

THE SERVANT OF GOD LUISA PICCARETA

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APOSTLE OF SALVIFIC SUFFERING, NOURISHED BY EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Conclusion of the diocesan phase of the Cause of beatification and canonization of the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta

Next October 29th, at the main church of the Apulian city of Corato, Mons. Giovan Battista Pichierri, Archbishop of Trani-Barletta-Bisceglie, will close the diocesan phase of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta (1865-1947), a humble and hidden tertiary Dominican, (crucified) in a bed for over sixty years.

With much prudence and constancy—beginning with the Dominican Archbishop Reginaldo Giuseppe Maria Addazi, who was followed by Archbishop Joseph Carata—all the Diocesan Bishops, one after another, did everything in their power to rediscover and bring to light Luisa's exemplary life experience, while the believers persevered in their ever-increasing devotion toward such an exceptional soul.

REDISCOVERED AND REVALUED

During these almost sixty years following her death, the most painstaking research of the handwritten and the printed writings of Luisa has greatly intensified; many prayer groups and private associations have risen, inspired by her spirituality and attracted by the many benefits received by reading the already published works.

The Holy See gave the authorization to transfer the mortal remains of this Dominican Tertiary from the Corato's Cemetery to her parish church of Saint Maria Greca. In the repurchased building on Via Nazario Sauro, which was the residence of the Servant of God for so many years, there has been canonically established the Pious Association of the "Little Children of the Divine Will."

Through mysterious ways opened by Divine Providence, the figure and spirituality of the "Divine Will" of Luisa Piccarreta have become discovered and appreciated also by a large number of believers in the Americas. In the fortunate linking of the steps of revaluation, the Archbishop Mons. Carmelo Cassati has obtained from the competent Roman Congregations, the nulla osta [approval] for the opening of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God, which took place on November 20, 1994—the feast day of Christ the King. And now we have finally reached the conclusion of the first phase of the lengthy ascent to the honors of the altars.

The memory of Luisa was never buried, nor her humble and extraordinary teachings, nor the testimony of her evangelical existence, nor the spiritual edification that magnetizes the souls to follow her example, and the blessings that continue to pour down from Heaven through her intercession.

Three truly historical events have crowned the journey to approbation of Luisa Piccarreta in these last years: the International Congresses held at San José of Costa Rica in December 1995, at Corato in October 2002, and, again in Corato, from the 27th to the 29th of October 2005. The International Congress of Costa Rica, which lasted eleven days, revolved around five very concentrated presentations each day, or more appropriately called "meditations" centered on the Divine will as lived and taught by Luisa Piccarreta. And they were accompanied by Eucharistic Celebrations and continuous adoration the Blessed Sacrament, both day and night.

The following data may underline the significance of that memorable Congress: several hundred attendees coming from sixteen American nations; representatives of Italy and India; various Bishops (among whom was the Archbishop of Trani-Barletta-Bisceglie, Mons. Cassati); about three hundred priests, one hundred and fifty seminarians, and many members of religious orders.

TOWARD THE OCTOBER CONGRESS

The 2002 Congress, held at the Oasis of Nazareth in Corato, with many participants coming from foreign countries, served to shed light on the status of the Cause. The upcoming International Congress, anticipated for next October, on the occasion of the closing of the diocesan phase of the Cause of Beatification of Luisa, will help to bring to light the salient aspects regarding the person, the spirituality, and the holiness of life of Luisa Piccarreta, in light of the testimonies and the documents retrieved during these last years.

In respect to the Cause, already in 1994—just after the opening of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal and the publishing of the Archbishop's edict for the collection of the names of witnesses to be interviewed, as well as of the writings of Luisa—it is verified that crowds of believers began to gather around the bed of the Servant of God to listen to her simple and enlightened lessons on the Divine Will, just as it had happened while she was alive.

In fact, the first result of the process of beatification was the retrieval and the cataloguing of the diaries and publications of Luisa's works. In 1996, Archbishop Mons. Cassati, upon formal request to the then Card. Joseph Ratzinger, obtained from the Holy Office a photocopy of the thirty-four handwritten notebooks of the Servant of God, which had been appropriated in 1938 by the aforesaid Congregation. He then appointed some respected theologians to reexamine these writings and to judge the orthodoxy of Luisa's ideas, in order to go forward with the process of beatification.

Since her death, the fire of these writings has almost blazed like wildfire, and the Tribunal has now been able to ascertain their great importance and scope—a rich mine of spirituality! Also, the diffusion of her works, which have been translated in many languages, constitutes a devoted pilgrimage and a religious pondering of her simple, humble and effective word, proclaimed both with her life and with her writings.

We shouldn't believe, however, that the Servant of God was a graphomaniac or a person who wrote a lot to draw attention to herself. Rather, she was a person extremely reluctant to put into writing the fruits of the prolonged nighttime contemplations in her loving dialogues with her bridegroom, Jesus. She acquiesced only out of obedience to her confessors—to Don Gennaro De Gennaro, her first confessor, and then to St. Hannibal Maria Di Francia, her spiritual guide and promoter of the first publications.

The Tribunal acquired a rich dossier of testimonies for its procedural actions. These were collected and recorded in the '70s, before the opening of formal Process, by Father Bernardino Joseph Bucci, on authorization of Archbishop Mons. Carata, so that they would not be lost, given the advanced age of the witnesses *de visu et ex auditu* [by people—now deceased—who had personally known Luisa or had personally interviewed eye-witnesses.]

Upon formally interviewing the above-mentioned, surviving witnesses—who were all invited to give testimonies under oath—a unanimous consent was reached regarding the holiness and heroic exercise of the theological and cardinal virtues of the Servant of God. And it is no secret that their unanimous opinion is even more valid because it is perfectly consistent with the context of the unchanged and always growing popular testimony of devotion among the faithful today.

Through their answers, the members of the Tribunal, under the guidance of the Postulator of the Cause, Don Lattanzio, seemed to experience again the enthusiasm of the four days of exposition of Luisa's body at the triumphal funeral of that prophetic March 1947—apotheosis and crowning of her terrestrial existence.

A pale profile of the main characteristics of Luisa's persona, which remained impressed in the witnesses' memory, would be the following: Luisa Piccarreta, by people's opinion, already enjoyed in life the appellation of "saint" and, as already mentioned, everyone called her and still call her "Luisa the Saint." This opinion doesn't intend to anticipate the final judgment of the Holy Mother Church—even if it remains an ardent desire! But it denotes only a judgment of the people, so forcibly struck by her simplicity, transparency and holiness.

Never was there seen in her the desire for the sensational or extraordinary phenomena: her existence was conducted for over sixty years in sufferings, in union with the suffering Jesus, and in uniformity with the Will of God, to which she consecrated her life with a vow, as victim soul. She asked God not to leave visible marks on her body. Concerning the work she was able to do (embroidery, work done on a cushion with hanging needles), she taught it to her students. She lived in poverty and absolute detachment from earthly things, in a state of continuous prayer.

Among the everyday routine of her duties there was only one extraordinary phenomenon: the regime of her food intake and the nighttime bodily stiffening that she called "my usual state."* According to those who assisted her, Luisa ate very little, without suffering any damage to her health. There was only one thing that she could not do without: the Holy Eucharist.

She recounts in her autobiography that since her teenage years: " Communion became my predominant passion. In It I centralized all my affections. I was happy to hear Our Lord speaking; and it cost me very much to be deprived of It, when my family forced me to go with them to the farm house, leaving me many months without Mass and without Communion."

CONVERSATIONS WITH HER BRIDEGROOM

Her conversations with her Divine Bridegroom extended long into the night, and they were accompanied by a stiffening of her limbs, from which she could be awakened only upon a call to obedience by the priest that went daily to her house to celebrate Holy Mass or to bring her Holy Communion.

The rest of the day was spent between working and smiling at those who went to visit her for counsel and comfort. Don Benedict Calvi, her last confessor and inimitable promoter of her name and writings, said: "Her bed turned into a marvelous desk from which, with wisdom and divine unction, she intimately changed many souls. More than few people left her little room visibly changed, surprised, touched, and... ready to purify themselves with a Holy Confession."

To everybody she gave the example of a normal, daily, working, and consistent holiness, through the simplicity and humility of her life, in her brief exhortations, in her striving for supernatural intentions, and in the perfection of her actions—precisely the style of holiness that is currently looked for by the great majority of believers.

The spirituality which characterizes the life, the speech, and the writings of the Servant of God was mainly centered on "doing the Will of God", "being the little daughter of the Divine Will" and "being the missionary of the Kingdom of God's Will," in light of the affirmation of Jesus: "My food is to do the Will of Him who sent me" (John 4: 34), and in light of the famous prayer of the Dominican St. Albert the Great: "Lord, I would love to always be in your beloved Will."

The exhortations, the diaries, the books, the counsels were, therefore, given in light of the "fiat voluntas tua," just as Jesus had done, as He had taught, and told us to do in the prayer to "Our Father."

Only from this fulcrum of the Divine Will, can one explain the constant and heroic exercise of Luisa's virtues, especially her imperturbable serenity in the tests that she had to endure. During her life in fact, she was often seen visited, examined, observed,

and questioned by ecclesiastical authorities, by superiors, by priests, and by religious with theological learning and ascetical expertise. Yet, she remained perfectly serene, and above all, humble and obedient to the Will of God, which was manifested to her through the Church and her ministers.

And now it seems that this same august Divine Will is manifesting Itself in removing all the obstacles to the promotion and diffusion of a spirituality that is greatly needed for the salvation of humanity.

As a teacher and missionary of the Divine Will, she promoted It not "with words of human wisdom", in an areopagus of wise men of the earth, but as a fruit of her great love for God, as a humble woman of the people, with a degree of culture barely elementary, and with an existence almost buried and "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3: 3).

SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE

There glows in the Servant of God her spirit and practice of obedience to the Holy Church. We have already mentioned her acts of obedience in her writing and in her daily exits from "her usual state." Her full submission to the will of her ecclesiastical superiors has been considered the most radiant pearl of her soul. It is worth noting that she herself used to instill such sentiments of obedience into the minds of the priests involved in her life. Therefore, she was always treated with great respect by all the archbishops of her diocese, by the local priests, and by the religious that visited her.

Luisa remains in the heavens as a luminary of this virtue, in an era which is not free of confrontations—fruits of the "not serviam" spirit [the refusal to obey, to submit] so widespread in relations within the Church, the family, among nations, and social groups.

A last touch for an almost complete spiritual profile of the Servant of God arises from the conclusions of the Process: she was an apostle of salvific suffering.

Contemporary man, who trusts in the certainties of his scientific, technological, and social conquests, tries to flee from the mystery of the cross and from the pains of suffering. In fact, he interprets suffering as an annihilation of his dignity; he doesn't understand it, and he intends to eliminate it from history.

On the contrary, with evangelical wisdom, Luisa Piccarreta presents the cross, in concrete and popular terms and with incisive examples, as a remedy and health for the world. In her life, the cross becomes a fruitful suffering when they are united to the crucified Christ, and mystically immolated in the Eucharist. The cross then becomes a suffering full of love, a suffering willingly hidden and always in line and in tune with the Fiat pronounced in Nazareth and renewed on Calvary by the Most Holy Virgin Mary, to whom Luisa was very devoted.

Therefore, never complaints, but only union with Christ, victim of reparation for sins and pleading before the justice of God on behalf of men. She reminds us that to the divine chalice, overflowing with the merits of the suffering Christ, we need to add the drops of man's suffering, in order to cooperate with His own work of Redemption.

To all those who asked her to implore from God relief from the pains of life, she never kept hidden from them of the sublimation of suffering, the Via Crucis which she followed all the way to Gethsemane and up to the "consummatum est" of March 7, 1947.

We believe that we are not exaggerating if we affirm that Luisa Piccarreta became a creature that left indelible signs of her charisms, of her spiritual faculties, and of her developed apostolate. By the mysterious dispositions of the Will of God, she now shines as a star in the firmament of Christ, whose light is reflected in the innumerable facets of her brothers and sisters united to her. The spirit of the virtues practiced by Luisa endures, and is growing ever greater, in spite of the passing of time, becoming an example and a stimulus for all to follow the same way of holiness.

May this humble lay woman—both old and perpetually young in the freshness of her flesh, tortured by a long and inexplicable illness (for which a precise diagnosis was never found), always peaceful, serene, humble, and innocent—intercede from the heights of Heaven for us wandering pilgrims, and obtain for us celestial protection.

SABINO LATTANZIO
Postulator

PIETRO CIRASELLI
Delegated Judge