring and influential women in world Catholicism. During her long life, she witnessed the grassroots religious movement she founded in her native Italy during World War II, the "Focolare", grow under her leadership to encompass 2 million adherents in 182 countries and open its ranks to non-Catholics and also non-Christians. Small in stature, a gifted speaker and best-selling author of many spiritual books, she was guided by her conviction that Jesus was alive in the world. Her loyalty to the Church and her determination to follow the example of the crucified and forsaken Christ, made her an icon of unity in a world torn by division.

A "song to the love of God."

That is how Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Pope's secretary of state, defined the life of Chiara Lubich, the foundress of the Focolare Movement, at her funeral, on March 19 2008, in Rome, at the basilica of St. Paul 's Outside the Walls. She had died on Friday, March 15, in her home near Rome, at age 88. Thousands of people participated in the Mass, including many Christians of other confessions, and people of other creeds or no faith at all. Many more people throughout the world followed the ceremony as it was broadcast live by many television networks.

There were three carnations on Chiara's coffin, alluding to the day she decided to consecrate herself to God in the chapel of the Capuchin college of Trent, her hometown. That day was Dec. 7, 1943, and Chiara bought three carnations on her way to class, to leave them at the foot of the crucifix.

Cardinal Bertone concluding his homily gave thanks to the Lord for her testimony, "for her prophetic intentions that have preceded and prepared the great changes and the extraordinary events that the Church lived in the 20th

century. The foundress of the Focolare movement, with her silent and humble style, didn't give origin to charitable works of human promotion but gave herself totally to the task of enkindling the fire of God's love in the hearts of people".

Pope Benedict XVI wrote in the telegram of participation: "There are many reasons to give thanks to the Lord for the gift he has given to the Church in this woman of intrepid faith, a meek messenger of hope and peace, the initiator of a great spiritual family that extends across multiple fields of evangelization".

Only Mother Teresa of Calcutta could match Chiara's influence as a woman in the Church. Both addressed synods of the world's bishops, and both caught the imagination of the world even outside the Catholic Church, but while the Albanian nun founded traditional male and female religious orders, carrying out charitable works, Chiara leaves behind what was, in its time, one of the pioneering lay movements in the Church, and an organization that joins a deep spirituality to the commitment to social justice and ecumenism.

While the bombs were falling...

In the final years of World War II, Trent, a town in Northern Italy, still under German occupation, endured heavy Allied bombing. With death staring them in the face, Chiara and some other young women her companions felt the urgency of penetrating to the heart of the Christian message by closely studying the gospels.

By candle-light in a makeshift air-raid shelter, they discovered the biblical phrase that was to be their inspiration for the next 60 years: "That all may be one" (John xvii, 21). Unity, achieved through mutual love, became the watchword of the group from that day on. Not surprisingly, the practice of reading the New Testament drew accusations of Protestantism and the predilection for the word "unity" aroused suspicions of communism.

When the cold wind blows and snow is on the ground, the mountain people take refuge in the warmth of a log-fire that burns lively in the hearth: "Focolare" is the Italian word for hearth and this is the name that Chiara gave to their group that used to gather to read the Gospel and find strength

and consolation in it. And “Focolare” remained the name of the whole movement.

But already Chiara had set her sights on far more ambitious goals. For her, “That all may be one” could mean nothing less than the unity of all mankind. It was her vision and single-mindedness that propelled the astonishing growth of the nascent community. By the end of the 1940s Focolare had spread throughout Italy; in the next decade it fanned out across Europe and by the end of the 1960s it had reached every continent.

But Chiara never saw her movement as of a purely religious nature. As early as 1948, when she moved the Focolare headquarters to Rome, she visited the Italian parliament where she met Igino Giordani, a founding member of the Christian Democratic Party. Giordani, who had a lifelong fascination with St Catherine of Siena, saw in this young provincial woman a 20th-century Catherine, whose ideas would influence not only the Church but also the political and social fields. Then in his fifties, the veteran politician became Chiara's most devoted follower and was regarded by her as a co-founder of the movement.

The Italian Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi, he himself from Trent and one of the founding fathers of the European Union, was also impressed, becoming a disciple. Much later this aspect of Chiara's activities resulted in a new school of economics - the Economy of Communion, which applied the movement's practice of sharing material goods to business enterprises - and the International Political Movement for Unity, which encouraged cross-party collaboration and drew such political luminaries as Romano Prodi, the last Italian Prime Minister, who collaborated with Lubich on a number of projects.

A life profile

Chiara was born Silvia Lubich, the second of four children, in Trent, Northern Italy, in 1920. Her mother was a devout Catholic, her father a socialist who lost his job in the Mussolini era. She had to postpone university plans to keep the family afloat. In 1939, when she was nineteen, she visited Loreto to take part in a Catholic students' rally. It was there, within the walls of the Holy House darkened with age, in silence and

unexpectedly, as so often happens with the things of God, that Chiara encountered her charism for the first time.

Although she did not fully understand yet the complete meaning of this calling, she nevertheless experienced a deep certainty and joy. She became a lay member of the Franciscan order, taking the name Chiara - Italian for Clare - in imitation of the close collaborator of St Francis of Assisi.

Chiara Lubich was a 24-year-old primary school teacher when she launched her movement. The humble organisation had a strong impact on the rather motionless Catholicism of the time. Many of its innovations - a reassessment of the importance of the laity, a return to scripture, a joyful liturgy using popular tunes of the day, an emphasis on the key gospel message of love and unity - anticipated the direction that the Second Vatican Council would take 20 years later.

After a thorough examination by the pre-conciliar Holy Office, much of it directed at Chiara herself by the notoriously strict Cardinal Ottaviani, Focolare was granted official Vatican approval in the mid-1960s. In this period Chiara was founding new branches for priests, religious, seminarians, young people, professionals, families - even toddlers had their own special section.

She had begun to establish model towns (“Mariapoli”: *Mary’s City*) intended to serve as laboratories for the reconstruction of society - today there are 35 of them around the globe, although the foundress envisaged there should eventually be a thousand. Of the 2 million Focolare followers, around 140,000 are formally committed to the movement. A hard core of around 4,000 take vows of chastity and poverty and live in communities. Some are priests, but most have jobs and pool their wages with the community.

“We are like a small hand helping the Church to carry out Jesus’ wish: ‘That all may be one!’ This is how Chiara presented her “Work of Mary” (this is the official name of the Focolare Movement) to pope John Paul II when he visited the headquarters at Rocca di Papa (Rome) to get to know them better. And six years later the Pope granted a unique privilege to Chiara in approving the movement’s statutes which stipulate that the president of the “Work of Mary” should always be a woman.

Global Outreach

As early as the 1950s Chiara enthusiastically took up the cause of ecumenism, something still rare in Catholic circles. Relations with German Lutherans began in 1959. In 1963, she spoke at Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral and nurtured the first British Focolare groups. The close personal rapport between Chiara and Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople led to her acting as something of an emissary between the Orthodox leader and Pope Paul VI. Later she became involved in multi-faith dialogue and in 1994 was appointed an honorary president of the World Conference for Religion and Peace.

In the vast Sacred Hall in Tokyo, ten thousand Japanese listened to Chiara Lubich share the story of her spiritual journey while ten video monitors relayed the event to the foyer and the corridors outside which were packed with the overflow from the hall. It was December 28 1981 and the first time someone from the West who was both lay and Catholic had addressed such an assembly of Buddhists. Only a few years earlier it would have been difficult to imagine a similar event taking place.

To mark her 80th birthday in January 2000, in an extraordinary letter of homage, Pope John Paul II, who had made a practice of calling her personally each year on the feast of Saint Clare, hailed her as “a messenger of unity and mercy among many brothers and sisters in every corner of the world”.

Her religious awards included the Templeton Prize for progress in Religion presented by the Duke of Edinburgh at Guildhall in 1977 and the Gold Cross of St Augustine, which she received from Archbishops Runcie and Carey, at Lambeth Palace.

Unfathomable depths

Chiara Lubich was extraordinarily popular all over the world. “I have only to say: ‘Greet Chiara’, and everybody understands”, said pope John Paul II to an international gathering of twenty thousand young people at the Paleur, on March 13, 1990. On that occasion, the speeches of both the Pope and Chiara were transmitted live to all five continents through the Olympus satellite in a spectacular global encounter. During the Gulf War, a prayer chain launched

by Chiara spurred 1.5 million people to stop working for a few minutes at midday and unite in praying for peace.

Extraordinary was the depth of her spirituality, that was marked by spontaneity and straightforwardness, and enabled her to move easily among the great religious leaders of our time, among young people from all over the world, both along the corridors of the Vatican and in the poorest slums. This might explain such a universal appeal.

Chiara's own person reflected this spirituality, with her perfectly groomed silver hair, her discreet elegance of dress, her ready smile, her unfailing pleasant manner and the clarity with which she used to communicate complex insights. But we must not be deceived by the outer appearance. The one who writes knows for certain that, in the 80s, Chiara spent two years in complete isolation, refusing to see anybody... At what unfathomable depths was she following her Master's passion?

Certainly it is not by chance that she brought, as a strong point of the Focolare spirituality, the "Forsaken Jesus" about whom she wrote her last "Word of Life" contribution for Holy Friday 2008. It is a striking piece of writing, of a great theological and emotional depth: "Good Friday: Jesus' death on the cross is his divine, heroic lesson on the meaning of love. He had given everything: a life lived in obedience at Mary's side, amidst discomfort. Three years of preaching, three hours on the cross, from which he forgave his executioners.

Only his divinity remained: his union with the Father, the most sweet and ineffable union which had made him so powerful on earth as God's Son, and so majestic on the cross. That awareness of God's presence had to withdraw into the deepest recesses of his soul and become imperceptible, separating him in some way from the One whom he had said was one with him. Within him love was annihilated, light extinguished, wisdom silenced. Yes, Jesus forsaken is darkness, melancholy, contrast.

To those who recognize that they are similar to him and are willing to share his fate, he becomes: for the mute, words; for the doubtful, answer; for the blind, light; for the deaf, voice; for the weary, rest; for the desperate, hope; for the separated, unity; for the restless, peace. As Olivier Clément writes: "The abyss, opened for an instant by Jesus' cry, is filled with the great wind of the resurrection."

basilica of Notre-Dame de Paris in the presence of the highest French authorities. And yet, according to his precise instructions, the first benches in the basilica were filled by the *compagnons* (the comrades), the poor of the community, the dropouts of society to whom he had dedicated his life.

Saving dozens of Jews

Henri-Pierre Grouès was born in 1912 at Lyon, France, into a well-to-do family. In 1931, after having donated his paternal inheritance to the poor, he entered the convent of the Cappucines of Lyon. Seven years later he became a priest. In the forties, during World War Two and the German occupation of France, he joined the freedom fighters, the partisans, and gave himself to the task of saving dozens of Jews, putting his life at risk many times. Once arrested by the Gestapo, he almost miraculously escaped torture and a certain death.

In post-war France, he was already famous and this fame took him to the French parliament. But he was not meant for a political career. Disappointed by the failure of the law about conscientious objection, he left the parliament and went out into the streets. By that time he had already made the experience that would change his life: it was in 1949 that he encountered Georges, a former convict with suicidal tendencies. The Abbé Pierre recognized him as Jesus in disguise, like on the way to Emmaus. It was together with him that he founded the first nucleus of the Emmaus community.

The “Uprising of Goodness”

February 1954 was in the heart of one of the coldest winter in man’s memory. In the icy streets of Paris, the homeless were in danger of death by frostbite. It was in that context that the Abbé Pierre launched his appeal over the French radio, for the “Uprising of Goodness”: he invited the citizens to immediately bring “5000 blankets, 300 big tents, and 200 stoves” for the homeless of the city of Paris threatened by the cold.

His moral authority and the extraordinary emergency provoked an overwhelming response. From that moment on, the tiny figure of the Abbé Pierre, with his characteristic long beard and black French beret, became well known and loved all over the world. He gathered around his humble person all the dropouts of society and gave them a chance of rehabilitation

through their communitarian work in favor of other people in the same condition or worse. They were the *Compagnons batisseurs d'Emmaus* (the comrades builders of Emmaus).

The “comrades constructors” of Emmaus

At Rouen, inside poor shelters on the banks of the river Senne, as well as in Paris and in other parts of France, the Abbé Pierre was surrounded by dozens of less respectable guys to whom he was nevertheless giving his utter respect, bringing out of them their wounded, yet rich humanity and great capacity of sharing.

They were attracted by that unusual priest and former congressman, who was putting them together and giving back their dignity by showing them that they could help themselves and others worse than themselves by means of their communitarian work, especially the building of poor but dignified shelters so that the homeless could at least have a home.

Les Compagnons d'Emmaus (The comrades of Emmaus) very soon became a reality in many countries of Europe, North America and the rest of the world. Poor people were impressed by the personality of their benefactor: he was first of all a man. In the recognized common humanity, they used to find him, a champion of communion, enjoying being outdoor with the comrades for the communitarian work or around the common table and a hot soup. But at the same time, he loved his solitude, time and again sitting on a pile of rubble, looking at the distant horizon, lost in prolonged prayer.

Together with him there were alcoholics, ex-legionaries and former convicts: a destitute and marginalized humanity that was trying to have another chance, to start afresh. Together they used to go out to empty attics and cellars, called by people who wanted to get rid of rags and debris. They used to load everything on pickup trucks and take everything to their store close to their ramshackle residences. In their spare time, they used to build shelters in order to host other homeless people more unfortunate than themselves. It was a competition between the defeated and the Abbé Pierre was their referee.

Greater than miracles: to recognize one's weakness

It was Christ's love that was pushing him “beyond”: beyond the social conventions, the self-interests, the worldly strategies; it was the Gospel that

animated him to go down in depth, within the hidden part of our heart where we discover our common God-image; it was the Spirit of discernment who was bestowing the Abbé Pierre the freedom and courage to proclaim the legitimacy of the gratuitous gift of self as Jesus did for our sake. And so he grew old, loving the poor and living with them. In 1981, he was awarded the highest French medal: The Legion of Honor.

When he was already 90, the Abbé Pierre spoke candidly about the sins of his youth and some people were scandalized. Yet he had simply recognized that he had known some moments of fragility and weakness as regards the sexual drive. As one of the Desert Fathers writes, “to recognize one’s sin is greater than to perform miracles and to raise the dead”.

This, only this was what the Abbé Pierre was asking every man, every Christian, every community and the entire Church: to recognize our own weakness. Our weakness is the door that allows God’s power and grace to enter into us, as Saint Paul wrote: “When I am weak, then I am strong”.

The fight against poverty goes on

The movement “Emmaus Internationalis” is the union of groups and communities founded by the Abbé Pierre that are committed to the struggle of uprooting all forms of poverty and to the full development of the human persons and their dignity. From 1999, “Emmaus Internationalis” is guided by the Italian Renzo Fior, who is the present successor of the Abbé Pierre. His term however is coming to an end. The world assembly of the movement is already planned for the coming October in Serajevo in order to elect the new leader.

The fight against poverty goes on. Like the Emmaus movement, so many others associations are involved in this fight. The free market and our global world generate an increasing number of people who remain at the margins of society. When, in the winter of the year 1954, the Abbé Pierre launched his cry for help through the radio and triggered the “Uprising of Goodness”, the homeless in Paris were two thousand, today they are estimated to be one hundred thousand. . If we are able to accept the voice of the radical Gospel, we will not miss the Abbe Pierre. He will be at our side, together with that cloud of witnesses who make visible and credible Jesus’ face in the midst of our every day’s joys and miseries.

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Saint John of God (1495-1550)

## **THE IMPULSIVE LOVER**

*From the time he was eight to the day he died, John followed every impulse of his heart that the Holy Spirit gave him. But unlike many who act impulsively, when John made a decision, he stuck with it. John of God could never see suffering without trying to do something about it. Having given up active Christian belief while a soldier, John was 40 when he decided to give the rest of his life to God's service. In response to a complaint that he was keeping tramps and immoral women in his hospital, John answered: "I know of no bad person in my hospital except myself alone, who am indeed unworthy to eat the bread of the poor". He had an adventurous life that made him experience the most different tasks. Because of this, Saint John of God is patron saint of booksellers, printers, heart patients, hospitals, nurses and firefighters.*

At the peak of his life, John of God's impulsive instinct helped save many people in an unexpected emergency. It was July 3, 1549, the year before his death, and, at the Royal Hospital, there was a banquet in honor of Lady Magdalena de Bobadilla. In the kitchen of the hospital, a big fire was lit to roast an ox stuffed with small birds and various spices and seasonings. Very soon the fire got out of control and began to spread through the hospital. The alarm went out that the Royal Hospital was on fire. John dropped everything to run there, and found that the crowd was just standing around watching the hospital - and its patients - go up in flames.

Not minding his own safety, he rushed into the blazing building and carried or led the patients out. When all the patients were rescued, he started throwing blankets, sheets, and mattresses out the windows since he knew from his own hard work how important these things were. At that point a cannon was brought to destroy the burning part of the building in order to save the rest. John stopped them, ran up the roof, and separated the burning

portion with an axe. He succeeded but fell through the burning roof. All thought they had lost their hero until John of God appeared miraculously out of the smoke. For this reason, Saint John of God is patron saint of firefighters.

### *Away from God*

John of God was born at Montemoro Novo, Portugal, on March 8, 1495, of devout Christian parents. When he was eight years old, John heard a visiting priest speak of adventures that were waiting in the age when new worlds were being opened. That very night he ran away from home to travel with the priest and never saw his parents again. They begged their way from village to village until John fell sick. The man who nursed him back to health, the manager of a large estate, adopted John. John worked as a shepherd in the mountains until he was 27. Feeling pressure to marry the manager's daughter, whom he loved as a sister, John took off to join the Spanish army in the war against France.

He had long since abandoned the faith of his childhood, and he had readily accepted the swaggering depravity that was the common standard of his companions. But all the while, amid the death, hardship and debauchery of his life, he retained some memories of long-lost innocence, associated with the image of his home and his loving parents and the faith in which he had been raised.

One day, he was thrown from a stolen horse near French lines. Frightened that he would be captured or killed, he reviewed his life and vowed impulsively to make a change. His comrades didn't mind so much that John was repenting but hated that he wanted them to give up their pleasures too. So they used his impulsive nature to trick him into leaving his post on the pretext of helping someone in need.

He was rescued from hanging at the last minute and thrown out of the army after being beaten and stripped. He begged his way back to his foster-home where he worked as a shepherd until he heard of a new war with Moslems invading Europe. Off he went but after the war was over, he decided to try to find his real parents. To his grief he discovered both had died in his absence. As a shepherd he had plenty of time to contemplate what God might want of his life. When he decided at 38 that he should go to Africa to ransom Christian captives, he quit immediately and set off for the port of Gibraltar.

### *Lover of books*

He was on the dock waiting for his ship when he saw a family obviously upset and grieving. When he discovered they were a noble family being exiled to Africa after political intrigues, he abandoned his original plan and volunteered to be their servant. The family fell sick when they reached their exile and John kept them alive not only by nursing them but by earning money to feed them. His job building fortifications was grueling, inhuman work and the workers were beaten and mistreated by people who called themselves Catholics. Seeing Christians act this way so disturbed John that it shook his faith. A priest advised him not to blame the Church for their actions and to leave for Spain at once. John did go back home -- but only after he learned that his newly adopted family had received pardons.

In Spain he spent his days unloading ship cargoes and his nights visiting churches and reading spiritual books. Reading gave him so much pleasure that he decided that he should share this joy with others. He quit his job and became a book peddler, traveling from town to town selling religious books and holy cards. A vision at age 41 brought him to Granada where he sold books from a little shop. For this reason he is patron saint of booksellers and printers. It was during this period of his life that he is said to have been granted the vision of the Infant Jesus, who bestowed on him the name by which he was later known, John of God, also bidding him to go to Granada.

It was there that he chanced to hear a sermon by the famous preacher John of Avila, which inspired him to take to the streets to proclaim his sins to the world. So well did he play the role of a fool for Christ that he was taken for a lunatic and confined in the local asylum. There he gladly submitted to the daily scourging that was the prescribed treatment for mental disorders. When John of Avila went to interview him, he determined that John was not mad at all, but that he had invited this cruel treatment as a form of penance. He urged John to express his love for God in a way more useful to his neighbors. This John immediately resolved to do.

He began methodically to offer shelter and hospitality to all the poor, the sick and the homeless he could gather from the streets of Granada. With the income from a small shop for religious books and devotional articles he was able to rent a small house. Later, his work of hospitality became a full-time occupation, and he accepted alms from interested benefactors for his support. Ex-prisoners, prostitutes, cripples, the sick and dying outcasts of the town- all were welcome to find a warm corner in his house. There he would

care for their wounds, bathe their bodies, and treat them with infinite tenderness and respect.

By so doing, John began to attract public attention. The bishop visited and conferred his approbation. To put a stop to the saint's habit of exchanging his cloak with any beggar he chanced to meet, Don Sebastian Ramirez, Bishop of Tuy, made for him a habit, which was later adopted as the religious uniform of his followers, and he imposed on him for all time the name given him by the Infant Jesus, John of God.

The town expressed appreciation by providing him with a hospital, which he operated with professional care. Still, he received abuse from many quarters—not least from many of his broken and derelict guests. When he was denounced as a hypocrite or a fool, he welcomed the insults as further opportunities for penance. Once when a prostitute was railing against him and his failings he thrust two silver coins into her hand and urged her to share her vilification of his name with the world.

### *Love wipes away sin*

His urge to act immediately when he saw need got him into trouble more than a few times. Once, when he encountered a group of starving people, he rushed into a house, stole a pot of food, and gave it to them. He was almost arrested for that charity! Another time, on finding a group of children in rags, he marched them into a clothing shop and bought them all new clothes. Since he had no money, he paid for it all on credit!

John was ill himself when he heard that a flood was bringing precious driftwood near the town. He jumped out of bed to gather the wood from the raging river. Then when one of his companions fell into the river, John without thought for his illness or safety jumped in after him. He failed to save the boy and caught pneumonia. He died on March 8, his 55th birthday, of the same impulsive love that had guided his whole life. He died under the care of a spiritual friend and admirer, Lady Ana Ossorio.

Behind John's outward acts of total concern and love for Christ's sick poor was a deep interior prayer life which was reflected in his spirit of humility. These qualities attracted helpers who, 20 years after John's death, formed the Brothers Hospitallers, now a worldwide religious order. Their motto is "Caritas".

John of God was many things in his long life: a shepherd, a soldier and mercenary, a book seller, a servant, and a hospital administrator. In everything he did, no matter how crazy and impulsive it seemed, John of God was following the will of God. Every time he saw a need, he saw one of God's children in need, and he jumped to serve them and God. His motto was: "Labor without stopping. Do all the good works you can while you still have the time."

He said again: "If we look forward to receiving God's mercy, we can never fail to do good so long as we have the strength. For if we share with the poor, out of love for God, whatever he has given to us, we shall receive according to his promise a hundredfold in eternal happiness. Just as water extinguishes a fire, so love wipes away sin."

### *In the poor he found peace*

This is how he describes his life at the hospital: "So many poor people come here that I very often wonder how we can care for them all, but Jesus Christ provides all things and nourishes everyone. Many of them come to the house of God, because the city of Granada is large and very cold, especially now in winter. Since this house is open to everyone, it receives the sick of every type and condition: the crippled, the disabled, lepers, mutes, the insane, paralytics, those suffering from scurvy and those bearing the afflictions of old age, many children, and above all countless pilgrims and travelers, who come here, and for whom we furnish the fire, water, and salt, as well as the utensils to cook their food. And for all of this no payment is requested, yet Christ provides."

I work here on borrowed money, a prisoner for the sake of Jesus Christ. And often my debts are so pressing that I dare not go out of the house for fear of being seized by my creditors. Whenever I see so many poor brothers and neighbors of mine suffering beyond their strength and overwhelmed with so many physical or mental ills which I cannot alleviate, then I become exceedingly sorrowful; but I trust in Christ, who knows my heart".

Unworthy though he felt himself to be, John experienced many mystical visions: In one case, as he was washing the wounded feet of a beggar he had carried home, he was astonished to see that the man appeared transfigured, bathed in a radiant light which enveloped John himself, so that when he entered the hallway some of the guests thought that he was on fire. On

another occasion, he heard a celestial voice saying, "John, all you do for the poor in my name is done for me. It is my hand that receives your alms; it is my body that you clothe, my feet that you wash".

His days and nights were divided between prayer and his ministrations to the needs of his demanding household. His own needs for rest, sleep and proper food were ignored. But through it all, eventually, he discovered that he was at peace. In the face of the poor he had discovered not only the face of Christ, but the features of his own family. All the care he could not offer his mother and father he lavished on those who came to him.

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Saint Aloysius Guanella (1842-1915)

NOAH'S ARK

This is how Fr. Guanella's Mother House, dedicated to Divine Providence, was referred to because it gathered every kind of suffering humanity. All found a simple but dignified welcome by one who saw in them the face of Christ. The name "Aloysius Guanella" is synonymous with love for human beings marked by any form of suffering. This is the man who was proclaimed a Saint last October 25. Even nowadays, his sons and daughters of the religious

congregations he founded offer a loving family atmosphere to the handicapped in many countries of the world, including the Philippines.

On an evening in April 1886, a little boat slipped into the quiet Como lake at Pianello, in Northern Italy, and traveled through the night to the city of Como. Two Sisters and four orphans were its passengers and it transported an assortment of furniture which the priest responsible, Fr. Aloysius Guanella, described as "a square table missing one leg, a chair that had seen better days, and a bed that was a miracle of balance." This was the nucleus of the future "Little House of Providence", the institution to which the poor and the afflicted of all ages came. In 1890 they were already 200: never before in Como so much human misery had gathered into one place.

It was truly a "Noah's ark" where a heterogeneous humanity found the simple but dignified welcome of somebody who could discern in suffering individuals the face of Christ. It gathered people of all ages and of every condition: little orphans, young students and craftsmen, domestic workers, deaf-mutes, abandoned elderly people, chronically sick people and "the good children", Fr. Guanella's affectionate term for the developmentally disabled who in those days were otherwise brutally referred to as fools and idiots.

This is how it had all begun. In 1881, a pious priest, Fr. Coppini, had just died in the town of Pianello Lario, on the shore of lake Como, leaving behind a small home for orphans and the aged, which he had entrusted to the care of a group of young women who had an inclination toward the religious life. In 1878, with five of these women as its members, the bishop had authorized Fr. Coppini to establish a religious community. No one seemed willing to assume the burden of carrying on Fr. Coppini's work until the bishop remembered Fr. Guanella, one of his most zealous priests, whom he therefore sent to Pianello.

In the beginning, Fr. Guanella found great diffidence in the young women because his arrival had been forestalled by unkind rumors: "He is a priest with too many ideas"; "he is hot-headed" and "he is a person to beware of". It was enough, however, for Marcellina Bosatta, the future co-foundress, to share a dish of polenta and a few leaves of salad with him to understand that the desires of this priest's heart had the light and savor of Heaven. From that

time, Fr. Guanella was invited to visit the house and to look after them, taking over the direction and formation of the group and focusing their objectives.

In five years, with the cooperation of their leader, Sr. Marcellina, he established the foundation of his charitable work and became the founder of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence. It was then that he thought it best to transfer the headquarters of the work to Como where it could be of great service to the entire diocese.

There, also some young men came to follow Fr. Guanella; he guided them and established a congregation of priests and brothers, the "Servants of Charity." And just when, in the first years of the XX century, Fr. Guanella was asking the Church to recognize his Congregation, he found himself paradoxically hindered by his own generous urge to open his arms wide to all who were suffering: the scope of his Congregation seemed too wide. Yet it was this extension of charity to all, in every place and circumstance, that gave his works their distinct originality and brought unanimous honor and merit, universal admiration and recognition to Fr. Aloysius Guanella.

A priest for the young and the poor

Aloysius Guanella was born on December 19, 1842, on a snowy night, in Fraciscio, a small village of Valchiavenna, a mountainous area on the road leading to Switzerland through the Spluga Pass. He was the ninth of the thirteen children of Lawrence and Maria Guanella. The day after his birth, his father carried him in his arms down to the Valley of Campodolcino to be baptized.

The family maintained a simple but comfortable home high in the Italian Alps. His father Lawrence was the respected mayor of the little town of Campodolcino. Their land was used for pasture, and young Aloysius worked tending the family sheep and carrying wood and other items long before he had had any schooling. These mountain people were hard working. They had no animals to help with the work: horses and wagons were almost unknown. For their living they depended on agriculture and cattle or sheep rearing and they cultivated every tiny strip of land between the rocks and precipices.

A marked characteristic of those mountain people, in addition to their modesty and their capacity for hard work, was their piety. This stretch of land has been called the Valley of the Saints: stations of the Cross and metal and wooden crosses decorate the roadsides and the walls of the houses are adorned with sacred images of the Virgin Mary and photos of religious celebrations to be remembered.

From his family, Aloysius learned many lessons he would later put into practical use in his apostolate. He learned how to use his hands to build things, rather than depend on having money to purchase ready-made items. He learned the value and some of the skills of agriculture. Best of all, he learned that a loving spirit of sacrifice can work miracles.

At the age of twelve, Louis wanted to enter the seminary. With thirteen children to provide for, his father was uncertain about whether he would be able to afford this. Luckily, through the offices of an uncle, Aloysius was able to obtain a scholarship. His record at school was excellent and he completed high school in 1859. After this, further studies at the seminary in Como were possible only by sacrifice on the part of his family. One day at the seminary, a fellow student came down with a contagious disease and became critically ill. While others used every precaution and avoided the student when possible, Aloysius disregarded all warnings and cared for the patient until all danger was past.

He was ordained in 1866. His first priestly duty was that of an assistant to an elderly pastor. Here his zeal for souls and his sense of responsibility toward them were exemplary. He was a priest who went from his private prayers to the village square and never lingered in the sacristy. He could be found exchanging a few words in the street, he would visit the sick in their homes, he walked for kilometers to visit the shepherds in the neighboring valleys and he comforted those who had suffered misfortunes and adversities. He sought every opportunity to be close to the poor. While seeing to their needs, he appealed to their sense of duty and never abandoned men or women “feeble of mind”, finding ways for them to be looked after. He himself took care of one “simple-minded and crippled” girl whose mother had died: he refused to send her to an institution and found foster parents for her.

In the valleys of Lombardy at that time the only thing that was not lacking was poverty: lonely old people needed a home and company; children needed healthy food and school; the ordinary people needed a minimum of

basic education and moral and Christian guidance; many of the disabled needed humane treatment to protect them from derision in the streets or, even worse, the squalor of mental institutions. Those were the people who became Fr. Guanella's world.

Learning from Don Bosco

From 1875 to 1878, Fr. Guanella, with his bishop's permission, went to stay with Don Bosco at the Oratory in Turin. As soon as he arrived at the Oratory, he met Don Bosco and warmly greeted him. Don Bosco at once said, "Would you like to go to America?" A few minutes earlier, he had decided to accept the missions in South America. "I would indeed" replied Fr. Guanella in whose head was a load of projects, and whose coming to Turin was more than anything a kind of apprenticeship.

In this account of this first meeting, we have in miniature the whole drama of Fr. Guanella's staying with Don Bosco. On one side is the Saint who wanted to take him over completely; on the other side, is the intention that brought Fr. Guanella to Turin: to learn, see and experience. His bishop wanted him back in the diocese and, finally, some interior instinct told him that the Lord wanted something different of him.

Don Bosco did not let him go easily. "My dear Fr. Aloysius, -he wrote to him- if you allow yourself to be carried away by every thought that comes into your head, you will find it hard to know God's will...Dear Fr. Aloysius, help me to save souls. Europe and America are crying out for apostolic laborers. Don't desert me in the fight...". But God had other plans for Fr. Aloysius Guanella.

A year or so after Don Bosco's death, Fr. Guanella wrote to Don Rua, Don Bosco's successor: "I want to record my immense attachment to Don Bosco. Certainly, leaving him was like leaving home". Looking back nostalgically upon the years spent at the Oratory, he spoke in these terms: "There I had the example of so many virtues, and the spiritual direction of Don Bosco who did so much to all. Don Bosco's heart was like a magnet which drew all to himself. My eternal gratitude goes to Don Bosco and his work".

Back in his diocese, Fr. Guanella was given the late Fr. Coppini's enterprise and that was the beginning of his love affair with the handicapped brothers and sisters that lasted his whole life. About them he wrote: "Freed from the

oppression of a mental hospital structure, it is possible to restore dignity to these people, beginning by letting them live in a place where each one is, as it were, lord and master because the providence of the houses and the things that the Lord sends through benefactors is for the residents. We must therefore make these residents believe the truth, that they are in their own home and may live there in full confidence”.

The champion of Divine Providence

"The Lord ordinarily wants everything here on earth to follow a natural course," Fr. Guanella used to say. He believed that the help of Providence was merited by faith, prayer, and work. Sometimes, however, the ordinary course of events gave way to the extraordinary. At one time, Fr. Guanella decided to rebuild the chapel. Patients, workers, and Fr. Guanella himself were working happily one day when he suddenly gave the order to halt and directed all the workers to leave the area. Within minutes, the scaffolding crashed to the ground without a single person being injured. On another occasion, the superior at one of the schools discovered that there was no food for dinner. When she told Fr. Guanella, he replied, "It is only 11:30; Providence still has half an hour to provide." The sister asked the students to pray, and at noon a cart delivered a sack of rice. No one knew where the cart had come from.

Humorous incidents often arose from what some considered Fr. Guanella's foolish charity. Once when some of the sisters tried to prevent him from giving away some money, he literally threw money out the window to a poor man standing outside. Another time, not having any money to give, he tossed out a pair of new shoes. A friend and contemporary of Pope Pius X, Fr. Guanella often appealed to him for help in his work. When the Pope asked him if all his responsibilities did not worry him a great deal, the priest replied, "I worry until midnight and from then on I let God worry. I even sleep too much. Sometimes when I am in the streetcar and should get off at one stop, I sleep and it takes me to another place. And then quietly, and well rested, I return without telling anyone so they will not make fun of me."

"But if too many come seeking a home, where will you put them?" a priest asked him one day. "Just let them get in the door," Fr. Aloysius answered, "and Providence will take care of them." His confidence, as always, was vindicated. "Let us confide and hope in God," was his maxim. "Let us avoid sin, then shortly God will work." He, himself, lacked neither foresight nor

his life mainly in the academy, he witnessed the mushrooming of his movement in the world, was intimate friend of popes and at his death, his funeral was a plebiscite.

On February 24, 2005, for the funeral of Fr. Luigi Giussani, at the cathedral church of Milan, Pope John Paul II sent Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, as his personal representative to preside the ceremony and deliver the homily. With this gesture, the pope expressed his highest esteem for the founder of Communion and Liberation, who had died in Milan at the age of 82, during the night of Tuesday, February 22.

The funeral was a triumph. Ten of thousands of people crowded the historical cathedral and the square. Representative of both the highest authorities of the government and of the Church were present at the burial but especially countless university students who had found afresh the vitality of their Christian faith under the spiritual paternity and guidance of Fr. Luigi.

In his homily, Cardinal Ratzinger said: “Fr. Luigi Giussani grew up in a home – as he himself confessed- which was poor of bread, but rich in music and so, since the beginning, he was touched, better wounded by the longing for beauty and he was not satisfied with a common-place beauty, a banal beauty: because he was looking for Beauty itself, the infinite Beauty. In this way, he found Jesus Christ, and in him he found the true Beauty, the road to life, to true joy”.

“Since he was an adolescent, Luigi had created, together with other fellow seminarians, a community by the title *Studium Christi*. Their program was to speak about nothing else but Christ, because all the rest appeared to them like a waste of time. With time he overcame the initial unilateral position, but the substance has remained the same. Only Christ gives sense to everything in our life: Fr. Luigi Giussani has always kept the gaze of his life and heart fixed on Christ”.

“Thus he understood that Christianity is not an intellectual system, a package of dogmas or only a moralism, but an encounter, a love story, a happening”. This is what the many youth who approached Fr. Giussani found: a person in love with Christ and they on their turn fell in love with their faith that before had appeared to them as stale and lifeless. It was a

slow avalanche, an incredible faith ground-swell what originated from the simple, naïf young priest. Something that has continued up to now and looks as if it wants to survive and still grow in the future.

Today CL is present in more than 70 countries. Adherents to the Fraternity number about 100,000. Then there are the members of *Memores Domini*, who take a vow of celibacy, present in thirty countries; the priests of the *Fraternity of the Missionaries of Saint Charles Borromeo*; the *Sisters of Charity of the Assumption*; the *Society of Works*, which joins together roughly 30,000 industrial companies; and magazines, publishing houses and other numberless initiatives.

And yet, in 2004, in a letter he wrote to pope John Paul II on the occasion of CL's fiftieth anniversary, Fr. Giussani wrote: "I have never 'founded' anything. I maintain that the genius of the movement whose birth I witnessed is that it felt the urgency of proclaiming the need to return to the elemental aspects of Christianity. By this I mean a passion for Christian reality as such in its original elements, and nothing more."

Virginity of the heart

Luigi Giussani was born at Desio, near Milan, Italy, in October 1922. His father, Beniamino, was an artist and anarchist who instilled in him a love of beauty, particularly in poetry, painting and music, and a desire for justice. From his mother, Angelina Gelosa, he received his religiosity. Giussani entered the Milan diocesan seminary at a young age, where he discovered a way to understand "secular" works of art (such as the poetry of Giacomo Leopardi and the music of Ludwig van Beethoven) as expressive of the religious sense and as unconscious prophecies of Christ's incarnation.

With his fellow seminarians Giussani founded a study group and newsletter under the name *Studium Christi*. There is a spontaneity and freshness like a kind of virginity in this young man who entered the seminary early, on the threshold of adolescence, and was caught up in the love for the Blessed humanity of Christ. It is this freshness and spontaneity that will constitute the extraordinary power of attraction of Fr. Giussani.

Fr. Luigi Giussani was ordained to the priesthood in 1945 at the young age of 23. His ordination had been accelerated by the authorities in the Milan archdiocese because they feared that the serious respiratory health problems

he was experiencing at that time (and which would plague him his entire life) would lead to his death before becoming a priest. Following ordination Fr. Luigi began teaching at Venegono Seminary.

His academic interests were Eastern Christian Theology and American Protestantism. In the early 1950s he requested of his superiors to be allowed to leave seminary teaching to work in high schools. It was at this point of his life that the trivial incident happened which would change his outlook and point to his future special vocation in the Church.

That trip by train

This is his account of the episode: “The first time the idea came to me to do something special I was in the train, going from Milan to Rimini. It was there that I came across some young people. There in the train, I started conversing and discussing with them and I discovered that they were almost totally ignorant about religion and Christianity: their skepticism, their derisory attitude, their ostentatious incredulity did not cause anger in me but rather pain because they were obviously affected by an abysmal ignorance...It was this contact that made ardent zeal rise up in me, almost a “rage”, so that they may know what I had encountered myself; so that they may be many who know it.”

He goes on describing his feeling as he was for the first time entering the college where he would teach: “I remember as if it were now the instant in which I entered the Berchet Lyceum at Milan. There were four steps to climb, from the sidewalk to the entrance, and this is what I was thinking, while climbing them: What am I doing here? Why do I come here? To tell these young men what I have felt and understood myself. Because if they do not understand nor feel that, I cannot comprehend how can they live”.

Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, who was his friend since Fr. Luigi Giussani was a young priest and theologian, confirms this: "That's just how it was. When in 1954 Giussani quit teaching theology in order to dedicate himself full-time to the boys of Berchet College in Milan, he had no conviction that he was starting something unprecedented. He simply wanted to make perennial Christianity known in a more effective, coherent, and persuasive manner to the adolescents who came to him. He didn't invent any unprecedented forms of youth pastoral work, either. In the schools, this took the form of the

apostolate that Catholic Action was already offering under the name of *Gioventù Studentesca* (Studying Youth).

One might say that Fr. Giussani poured new wine into old wineskins. He didn't even think about establishing a program for the movement. He had only one great concern: to transmit the experience of Christianity to everyone." And it is precisely because of this concentration on "Christianity and nothing more" that Fr. Giussani found himself at the epicenter of the earthquake that has rocked the Catholic Church during recent decades: admired by some, opposed by others.

The vibrant scholar

Fr. Luigi taught at the Berchet Lyceum in Milan from 1954 to 1964. During this time his primary intellectual interest was the problem of education. In 1964 Fr. Giussani began teaching Introductory Theology at the Sacred Heart Catholic University in Milan, a position he occupied for almost three decades. In the late 1960s he devoted himself to theological studies and was sent by his religious superiors on several periods of study in the United States. As a result, he wrote one of his major works: *An Outline of American Protestant Theology. An Historic Profile from the Origins to the 50s*.

In 1969 he returned to pick up the fragments of *Gioventù Studentesca* which had disintegrated in the wake of the tumultuous student rebellions that swept Europe following the events of May 1968. Under the new name *Communion and Liberation*, the movement attracted university students and adults in addition to high school students. The development that followed had the characteristic of a charismatic phenomenon.

Tens of thousands of young people all over the world felt the attraction of CL's proposal. Members of the movement, which Fr. Giussani led from 1969 until his death in 2005, became influential not only in the Church but also in politics and business. Fr. Giussani's several writings have been translated into many different languages, attracting a worldwide following.

On February 22, 2005, Fr. Luigi Giussani died in his dwelling in Milan.

He was buried in the section of Milan's "Monumental" Cemetery reserved for illustrious citizens of the city, in a newly built chapel. From that time on, the tomb has been visited by thousands of pilgrims from Italy and the world. In 2012, Fr. Julián Carrón, President of the Fraternity of CL, announced that he had presented the request for opening the Cause of

Beatification and Canonization of Fr. Giussani. The request was accepted by the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Angelo Scola.

Communion and Liberation

CL is an ecclesial movement whose point of origin can be traced to an impulse of the Holy Spirit, and, as Pope Benedict XVI observed, "is thus inserted into that vast flowering of associations, movements and new ecclesial realities providentially raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church after the Second Vatican Council."

In 1975, during a youth pilgrimage to Rome for Palm Sunday, Pope Paul VI encouraged Fr. Giussani in a private conversation with these words: "This is the path, go on like this." In 1982, as it continued to expand, the "*Fraternity of Communion e Liberation*" was declared an "Association of Pontifical Right."

And in 1984 Pope John Paul II received 10,000 CL members in an audience, giving them this challenging mandate: "Go into all the world to bring the truth, beauty, and peace you have encountered in Christ the Redeemer. This is the task that I leave with you today." A new impulse was thus given to the missionary spread of the Movement, which is today present in some seventy countries.

Fr. Giussani charismatic certainty that, through the life of the Church, we can arrive at sufficient certainty about the life of Jesus of Nazareth, adhere to his teachings, and intuit adequate reasons to believe in Him revives Christian apologetics. Jesus is certainly a fact of history. And yet, at the same time, he reacted to the reduction of Christianity to something in the past. Jesus of Nazareth is not only someone who lived and died. He is alive. "The Christian proclamation is that God has become a human presence, carnal, within history. God is not something far away that man tries to reach by his own effort, but Someone who came to join in man's journey, and became his companion."

The "Christian claim"

The person of Jesus was the intellectual and emotional center of Fr. Luigi Giussani's life. This centrality was the anchor of his existence. In Jesus Christ, Fr. Giussani found the only being who, precisely because of his twofold nature, was fully human, capable of understanding from within each

person's expectations, and at the same time capable of responding to these like no one else, because he was God.

Throughout its history, humanity had many opportunities to experience the manifestation of the sacred. But with the birth of Israel, something absolutely new came about. With the call of Abraham, God chose time, history, as the privileged venue within which to reveal himself. The process was reversed. It was no longer man in search of God, but God in search of man.

The fact that Christianity is not a collection of doctrines, a catalog of behavioral norms, but something that happened in history, an event, a "coming," is a recurring theme in Fr. Giussani; it is the heart of his faith and experience. Christianity, therefore, was a completely new path. He writes: "If there is one crime that a religion can commit, it is that of saying: I am the only way. This is exactly what Christianity claims. It is not unjust to feel repugnance in the face of such a statement. What would be unjust would be failing to ask the reason for this claim."

Where can we find the testimony of this claim by Jesus, by the Mystery that entered into history? In the Gospels, Fr. Giussani replies. An event can be experienced. How can it be experienced today? By beginning to experience the memory and the proclamation of Him presented by those who have been drawn to Him: the Church as the continuity of Christ, as his body, his presence. Encountering Jesus means encountering those who believe in Him, the unity of believers, the body that the Spirit creates by assimilating to Jesus every person who entrusts himself to Him.

Fr. Giussani must have meditated for a long time on the teaching method of Jesus. In fact, he tried to duplicate it in his relationship with young people. He talks about three factors in the teaching method of Jesus. First, Jesus is a master to be followed. Then there is the need for renunciation. There is no Christianity, if there is no sacrifice, acceptance of trial, detachment. Finally, the third principle, it is necessary to proclaim one's allegiance to Jesus in front of everyone: so that people may know that He is the center of our affectivity and our freedom. Only love can explain and enable this process, can usher us properly into this inconceivable claim by Jesus.

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