

## CHAPTER III

### THE MISSIONARY <sup>1</sup>

The method of giving missions

In speaking of the method that he used in giving a mission, I can say that, substantially, it was the one that the Servant of God had the Contedini printers in Rome put out in 1819. He told me that it had been checked by Albertini, his spiritual director. Besides the usual revisions, he told me further that it had been reviewed by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in the part that pertained to religious services. This method was based upon the methods used by the more famous missionaries, especially Fathers Segneri, Sr. and Segneri, Jr., Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice, the Blessed but now St. Alphonsus Liguori and Father Balducci. I must point out that in September of 1835, he re-worked and made a corrected copy of it, which he then consigned to me for the general archives where it is presently preserved. Further, I must point out that he would vary the method in incidental things, adapting them to the diversity of places, to the different groups that he served, as well as the topics of sermons and religious services. But, they were always studied beforehand by him and made to fit in with the spirit of the Church. He carried out these religious services, now more now less, now some now others, according to how the Spirit moved him, as I myself witnessed many times.

To be more precise, I shall say, first of all, that he would not accept a mission or any other type of ministry without first having received a request from the legitimate authority or, at least, having obtained their approval.

After corresponding by mail, setting up the proper procedure for the mission, he was then accustomed to making a solemn entrance, in order to produce in the people, from the very beginning, a feeling of excitement and to remind them that the time of the mission is a time of divine mercy, but that they should also be filled with joy. That is why he would have the clergy, the confraternities and the people come in procession to meet the missionaries and, amid the festive ringing of bells and the singing of hymns, he would, while kneeling, receive the image of the Crucified Lord, signifying thereby the consignment of these souls by the bishop, or someone in his name, as they then moved processionally to the church.

Having arrived there, they would sing the *Veni Creator* and recite the *Ave Maris Stella*. He then mounted the platform together with his companions and, after singing the *Dio ti salve, Maria*, he would give the introductory sermon. That introduction was a simple one: he spoke of the grace of the mission and presented some basic, saving truths. At times, however, he would make the introduction by following the method of Termanini, i.e., solemnly with surplice and stole. In that

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: In the third chapter of this book, which the compiler, Fr. Beniamino Conti entitles "The Missionary," the Venerable John Merlini gives a listing, year by year, of the almost unbelievable number of missions and retreats, as well as other forms of preaching, conducted by St. Gaspar, starting with the one in December of 1814 in S. Nicola in Carcere to the last one given in Chiesa Nova in Rome in 1837, the year of his death. I have opted not to reproduce here this long listing. However, if anyone is particularly interested in those details, they can be found in Volume I of "St. Gaspar Letters" compiled by Fr. Luigi Contegiacomo, C.P.P.S. (thus pages 46 - 53 of the original are omitted here.) Raymond Cera, C.P.P.S.

case, he would give an explanation of the meaning of the surplice and stole, he would focus his remarks toward penance by which souls are made beautiful and sanctified.

Then, he would remove the stole and surplice and announce that he would put them on again at the end of the mission after the souls have been sanctified through the sacred, penitential cleansing. He would implore God's mercy toward the souls in need, and would close the service with the use of the discipline.

On other occasions, he would put on the violet stole, calling for tears of repentance, and would have his companions do the same. Then, having removed the stole, he would put a rope around his neck, a crown of thorns on his head, explaining the significance as he did so, in order to impress more deeply on the people the feeling of compunction. Finally, he would conclude with the use of the discipline.

At other times, he would lead a procession from the place where the mission had just been completed to the next place where he was to begin another, and, along the way he would ask the people to sing the *Cantemus Domino* or *In exitu Israel de Aegypto*, inserting after each verse the *Lodato sempre sia*.

When the two groups met, that is, the one that he was leading and the one coming from the other direction, he would line them up together, continuing, then, in processional form. When the time came for the introductory sermon, he would use the theme of the glory of a soul that has been sanctified, thus arousing the new mission participants to sanctification, as he praised the souls already made holy. These different ways of introducing a mission, I, myself, have witnessed in the different missions that I participated in with the Servant of God. Ordinarily, however, he would follow the first method.

After the introduction, benediction with the Blessed Sacrament followed immediately. Whenever he preached outdoors, he would have it brought processionally either to the door of the church or to the platform. After this service, he went to pay his courtesy call to the bishop, if he was there, to the vicar, to the leading clergy, both regular and secular, as well as to the principal civil leaders of the city, town or commune. On occasions, I accompanied him on these visits and I noted that he dispatched them with little waste of time. He availed himself of this opportunity to ask them for their prayers, to speak to them of matters relating to the Mission, for example the oratory, and discussed with them the talks and everything else that would be needed. In the meantime, he would send his companions to the neighboring towns to give the *svegliarini* (pep talks?). Whenever he was unable to complete all the courtesy visits after the introductory services, he would finish them on the following morning and would send one or the other of his companions, in his name, to do the same for the religious who lived outside the inhabited area, and were a bit farther removed.

During the first days of the Mission, he would take care of giving talks to the various groups, as the opportunity arose and as the variation in locality allowed: the priests, the seminarians, the clerics, the seculars, the civil leaders, the workers, the leading women, the confraternities, the nuns, the military personnel, the artists, mothers of families and, separately, the fathers and the children. He did not overlook those in the hospital as well as those in prison, adding, omitting or multiplying the talks as he judged them to be needed.

He was concerned, furthermore, with the giving of visiting sermons to the nearby towns, since the people would come in processional form from those places to participate in the Mission. He would share this obligation of visiting sermons with his companions, and he himself would

supply whenever they were unable. As a result, he was compelled, by circumstances, often to preach many times each day. And, as I was told by Vincenzo Severini (Gaspar's lay-helper), he preached as many as fourteen sermons in one day.

In addition to that, early in the morning, after the Mass at which the Chaplet of the most Precious Blood was recited, he himself, or more frequently he would assign someone else, gave the catechetical instructions on the commandments and the sacraments, if, because of restriction of time or variation in locality, these could not be arranged for after the noon meal. The second Mass followed at which the recitation of the Acts, the rosary and the litany of the B.V.M. took place. The service ended with a blessing of the people with a relic of the Madonna. During this Mass, after the reading of the Gospel, he would recount or have one of the others recount an incident in the life of the Blessed Mother which he, or the other person, would tie in with the catechetical instruction.

After the noon meal, or occasionally before noon, there were lessons for the children, separating the boys from the girls. He was particularly interested in preparing them for their first communion. At times, he would give those lessons, even if only for a short time, thus by his very presence encouraging the pastors and the other priests of the place.

The principal or "grand" sermon was, as far as I know, given by him at the Missions which he directed, but whenever he felt that he no longer had the energy to give it, he would replace it with some other religious service. I know this for certain, that, at times, he would propose that one of us give that sermon. When we replied that this would not be the proper thing, he would admit that Albertini had told him that when he went out to give a Mission, he should never fail to give the "grand" sermon.

At the end of certain sermons, as an aid to his summation of the theme or in keeping with the spirit of the Church and the practice of the saints, he was accustomed to use certain rites. At times, he would hold up a skull or would have one of his companions bring one forward, accompanied by two lighted candles. This would take place after a sermon on death, on sin or on indecency. At other times, he would use the discipline or have the *Miserere* chanted. Likewise, he would have the church bells sound the death toll for an hour at night to remind the sinner that he was dead to the grace of God and that he should rise to the life of grace.

On occasions, he would distribute these functions in several of the sermons, for example, he might use the discipline at the end of only one sermon, and at other times after two or even three of the sermons, depending on the places involved. Sometimes it was he alone who used the discipline, and on other occasions, he used it along with his companions. At times, he would use the discipline once on the platform after the sermon, once during the *svegliarino* and once at the oratory.

From time to time, he would direct a penitential procession, using the discipline at two or three different places after he had drawn the people together after the sermon. On still other occasions, he would use it frequently during the procession. Often, before using the discipline on the platform, he would ask for the chanting of the *Parce, Domine, parce populo tuo* or *I gradi della passione*. Other times, he would have them chant the *Miserere* as he then interjected a short fervorino after two or three verses. Sometimes, he would have the Crucifix carried away so as to give the feeling of God abandoning his people, just as on judgment day there will be the issuing of the final sentence for the reprobates. Then, reminding sinners that this is the acceptable time for salvation and for peace through conversion, he would place the rope around his neck, the crown of thorns on his head and plead for the pardon of sinners, asking all to pray for them and then ending

the ceremony with the use of the discipline.

When he preached on the topic of hell, he was accustomed at times to depict a soul that has been damned. This practice, although capable of causing an immense effect, he no longer used, it seems to me, after the Mission he gave in Marino where he was advised by one in the Institute that it would be better not to have this sort of demonstration. At another sermon, given around the half-way point in the Mission, he would have joyous rites, presenting, for example, an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercies, into whose hands he entrusted the Mission. He would leave that image on view for the remainder of the Mission for public veneration on the platform, surrounded by burning candles offered by the faithful. On that occasion, he would urge the people to bring to the confessors all forbidden books, playing cards, forbidden weapons and other dangerous articles, and then giving them very special instructions on that night.

At other times, he would have that image of the B.V.M. brought in at the same time as an image of the Crucifix, but from two different points, both accompanied with a large number of candles, palms and flowers, the ringing of church bells, the organ, other bells, the procession of the clergy. Having filed through the aisles of the church, he would then have these two images brought forward to the platform, where he then raised each of them in blessing over the people. It was also his practice to urge the people to make gifts to the Blessed Virgin as a sign of tender affection to so great a mother. These he would leave there as a perpetual reminder of the Mission, and each one would remember the promises made to the Madonna ...

The Servant of God was accustomed to having a figure of the deceased Christ brought in at the end of one of the sermons: it was done with mourning if it occurred before the half-way point of the Mission, and with solemnity, if he had already entered upon the theme of guidance for souls already in the illuminative way. In this case, the image was draped in red, thus reminding them of the glory of the Divine Blood in the way that the Church recalls the triumph of the Cross.

Behind the dead Christ came the image of the Sorrowful Mother and the cross. Whenever he could he would have this done by the clergy wearing red vestments and carrying torches. Otherwise, it was done by members of one of the confraternities.

At night, there would be a solemn procession at which, ordinarily, the clergy would be present, along with the members of the various confraternities dressed in their uniforms and carrying torches; then, came the men in ordinary dress. He would recommend that the women retire to their homes, as he regularly suggested whenever it was a matter of functions at night. For the processions that would pass by, he would ask the women to put lighting in the windows of the streets through which the procession would go. Once everyone was in place, at one or more stops along the way, he or one of his companions would give a fervorino.

Sometimes he would lead them in a solemn Way of the Cross, with a fervorino at every station. This occasionally replaced the "grand" sermon. During that ceremony, he at times would use the discipline. Likewise, in place of the "grand" sermon, he would lead a penitential procession to one or the other shrine, keeping the men and women separated, and with the clergy and the vested confraternities leading the way. He frequently wore a rope around his neck, used the discipline in an exemplary way, and was accompanied by his fellow Missionaries.

(At this point Merlini lists towns and shrines that were visited during these processions.)

At times, these processions were followed by the implanting and the blessing of a wooden cross, usually set up outside of the town, as a perpetual reminder of the Mission that was given.

Occasionally, that implantation was done along with the blessing of images of the Blessed Virgin Mary which he begged them to place in open view in the piazzas and public streets, illuminating them at night with burning lamps following the customs observed in Rome. He would urge them to place the names of Jesus and Mary on their doors as an effective way of inspiring them to do good works.

When he would preach about hell, he would go up onto the platform without the Crucifix, telling the people that he would be treating the theme of justice on that day; then, he would have the Crucifix brought in solemnly at the end of the sermon.

Likewise, he used to have a ritual for the making of peace. It consisted in having the priests come onto the platform two by two where they kissed the wounds of the Crucified Lord, while he and his companions kissed the feet of the priests. Sometimes, he would have two of his companions kiss the feet of the priests while he held the Crucifix. The priests then stepped off the platform, wearing their choir garb and the solemn stole or with surplice and stole. Where there were few priests, he would substitute with the men of the various confraternities that had assumed the task of assisting at the Mission. While all that was going on, he urged the people to exclaim: "Peace with God, peace with everyone, long live peace." Furthermore, he himself or others would announce the selection of peacemakers, both men and women, whose responsibility it was to bring about reconciliation wherever there was need.

Then, at night in the oratory at the end of the sermon, he would have these brethren summoned to one or the other altar with the image of the Crucified Lord, surrounded by candles. There, he asked the men to approach and kiss the Crucifix. As that act took place, he urged everyone present to remember the peace which they were required to give to their enemies and to pray for those who needed to be reconciled with their neighbors. He had them ring the church bells festively while in every home they were to ask pardon of one another.

When the "grand" sermon was given and completed, they had the singing of the *Perdono, o caro Dio*, benediction with the Blessed Sacrament, the chanting of the psalm *Laudate Dominum, omnes gentes*. Then followed the announcement of the rosary to be recited by the women as they made their way home, having been previously urged not to roam about at night.

At this point, I might mention that in the church, especially at the discourse given after the noon meal, he would insist that they, his Missionaries as well as the confraternity leaders, be very careful to keep the men and women in separate groups for the sake of maintaining good order throughout the Mission.

Every night there was the *svegliarino* and the oratory for the men, as I have said, at which a résumé of the sermons was given, stressing the practical points that should be the result. Whenever the Servant of God conducted the oratory, he would add something from the life of St. Francis Xavier. They frequently had services in that night oratory in honor of the Madonna with the singing of the litany and the blessing with the relic. On other nights, they would have a blessing of the water of St. Francis Xavier to be used for the sick.

These and similar functions were the practices that the Servant of God used during Missions. I noticed in a particular way that he did them so naturally and so easily that it was hardly believable. Alert to the needs as they arose, he knew how to adapt himself to the diverse localities.

When he carried out the functions by himself I would stand in amazement at his skill. On those occasions, when he would take me along with him on a Mission, he would usually put me in

charge of directing those functions at which he was unable to be present and would instruct me with the minutest details. What I observed was that every function was worked out with solid reason and was based on well-thought-out ideas. As a result, they turned out to be quite spontaneous and effortless. I further noticed the gravity, the majesty and the dignity involved, so that far from dissipating his spirit, they made him all the more recollected.

If some particular function did not turn out well, he experienced displeasure and sought to correct it. Furthermore, he insisted that these functions should not take place before their assigned time and that they be carried out only where there was necessity for them. He was accustomed to remark that since a human being is not a pure spirit, these things will make a deeper impression when they strike the senses and will firmly affect the person, especially when they are not expecting it.

Toward the end of the Mission, or after its conclusion, he would gather together the boys and girls who had already been prepared for their First Communion. He, or one of his companions, would give them a retreat of a day or two with meditations and instructions. On the day set for their First Communion, he would have them move processionally into the church where the ceremony was to be held. The girls were dressed in white with a veil, a crown of flowers placed on their head a crucifix and Mary's rosary in hand. The boys had only the crucifix and the rosary of the Blessed Virgin. Sometimes he would have the boys don the habit of one of the confraternities and at other times he would have both the boys and the girls wear the Madonna's scapular around their necks. The ceremony was accompanied with hymns and a fervorino.

Finally, after the distribution of articles of devotion, two by two the boys were led forward to kiss the wounds of the crucified Lord. He himself, or, if he were not present, his companions would kiss the feet of the boys. Then, he or one of the others would present the image to the girls who, without moving from their places, would kiss it. Finally, the *Te Deum* was chanted. This ceremony was carried out with greater or lesser solemnity, depending on the circumstances of the place.

Besides this ceremony, he would have Holy Communion brought to the sick; sometimes, he would do it himself. If the place was vast and the sick numerous, he would have Communion brought from several of the churches. On these occasions also the imprisoned would participate from the holy table if provisions for them had not been made otherwise. This ceremony was done with the greatest solemnity possible.

When Communion was being brought to a poor person, he would have people gather alms which were then also presented to the individual with some devotion. In giving Communion, he would say a few words of encouragement to each sick person. Finally, he would urge the owners to have a candle in the house to be used in accompanying Holy Viaticum and that all should participate by walking along reverently with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament whenever it was brought to the infirm. If they were unable to do so, at least they should pray at that time. Then, too, whenever he passed by a home in the city or town, on that occasion he would also bless the area with the sacred pyx.

In the morning, or, after the noon meal of the final day of the Mission, the usual practice was the preaching of the "sermon of reminders". On that occasion, the people were asked to bring along all evil books that were to be burned, also playing cards and other dangerous articles, including forbidden weapons and all these things were to be surrendered.

Then, after mounting the platform, he delivered his "sermon of reminders" adapting it to the

needs of the people there. Next, he would have the pile of books and playing cards set on fire and the weapons smashed to bits. The crushed metal was to be sold and the money used to buy wax for candles or something else in honor of the most holy Mary.

Likewise, he had them gather together any gifts that had been offered and these were presented to the image of the Blessed Virgin, the one that was venerated in their area, as I mentioned before.

While all this was going on, he would lead them in songs of praise to the Virgin Mary. In his "sermon of reminders," he gave opportune warnings and at the end he blessed them with the image of St. Francis Xavier which he regularly kept on the platform along with that of the Blessed Virgin. Finally, he would put on a surplice and stole; with the faculties that he had received, he blessed the crucifixes, rosaries and medals. Last of all, he blessed the people with the crucifix.

During these final moments, he would have them ring the church bells festively and even permitted the people to play instruments, shoot off firecrackers, if this was their custom. The Ambrosian hymn was intoned, benediction of the Blessed Sacrament followed, and the Mission was terminated.

#### Works of perseverance

He was accustomed to setting aside the seven Sundays in honor of the Sorrowful Mother, - warmly recommending the devotion to the most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, to Mary most holy and to St. Francis Xavier.

In the course of a mission or at its close, he would see to the setting up of the various organizations, that is, of the apostles for the clergy, of St. Francis Xavier for the men, of sisters of charity for the women, of St. Aloysius for the boys, of the children of Mary for girls; this he did as best he could and as circumstances allowed. In a particular way, he concerned about the establishment of the nightly oratory for the men. In these ways, he managed to perpetuate the fruits of the holy mission.

I must point out that he made use of every opportune faculty so that the mission could attain its fullest success. Furthermore, he would preach outdoors when the church was not capable of handling the number of people or when the heat in the church would stifle his voice, he much preferred preaching outdoors if possible.

#### Community life during a mission

In regard to lodging, he wanted it to be accessible so that it would be easy for men to approach as well as to be less subject to wrong suggestions. At the table, he would not permit sweets nor liqueurs or any such luxuries. He would either send them back, or give them to the prisoners or the sick, as though the donation had not been made. This practice of his was done as a tribute to the ministry even though that ministry may have been accompanied with a person of note, for example, a prelate.

I learned from Fr. Biagio Valentini, if I am not mistaken, that in Pievetorina, when they had brought in such foodstuffs, the Servant of God immediately ordered that they be sold, even though in that mission a prelate was present. The meals for missions were frugal and he would allow third entree only on the final day of the mission. However, he insisted that the food be healthy and in sufficient quantity so that the companions would be sustained during the labors of the ministry. For

that same reason, he also permitted the use of coffee or some other beverages that could help the voice. He himself made use of them for that same motive, although during his final years he was more sparing.

He would take along just a few companions since he said that with just a few the of the ministry could be carried out even in large cities. In agreement with the bishop or his vicar, he would have confessors come in from the neighboring places in the number that he felt was necessary. He would see that these men were lodged in particular houses offered by generous benefactors. He made use of this method since expenses were very high. Even though, in the beginning, he did not want to be concerned about temporal things, still he had to ask for a certain amount of money. But, once the expenses for the missionaries were covered, he would return what was left over. I witnessed this procedure in the mission of Ferentino.

During a mission, in the morning, before the noon hour, he would have a meditation with the other companions and would close it with the recitation of seven Glory Be ... in honor of the most Precious Blood, the *Angelus Domini* and a few verses of Scripture.

During the noon meal, there was a reading of the life of some saint or another spiritual book until the half-way point of the meal. After the reader was dismissed, he would discuss the functions to be held, he would distribute the assignments and dealt with other things that appeared to be necessary for the success of the mission. He did not want them to discuss conscience cases at that time but told them that if anyone needed help or counsel, they should do that in private.

During the early years, they were accustomed to giving what was called "the farewell sermon". This function, as I noted in the report of the mission given in Ancona that I referred to before, was done to the general commotion of all in that city. In later years, however, they no longer did this and in the method to be followed in giving missions that has been printed, as I said, in 1819, it says that the missionaries are to leave the city as secretly as possible. That now has been the practice that I have noted in the missions in which I have been a companion.

#### St. Gaspar's Eloquence

Besides his deep love and particular natural aptitude for preaching, as I have mentioned elsewhere, the Servant of God learned the art of preaching by attending, as a young man, the lectures of Monsignor Marchetti and Monsignor Bacolo. At times, he would speak to us about these two outstanding men and he would repeat, during our recreation periods, a selection from the sermons of Monsignor Bacolo. I learned from Paolina del Bufalo and from others that while he was yet a deacon, he substituted for Monsignor Marchetti in explaining the Scriptures in the church of the Gesu and that he appeared to be a second Marchetti, so perfect was he in imitation of him.

I maintain however, that beyond his natural endowments and his study, there was in him the grace of his vocation to the apostolic ministry. I am convinced, indeed, that he had the gift of the word. I understand that this was also the judgment of others.

It is certainly true that one could see the spirit of the Lord in him; otherwise, he could never have spoken with such readiness, persuasive power, strength and decisiveness in such a manner, that one could never repeat, unless a much higher spirit dwelt in him. More than in his writing, I admired his force of words, although, even in his writing, one could feel the spirit of Jesus Christ, but it was much more energetic in his preaching.

At times, I witnessed him as though he were outside of himself, as happened at the mission in

Marino during a sermon which I attended. Great was his fluency of speech, superlative was the naturalness with which he poured out his argumentation; I did not hear him ever repeat a word.

He handled the Scriptures and the Fathers with utter ease and especially paraphrased the Psalms in a marvelous manner. He would select only those themes that were substantial and he would avoid topics that were not completely clear. He was particularly careful to observe rigorously the correct theological terminology, which he also insisted that we do by setting down rules for exactness in expression. It was his principle to preach to the people only what was certain and also to distinguish between commandment and counsel, in order not to confuse consciences.

He respected the opinions which the Church respected, without, however, making those things the topic of a sermon or of an instruction. Assumptions were, indeed, for him something noble and extensive; they escaped the cut and dry categories, and he warned me about such things. He preached of God, of the soul, of eternity with a fullness of heart. He was thoroughly distressed with any stifling of his spirit. His manner of developing the exposition of even the most difficult truths of our religion was such that it drew every soul to the love of God. When he noticed a certain hardness of heart in his listeners during his sermon, he would say: *Sentite de Domino in bonitate*. Always in control of himself, he would take hold of his theme in a wondrous way. The fullness of his treatment, the skill with which he anticipated difficulties, the outstanding naturalness with which he unfolded the theme and the fluency with which he expressed it, commanded the attention of the learned; furthermore, through his own proper gift of weaving things together, the unlettered also were able to have their hunger sated. Many times, they were moved to compunction by his gestures, by the tone of his voice, by his very comportment.

Especially stunning were his digressions which came to him spontaneously and, although prolonged occasionally, he skillfully worked his way back to the thread of his thought without anyone scarcely realizing it. During these digressions, he would get down to the practical level and, in as far as he was able, he would adapt himself to the level of his audience, selecting pertinent comparisons but at the same time not detracting from the dignity of the holy word of God. This was something that he advised all of us to be careful about.

His talks to the clergy and to the higher class of people were distinguished. In giving them, he spoke with evangelical liberty, but, at the same time, with respect, thus winning over the esteem and veneration of all.

I was told, I do not rightly remember whether it was Fr. Biagio Valentini, that on the occasion of talks given by the Servant of God to the higher ranked people and their employees in Frosinone, one or more (I do not remember exactly) said that if anyone else had said to them all the things that del Bufalo preached they would have been displeased. But, since it was he who said them, they listened willingly.

This was his usual manner, namely, to speak with the freedom of the Gospel but always respectful of his audience. He would season his discourses by saying, for example, "while we intend to do good, we fail through ignorance, through inadvertence, through thoughtlessness, and that is, indeed, the fact."

In giving Mission sermons, besides the ones that stressed the basic principles according to the method of the Ignatian Exercises, he was accustomed, in some places and according to the circum-stances, to give one or more apologetic sermons. I heard one that he gave in Gaeta, dealing with the necessity of having a revealed religion. It was handled with such accuracy of argument and

with such completeness that I was stunned. In addition to the aforementioned sermons, he would also preach about the Blessed Mother, about peace, about the Precious Blood of Jesus, as well as other sermons that he judged necessary according to the diversity of places, but always asking them for their prayers and seeking their advice.

In reference to this topic, I shall tell you what was reported in the records covering the Mission given in Ascoli in June of 1821. It was written by Father Francesco Amici, of happy memory, who was at that time an Olivetan monk, and the report was printed in Ascoli.

Among other things, in speaking of the talks given to the clergy, it said the following: "In those conferences, which might better be entitled a public schooling in religion, the highly-esteemed Missionary (he is speaking of the Servant of God) was the source of constant amazement because of his gentle and winning manner, his interweaving of ideas as he poured out his exposition with surprising naturalness and dignity, and because of his skillful handling of the Sacred Scriptures, along with his inexhaustible storehouse of sacred erudition. They were seasoned and delivered with his unique style, unhesitating as the flow of a river, and holding his audiences spellbound. At that moment when the intellect is illumined by the irresistible light of truth, supported by reason and revelation, he would lead one on, or, should I say rather that he drew one almost insensibly along with him by a secret, wonderful enchantment which one could not possibly imagine, unless one actually heard him. With assurance, it can be asserted that in this type of quiet, yet discursive, eloquence, it would be quite difficult to find his equal. He was greatly helped in this regard because of his Roman dialect, in itself a thing of dignity. Also, it was due to his many natural talents, evident in his voice, his gestures, his bearing, not to mention that sacred unction that pervaded his words and gave such verve and force to his jolting concepts which never just stopped at the ears but worked themselves into the very core of the hearts of his listeners."

Then, speaking of his sermons, it said: "With the crucifix and the image of St. Francis Xavier being carried before him as an escort, and, reciting devout prayers in a low voice, he would ascend the platform. After the usual preparations and the customary greeting with the ejaculatory prayer to the Blood of Jesus Christ, he would begin by first instructing the people in the various functions that would be included in the daily program during the Mission. (I point out that this was the usual method observed. I myself have seen the Servant of God do this on the Missions that I worked with him. He was accustomed to give, at that time, the basic principles in a more concise and direct form for the renewal of their lives.)

Having, then, [the aforementioned author continues] given as a usual thing a brief resume of what the sermon would contain, he would cite his text and state his theme again, which he always divided into its component parts, identifying the steps that he would follow throughout the presentation. In this outline, the main points would allow him, during the course of the sermon, the possibility of bringing in and using the many gifts that adorned his fertile imagination. If, in the ardor of his zeal, he was carried away with apostolic freedom, since *verbum Dei non est alligatum*, sometimes he gave the impression of having strayed from his theme, while giving practical examples in useful digressions; yet, he did that so pleasantly and with such dexterity that instead of losing the attention of his listeners, he captured it wondrously and opened it up to the enjoyment of a vast field of pertinent, sacred erudition which he had accumulated. That type of freedom, not really in keeping with the strict rules of sacred eloquence, was in him a unique merit.

Without prejudicing his main theme, he would extemporaneously proceed to discussing the

lack of morality in his time and, in doing so, would allow himself to become emotional, but with moderation, never losing his composure. Rather, more correctly stated, he allowed himself to be moved by the spirit of the Lord who, *ubi vult spirat*, urging him on in those precious moments. However, what no one knows how to explain and what seems to be something far above the human condition in this rare genius of sacred eloquence, was his ability, with scarcely three hours of sleep per night, to keep up sufficient strength, to preserve his forceful and thundering voice for the continuous exercise of preaching, even to the extent of giving as many as six different sermons a day, being done quite often out in the open air. How could he continue giving, with that same vigorous voice, sermons that were so meaty in content and yet within the space of no less than an hour and a half, never stopping for a pause, not even in going from one point to another, never repeating a thought already expressed, never stopping to cough or spit, *sit veria verbo*, content only on rare occasions to mop his brow with his handkerchief. How could he, with such a variety of material and thoughts, often punctuated by gasps of embarrassment from the teeming crowds, always adhere to his original outline as well as to its development, without ever reproducing the same ideas, yet maintaining from beginning to end, the same presence of mind, the same strength of voice, the same cheerful look on his face. In truth, these were talents or extraordinary gifts and all of them were his." "I proceed now to refer quickly to something about the sermons themselves that he gave during the Mission. On the first two days, he took as his subject: the truth of the Catholic religion as opposed to philosophical unbelief. It is not my purpose to analyze the natural reasoning nor the philosophical teaching that he detailed in his first sermon on the existence of God, the authenticity of the Holy Book, the variety of theological doctrines, accompanied with a profusion of scriptural texts, that he poured out, nor even the various examples that he used with a masterful stroke in his second sermon. All that I want to say, and everyone asserts the same thing, is that in those two sermons, both as an accomplished philosopher and a profound theologian, he summarized the most convincing power of Christian apologetics and brought out clearly the invincible triumph of the Crucified Lord. In the subsequent sermons, treating the last things, far from causing a feeling of gloom with tedious threatening words to a very large audience, he used his enthusiasm to lead them to renew their lives and repent wholeheartedly."

Thus, does the aforementioned Amici continue giving the details describing that Mission from beginning to end. I shall report, further, what I read in the summary of the Missions given by the Servant of God in the city of Teramo, in the diocese of Abruzzo, at the end of 1822 and the beginning of 1823. It is written by Father Nicola Palma, now deceased, a Canon in the Abruzzo. It was printed in Teramo, as can be read in the biography of the aforementioned Nicola Palma, page 10. I, myself, also saw this mentioned by the same author in his *Storia Ecclesiastica e Civile*, third volume, page 297. He says, speaking of the Mission in Teramo:

"I observed these things, and the sermons that were given only confirm these observations, namely: first, del Bufalo's digressions, always very appropriate, to which his enthusiasm so often led him, did not cause him to stray far from his main points; second, without stopping, without repeating, without making errors, he avoided presenting anything that would disgust his audience. Neither did he assume airs either in his gestures, his voice or the expression on his face, whatever the topic may have been that he was treating; third, that in the outpouring of his feelings, which could be produced by nothing other than his purity of intention and his inner conviction of what was being explained, he found the secret to moving people, especially when he would take into his hands

the large, beautiful Crucifix that he always carried with him on his Missions.

From that point on, he was no longer the orator who was presenting an argument, but a heart burning with love for God and enthusiasm for his neighbor so that it is no wonder that even the most stolid person was moved to tenderness and tears; fourth, with a robust eloquence, supported by an attractive Roman accent and a very neat, regular, composed outward appearance, he would sometimes go on for a good two hours. Yet, no one in the listening audience felt the least bit bored."

That is how it continues, not only describing this mission but also the others that were given in the diocese.

Among other words of praise that I discovered, though I do not remember them exactly at this moment, was a sonnet printed in Teramo and dedicated to the Servant of God on the occasion of the Mission he gave in Campli, diocese of Teramo. I heard people speak other words of praise for his preaching and quite widespread was that of learned people with respect to his manner of preaching. In particular, from a letter written by Canon Baldesi, I noted that for the Mission in Caldarola, priests and learned lay people of rank stood in admiration of his method, his delivering and the development of his themes. The two sermons that he gave on the truth of religion were masterpieces, especially for that period in history when that area of la Marca was somewhat in the state of upheaval.

Also, in a letter from Fr. Luigi Cocci, I learned that while a Mission was being conducted in Grutti, a certain Fr. Girolamo Leli, a priest of recognized learning, came from Todi just to hear the Servant of God, whose reputation had become well known. Then, after hearing him, he said that del Bufalo was quite a bit better than the celebrated Doctor Del Monte and that it was something prodigious to have joined together in this one man such holiness, learning and eloquence. I took part in this Mission in Grutti; I saw some of the priests who had come from Todi and I heard them applaud the Servant of God, even though I cannot recall now their precise words.

I add now what the *Osservatore del Trasimeno*, in Perugia, May 31, 1836, says on the occasion of a Mission given in Todi by the Servant of God:

"For a long, long time there will resound on the lips of the faithful citizens of Todi, the gentle name of the Immortal Workman [speaking of the Servant of God] and from generation to generation the people will speak of a truly apostolic man who, in the year 1836, displayed a most profound knowledge of theology and canon law, produced a vast impression on the clergy of Todi and the people in general. He did so, on the one hand, in his public remonstrances and, on the other hand, in his contacts with individual groups separately, offering them the purest doctrine and the basic principles of our holy religion, and doing so with a spirit of piety and zeal, balanced always with freedom and prudence. A man of extraordinary genius, a man without officiousness in his words, a man whose very face manifestly reflects his deep-felt consciousness of his mission; a man who is truly singular and unique - may he live in the memory of the ages, for he is most worthy of that remembrance."

Even though he was most deserving of this praise from the public, he nevertheless knew how to humble himself in adaptation to the simple folks whenever he was to preach to them. I remember having heard the Servant of God, who really enjoyed preaching to the poor, say to me, referring perhaps to the Missions given in the abbacy of Farfa and San Salvatore Maggiore, that he was using examples taken from the lives of servants and field laborers.

I am of the opinion that although he did not move people by the tonality of his voice, he did

possess all the other talents for preaching. In substitution for that lack, however, he supplied his sentiments that were passionate, produced in his heart out of love for God. To that, he added yet his affection for devotions and ceremonies, as I related previously, which deeply impressed his listeners, as I myself witnessed. From all of this, many conversions resulted. The Servant of God himself acknowledged that he lacked the ability of moving people simply by the tonality of his voice, so that in writing once to a nun, a letter which I have read, he asked her to pray that the Lord would deign to grant him that grace.

However, I will say that although the mere tonality of his voice did not manage to touch someone's heart, neither was it irritating, even though, at times, it became somewhat raucous or even lost completely for a short period of time, especially when he had to force his voice in order to be heard. Indeed, when that happened, he aroused pity and then joy in his listeners when, all of a sudden, it would come back strong and sonorous. It is certain that, all in all, one could always note in his audience a great emotional reaction, whether the people showed it externally or not. The extraordinary help of God must have concurred.

#### Fruitful harvests from the Missions

First of all, I will say that the two results that he sought in all of his preaching were for good and practical effects in the life of his neighbor. I know this because he spoke of it continuously and wanted us to preach in such a way as to win souls to God. Constantly did I notice that he would study every possible way of promoting, in this fashion, the glory of the Lord.

Then, too, I heard him say, not only in private but also from the platform, especially during these last years, that he was distressed because he did not see the hoped-for reform that was willed by God. For that reason, he would say that God's chastisement had not as yet come to an end. At times, he also wrote this whenever he saw that the good was being ignored. He was distressed when he witnessed the disorders against which he struggled to set up a rampart, declaring that the two strong weapons for reform were the missions and retreats.

Among the missions that he conducted, the most fruitful ones, as far as I could note, were those that he gave in the Marche, commissioned by Pius VII with the grant of generous faculties, as I learned from Canon Muccioli who was his companion, and, that I also heard spoken of by Fr. Antonio Lipparelli while I was still stationed in my home town. Also rich in bountiful results were the missions given in Forlimpopoli and Meldola as well as others.

In general, then, I can say that all the missions given by the Servant of God, some more some less, were accompanied by special, heavenly blessings. In every mission that I took part in, I stood in admiration of the powerful hand of God who worked in the hearts of all. In a special way, I recall that a good part of the confessions that I heard were general confessions because of the need felt by the penitents.

Among other cases, I remember a young lady who, out of shame, had never confessed her sins. Even though she found herself close to death and had received the sacraments, she still did not have the courage to accuse herself of her sins. So, the father of this only daughter, fearing that she might be lost, prostrated himself before the image of the Blessed Virgin and prayed ardently for the salvation of his daughter, saying that he himself would be happy to die instead, if only she would be restored to health. The fact was that the father became ill, the daughter's health improved, the father died, the daughter was cured.

The girl, in the meantime, kept on having feelings of remorse but without ever being able to convince herself to make a sincere confession. On the occasion of the mission and moved by grace, she went in search of the missionary who, it seems to me, was certainly the Servant of God. But, because of the large number of men who were surrounding us and whom we were serving, the young lady was unable to get the favor that she desired. One day, she took to following me and wanted me to promise absolutely that I would hear her confession.

After getting the Servant of God's permission, she in the meantime made her way toward the confessional area which I noticed was crowded with women. I saw that it would be impossible to satisfy her wish. But, this girl, I do not know how she did it, managed to work her way into the crowd and get to the front of the line. The first words that she uttered I do not recall ... either that she was desperate or that she was damned. However, she did say that the mission there was scheduled for her and that the Blessed Mother had given her the grace to make a confession of her sins. She told me in detail the whole story. Encouraged by this, she proceeded to make a good, general confession, giving thanks to the Blessed Virgin for this exceptional favor.

On another mission, a woman likewise felt very cold toward it and the sermons seemed to have no effect whatsoever on her. Then, one day, while gifts were being offered to the Blessed Virgin, she began to shout out in the midst of the audience at the foot of the platform: "A grace, a grace, most holy Mary," and she shouted so loud that she sounded like a raving maniac. No matter what anyone did, she could not be quieted down and absolutely insisted on going to confession immediately. She was quickly removed from that church and taken to another. I had to go there to hear her confession and she immediately recovered her composure.

At that time, she told me that while gifts were being offered to the Virgin Mary, she felt something deep within her heart (I do not quite remember the expression that she used but in substance was): "So many are converting and you aren't; so many are weeping and you stand there cold."

Later, when I learned that this same woman became ill, I was asked to go and reconcile her, but, I had already heard her confession. I do not know whether she died then or not, since we left there and I never inquired about her again.

On another mission, a man came to me in order to make a general confession. After I had gone with the Servant of God to another mission, I was told that the man had passed on to the next life showing signs of being saved and continually thanking the Lord for the grace of that general confession which he had made.

At this same mission, the Servant of God told me, one day, that I should go at night to give the *svegliarino* and that I should stop and preach whenever I was inspired to do so. That night, even though the weather was a bit uncomfortable, I went out, but, I did not feel within myself that impulse which he had mentioned to me. I was just about at the end of the rounds and all set to return to the church. Then, with my companions, I turned down a small street where, not knowing just which spot to pick for preaching, I stopped and began preaching. When I finished, I was summoned immediately to hear the confession of a man who told me that the Lord had led me to that spot.

In Rome, a woman who, if I have not been badly informed, was off the beaten path or surely quite an uncouth person. She converted during the mission that was given in San Nicola in Carcere, and, in the confession that I heard, it appeared that she gave unequivocal signs of sincere conversion. There were others, too, during that same mission. It would not be easy for me here to recall all the

cases that I encountered, especially since they were so numerous and I no longer give much particular thought to remembering them.

I will say only (since generally I took care of hearing the confessions of men) that I have heard the confessions of sinners of every sort and, in untold numbers, of those who for years and years had not approached the sacraments and were weighed down with misery. I was not the only one besieged by penitents, for the very same thing could be said for all of our helping companions, including especially the Servant of God to whom, it appeared to me, those would go who were the most needy. Furthermore, I noticed that the other confessors, some more some less, were kept quite busy. For us, they were a welcome relief, since we, by ourselves alone, could never have been able to satisfy all the people who came. At times, those crowds of penitents would begin to gather immediately after the introductory services, but, more frequently, they would appear after the first penitential rites.

Besides the general results that the Servant of God sought to bring about through his Missions, the one that stands out remarkably is that of arousing the clergy to lead an apostolic life. Particularly in Spello, he formed a union of the priests to carry out good works throughout the diocese, as I was informed by Canon Petrucchi in a letter that he sent me. Also, in the Marche, I know that he spurred on many priests, especially the young ones, some of whom lacked training at the time, to become successful preachers. This I discovered from Fr. Francesco Pierantoni, Fr. Biagio Valentini and others who attribute their careers to the Servant of God.

I know further that wherever he found priests whom he could take along with himself on Missions, he would do so. I got to know several of them and, as a matter of fact, he managed to invite one or the other bishop to accompany him. Other priests, encouraged likewise by the Servant of God, saw to the continuation of the work that had been initiated during the Mission by means of the various pious groups established, set up according to the needs of the different places. I know that some of them are still directing them. Notably, there was the nightly oratory for men which was a primary concern of the Servant of God and I know that they are still maintained by the priests to whom he made the recommendation. Since it was not always possible to introduce this practice in every locality, he nevertheless would offer suggestions on how other good works could be continued in the most effective way.

Animating the clergy was not the only fruit of the Missions. There was also the encouragement of the men to continue to support the oratory. Even where he encountered a shortage of priests, he would try to get one or the other layman to take care of this pious work. In particular, I know of a certain Luigi Batdi in Meldola, of a Mr. Barcaroli nobleman in Chiaravalle, of a Luigi Fuschi in Norma. I have had letter correspondence with each one of them. Although they were laymen, they showed and still show concern for the good work begun and entrusted to them by the Servant of God. Every year, Mr. Baldi makes arrangements for the Retreat in preparation for the feast of St. Francis Xavier which is observed with great solemnity and he invites our men to conduct it. Mr. Fuschi wrote to me a short time ago that the oratory was still functioning and that if a priest could not be present, he himself would lead the function, as he would do also on one day for the members of the confraternity. I recall that the Servant of God, during his mission work, would frequently propose the oratory of Norma as an example.

To continue, I still submit two more facts known to me. First, that when I was serving as the extraordinary confessor for a group of nuns, one of them, who had made her first communion during

a Mission given by the Servant of God, approached me. She told me that when she attended the sermons that were given at that time, just looking at him with his imposing appearance, though not really understanding a single thing that he was saying since she was a simple, little girl, nevertheless she felt moved little by little to detach her heart from created things and respond to the invitation to embrace religious life. She added that every so often she would recall those days and moments, thereby experiencing them tenderly once again, and then be moved to a new vigor for serving God. She recommended herself to him and asked him to pray that she would be granted the grace to die on the day of the Assumption. I knew this nun to be very dedicated and highly esteemed by others.

There was also another young lady, [Translator's note: a footnote says that this refers, without a doubt, to Maria De Mattias, foundress of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ. The Mission mentioned here was held in Vallecorsa in March of 1822.] who has come to me quite often for confession, who declared that she had undergone a change due to a Mission given by the Servant of God in her home town. On that occasion, I, too, noticed that she was moved to even greater fervor. Indeed, I know her very, very well and I know that she is promoting the glory of God in imitation of the Servant of God.

In our general archives, there are several letters which I found among the papers collected from his Eminence Cristaldi, whom I have referred to on other occasions. These were written to him by the delegate Monsignor Luigi Bottiglia, by Fr. Epifanio Mazio and by Canon Muccioli. They deal with the Mission ordered by Pius VII for Benevento. In these letters, one notes very clearly the copious fruits that were gathered during that mission. So huge was the number of penitents that the delegate himself says that he had to assign guards to protect the missionaries, who were besieged night and day by penitents, from suffering violence. The penitents came all the way from Naples and other remote places in the area and among them were those who had not confessed for twenty and thirty years or more.

Furthermore, one learns that Monsignor Cristaldi was given the task of requesting the Holy Father for a prolongation of the Mission, even though it would involve the postponement of another Mission already scheduled for Frosinone. Likewise, one can read in one of the letters of Monsignor Bottiglia, dated December 2, 1815, that somebody had affixed in many locations throughout the city certain posters lampooning religion, the Pope and the missionaries. This horrified the entire city. Monsignor Bottiglia says that he is sending to the Secretary of State, a copy of those that had been torn down and that a few hours after the publication of the aforementioned posters, one of the men involved cast himself at the feet of one of the missionaries, confessed his guilt and destroyed his own rough copy and everything connected with it.

From other letters (found as above) written by Monsignor Cipriani, bishop of Veroli, by the most reverend delegate and by Sir Knight Antonio Guglielmi, we learn that in the Mission conducted in the two churches of Frosinone, the Servant of God himself preached in one of them. Once again, the results were unbelievably copious, the confessionals constantly filled. Many alms were collected for the poor, many prohibited weapons destroyed as the men beat a path to the oratory. One noted also that everyone spoke words of blessing for the Holy Father for having provided them with this Mission, which was, they said, an inspiration from God. Mention is made of how busy the missionaries were kept, night and day, hearing confessions. Even the police and the soldiers came, including, of course, those who for a number of years had not gone to confession; but, on this occasion, they did. Antonio Guglielmi observes that he could recall seven or eight Missions,

but never anything like this one. The bishop of Veroli begs Monsignor Cristaldi to inform the Holy Father of the immense good work accomplished.

I read in the *Diario Romano* a report of the Mission given by the Servant of God in Civitavecchia. It is dated May 15, 1816 and says that one cannot fully describe the effects that the Mission had on the various groups of people: the restitution of considerable sums of money (I point out here that I learned from Fr. Biagio Valentini that the Servant of God was displeased that such an item should be printed in the *Diario* since the source of the restitution could be made known in that way); reconciliations that had been sought without success for years; the surrender of numerous prohibited weapons, bad books and manuscripts of all kinds; the cessation of public scandals; the abandonment of indecent practices.

As for the Mission in Rieti, I learned from a letter written by Canon Simeone Simeoni that the Servant of God reorganized there the association for priests, the so-called Amanti, drew up for them some questions for study, assigned them to the various offices and finally transferred it from the church of San Giovenale to the church of Santa Scolastica. After he returned to Rome, he obtained from the Pope, in favor of that association the grant of several places whose rental income brought in the sum of approximately two hundred scudi per year, used for the promotion of the pious works which they had set up.<sup>2</sup>

#### The Mission in Ancona

I have read the handwritten report describing the mission in Ancona which was conducted in the month of September in 1816. From the very beginning, there was opposition to it and, as one reads in the report, no sooner was the announcement of it made by his Eminence Riganti that the people began mumbling and saying: "We need a lot more than a mission; bread, bread!" This cry was heard to come even from the lips of one or the other priest.

Nevertheless, when the time of the mission arrived, the tune changed and the fruits appeared to be quite numerous. Many people received the holy sacraments, taking advantage of the services not only of the missionaries but of other priests, since, as the author of the report states, it was morally impossible for the missionaries alone to hear the confessions of not a few people who had not gone to confession for twelve, twenty, thirty, even forty years. And this is not, he continues to add, an exaggeration but the truth, since he himself got this information from the penitents themselves. The Servant of God had as his companions: Monsignor Carlo Odescalchi, who was also a prince, Monsignor Antonio Piatti, Fr. Andrea Butironi, Canon Antonio Muccioli and Canon Pietro Antonio Cristianopoli.

The mission was conducted in two churches: while Monsignor Odescalchi was giving the grand sermon in Sant'Agostino, the Servant of God was doing the same in San Domenico. The sermons, however, and the ceremonies were the same.

The themes that they used were: "First, what is God; second, death; third, the obstinate sinner; fourth, the final judgment; fifth, hell; sixth, the mercy of God; seventh, the mercy of Mary, or the so-called sermon of victory; eighth, impurity; ninth, the passion of Jesus Christ; tenth, scandal; eleventh, peace; twelfth, you cannot serve two masters; thirteenth, heaven."

Finally, the Servant of God gave them the reminders which would serve as principles of

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<sup>2</sup> [Translator's observation: from the statements made here by Venerable John Merlini, can we not suppose that he and St. Gaspar would applaud our budding COMPANION PROGRAM?]

good-living, as he preached to them in the main square where the crowds of people had grown so large that the ample piazza of San Domenico and that of the Piazza Maggiore were not sufficient to hold them all - and this is not an exaggeration (so says the author of the report, namely, Camillo Albertini). It overflowed onto the street named del Bondo which joins up with that of the Loggia, and these were filled everywhere. Not only that, but groups of every kind were looking down from balconies and loggias, as well as groups streaming out of the opened store-fronts that surround the piazzas. What was most surprising was to see how many had gathered and filled the roofs of all of the houses.

On the following days, communion was brought in solemn procession to the sick, as the processions issued from three different churches. The number who received communion was sixty-two.

On other days, varied ceremonies took place, such as the blessing of the farmland and the sea, the first communion of boys and girls, the procession of the Madonna as well as other exercises of the ministry that still had to be carried out, until the last day of the month of September when the Servant of God delivered the sermon of *addio* [farewell]. Then, all of them departed the area amidst the people's tears of love and compunction.

#### Criticisms of that Mission in Ancona

Even though that mission turned out to be exceedingly fruitful and exciting, nevertheless, as it unfortunately happens, it did not lack those observers who, in the midst of the general satisfaction enjoyed, proved to be the exceptions. I shall report here what is recorded in the aforementioned report of Mr. Camillo Albertini.

"A few remarks about the reputation attributed to the reverend missionaries as being fanatics. Certain priests and lay people commented that it was sheer fanaticism that the missionaries should have a military escort as they left the church on Monday morning, September 30th, to protect them from the ardent fervor of the people as they were about to leave the city. I say to you, my dear reader, that whenever Fra Pietro Veronese, the son of heretical parents, the one who later became known as San Pietro Martyr, would go to preach in the cities of Italy and elsewhere, and particularly in the city of Milan, the people there would be beside themselves just knowing that he had come.

With great festivity and joy, they would go out to meet him and this huge concourse of people would approach him in order to kiss his hand or touch his habit. The crowds were so large that at times he would have to be carried on their shoulders as he was seated in a special chair, so as to protect him from the fury of the people, from the very fervent impetus of devotion that drove people to trample on each other. It would easily have caused injury to the person of Fra Pietro whom they loved and esteemed more than themselves.

Is it not possible that the same thing could have happened to these missionaries as they departed, if they had not been, as stated before, protected and defended? Likewise, noted in the life of Fra Pietro is the fact that those that heard him preach were so numerous that the churches, streets and the piazzas could not hold them all. Now, have we not seen here the same thing, indeed, in even larger numbers? In addition to the locations just mentioned, even the rooftops were seen to be crowded. So, what do you say to that? What people demonstrated toward Fra Pietro, they also showed toward a Vincent Ferrer, an Anthony of Padua, a John of Capistrano, a Giacomo della Marca, a Bernardine of Siena. So, why should this be such a surprise?"

"Now, we turn to the missionaries use, on several occasions, of a discipline. This act of public penance performed with iron chains by the servants of God, that is, the use of the discipline, was also criticized by one or the other priest as a prankish act and as something outdated. Perhaps it may appear strange to you, my reader, that such a remark should ever come from the lips of a priest. But, while I still give honor to the priesthood, I am also happy to say simply that we cannot all be of the same opinion and that the censure of a few cannot denigrate the clergy in general. Certainly, this is a period in which those who are occupied in giving Missions have not, as yet, set aside this practice.

In 1747, Father Leonard of Port Maurice, now Blessed, used it mornings and evenings. In 1753, Fr. Stefano, a Capuchin, also practiced the same and he died with the reputation of being a saint. I remember these things precisely because I have written about each one of these men. In fact, I recall that, as they were administering this punishment upon themselves, all the people were deeply moved to tears, uttering laments and sighs. I saw it again on the evening of the 12th of September by these highly esteemed servants of God. If you were to ask me just what greater influence this self-discipline gives to the preaching of the missionary and the purpose that he has for administering it to himself, we have the answer to both questions in the *Vita del Venerable Marcello d'Aste*, who was bishop in this city in 1710. It was printed in Rome in 1811 by the press of Giovanni Francesco Cracas near San Marco al Corso.

In it, one reads that in order to set straight a priest who regularly frequented taverns, he was given repeated admonitions by outstanding religious and sometimes by others, to withdraw from such a scandalous and indecent vice. First, they had recourse to prayer, then to threats, but all turned out to be useless. Finally, it was decided to send him to make a retreat in the hermitage of the Camaldolese Fathers in Monte Conero, obliging him to remain there for a full month. When that month was completed, the Cardinal sent for him, and with a fatherly concern stressed for the priest the basic principles that should be observed.

However, just a short time after, it was learned by that good bishop that his prayers and his sincere efforts were in vain, for the priest had gone back again to his usual way of life. He was called in again. Having emphasized once more the decorum that should identify his character as a priest, the bishop realized that all his paternal efforts to draw the priest away from his life of vice were fruitless. He was convinced that all of this was happening because of his own demerits as the priest's superior and that he himself did not merit from God the grace of correcting the life of this wayward soul. So, he told the priest that he himself wanted to do the penance for such a non-correctable failing. He took the priest along with him to his own private chapel and there, in the presence of the delinquent priest, he whipped himself brutally for a long period of time, blaming himself as the one guilty of other's sin, since he had been culpably negligent.

The priest was so stricken in seeing the bishop whipping and torturing himself that he could no longer hold back his sorrow and suddenly broke down, pouring out a flood of tears. This spectacle of compassion on the part of the innocent penitent caused so deep an impression on the priest that he began from that moment on to regulate his life and activities so that they would serve as an example to other priests.

"With this authentic fact in mind, would you still say that the use of the discipline is just a prankish and useless thing? Indeed, I would say that it is necessary for a missionary to use the discipline just as, in a certain way, it was necessary for that good shepherd to lead his lost sheep

back to true repentance. What a beautiful lesson that is for a missionary to give!<sup>3</sup>

"Now we turn to the accusation that the Missionaries were nothing but beginners. Well, even the young can become accomplished and perfect teachers since the Holy Spirit does not need to have people who have accumulated long years of life when he wishes to effect great things. And, when he wishes to lead people to the way of salvation, he does not have to have preachers who are old and gray-haired. Furthermore, God, for whom nothing is impossible and who can make the mute speak eloquently, gives a particular grace to those who take up work in his vineyard, not for mundane rewards, not for lucrative gain nor applause, but to give glory to him alone and to bring sinners to conversion. In just a few hours, they are able to effect great things, not of themselves, nor just as human beings, but as those who are given divine assistance. So, they keep their hearts and souls ever open, ready to give their all. Now who can argue about that?

(Merlini then says):

That is how Camillo Albertini, the compiler of the notes on Ancona, completes his report on the Mission there. Along with this report, we likewise find appended a sonnet that was composed by Count Alessandro Nappi in support of the report.

### Mission Expenses

I must not fail to mention here that in the Mission given in Ancona, besides the observations which I have already made, something else occurred that was quite displeasing to the Servant of God, as I learned from Fr. Biagio Valentini. It was the considerable expense that was involved in that Mission. It is true that the Servant of God was in favor of giving the religious aspects of the Mission great attention, but he did not go along with the idea of using money for profane things, resulting thereby in a lack of funds for the things that pertained to God. So, when this was discovered it was very hard for him to accept it.

Again from Fr. Biagio Valentini I learned that in order to compensate in some small way for the bad judgment that was used then, two years later when he was to go back there to preach, he asked for no remuneration for his work. In 1823, he returned there to give a retreat, or more correctly stated, a Mission to those in the Darsena (a prison). In a letter<sup>4</sup> that he wrote from Offida where he was located in the month of June, addressed to Monsignor Cristaldi, he says:

"I would like to inform you that I have already contacted the most eminent bishop and the most reverend Delegate of Ancona with regard to the Mission to the prisoners. It will begin during the opening days of July [actually it was anticipated by a day or so]. I also wrote asking them to provide lodging for me in some religious community and all would go along well. As for the expenses. I would ask you, if you so agree, to direct them in Ancona to handle things as I would like them. Even though I am truly trustful of all, nevertheless I would like them to do things as I feel they should be done. However, if your most reverend excellency should decide otherwise, I will likewise be content."

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<sup>3</sup> Translator's note: At this point, the author of that report gives a couple more examples of individuals in the past who made use of the discipline. I have opted to omit them for the sake of brevity. Likewise, I chose to omit his next defense of the missionary's use of flowers and fragrant herbs to decorate the churches etc. His argument is based on the long-standing tradition of doing the same on great festive days, such as Corpus Christi, so why not now when souls are restored to the love and service of God?

<sup>4</sup> Lett. n. 724.

I shall hurriedly add that in that same letter, he gives thanks to God for this shift of Missions and expresses his inability to describe the many ways that the glory of God is promoted among the people. In his postscript, he asks for information concerning the Mission to be conducted in Pontecorvo where he expects to go for the month of August. In the closing part of this letter, after extolling the glories of the Divine Blood, he adds: "O God, may the world be purged of the leprosy of sin".

In another letter,<sup>5</sup> sent from Ancona on the 29th of June of that year, he first makes the observation that he has carried out his ministry and asks that prayers be offered that God will bless the spoken word and that the fruits will be a source of joy.

Then he says:

"Since I have not been otherwise directed, I have begun to take in hand this matter of regulating the expenses. I await, of course, any instructions that your excellency might wish to communicate to me."

From this, one can see that he prudently sought to investigate the expenses incurred so that they would not become a burden.

In a letter from Canon Ottaviani, I learned that in 1830, when I was with the Servant of God, giving a retreat to the clergy, he asked for only three scudi for travelling expenses, which, *de facto* were to cover my coach fare from Rimini to Ancona. He asked nothing for his own travel from Rome.

This excess in expenses occurred not only in that city but also in other places to the displeasure of the Servant of God when he learned about it. I saw how it would upset him for he, indeed as I heard him say, wanted the Missions to be financed by private donations, by what was left over from offerings made to pious places, from Lenten contributions or, finally, from benefactors. In Forlimpopoli, he tried to encourage them to set up a pious legacy so that a Mission could be given there every six years and, in that, he succeeded. As a matter of fact, right now, another sum of money has been added to that legacy so that a Mission can be given there by our men every five years.

In speaking about Mission expenses, I must, above all, mention that the Servant of God, during the early years did not want to have anything to do with temporal matters. When Pius VII ordered Missions to be given in the Marche, he allotted two hundred scudi for expenses (I think for the devotions and other needs) and he wrote<sup>6</sup> to Monsignor Cristaldi on March 31 (it must have been in the year 1818, though that date does not appear there) and says:

"The person who bears this letter of mine is to receive the two hundred scudi, to be used for the purposes of the Missions. I place all of this in your hands so that you, as you determine necessary, will give pertinent instructions to Canon Muccioli. As for subsidies from the Datary office, I have never cared to have any interference from them."

I also know that it is a fact that from the beginning, when I first started going out on the Missions with the Servant of God, he had the practice of not getting involved with temporal matters and would say, as I remember well, that it was not a missionary's concern and it should not interfere with the delicate work of the ministry. But then, when he realized that proper attention was not being given to the question of expenses, he immediately became concerned.

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<sup>5</sup> Lett. n. 733.

<sup>6</sup> Lett. n. 160.

On one Mission which I shared with him, I do not recall where it was, he asked for an accounting of the expenses. Likewise, I know that on another Mission, he appointed one of our lay-helpers to handle the accounts, urging him to be thrifty. For the Mission in Ferentino, around sixteen scudi were spent for us, as I was informed by our helper Bartolomeo Panzini. I also point out that the Servant of God often did not include under those expenses the amount that he paid out for devotional materials which, at times, were quite extensive. Sometimes he would not even include the cost for shipments that were made, often even overlooking travel expenses.

In the second Mission given in Gaeta, I myself noted that he requested only one-half of the travel expenses, having in mind the welfare of the House in Vallecorsa.

There were occasions when he gave a Mission *gratis* as, for example, the one in Nepi in which I too was a participant. I know that when outside confessors were needed, he would ask benefactors to be willing to lodge them in their homes and to do so without any charge, thus reducing the burden of Mission expenses. He would make every possible effort to convince us that when a Mission was being conducted, we should be willing to support it even without compensation. He himself began cutting down on some of the solemn functions during the Mission and made adaptations according to the locale where he happened to be.

Finally, I must note that even though the meals provided during the Mission were frugal and excluded such things, as I mentioned before, as liquors, sweets, etc., he restricted himself even further by depriving himself of a bit of butter or some hot beverage that he used to take for the sake of his voice. It seems to me that he began doing this around 1823 or 1824. I know that he would abstain from these things even though, from time to time, I advised him to make use of them, for I could see that he needed them. In addition, he would say that as often as possible, we should also be sparing in the use of coffee after the noon meal.

#### Criticisms of the method of conducting Missions

In view of the fact that I spoke about the objections that were raised during the Mission of Ancona with regard to the use of the discipline, it would be well to point out that this criticism was leveled against the Servant of God in other places too. As a matter of fact, in general, there were objections to the method that he used in conducting a Mission. In Rome, the procession with the dead Christ was criticized, as I learned from Fr. Biagio Valentini, even though this practice was done with edification in other places outside of a Mission, as I myself saw in my own hometown on Good Friday. However, the criticisms must have resulted from a misunderstanding, since the ceremony turned out to be most edifying, as I myself witnessed, being present at that time.

In Sant'Elpidio the Servant of God was prevented from giving the *svegliarini* (Translator's note: I call these pep talks given outdoors), so commonly practiced in Rome. Fr. Biagio Valentini told me that when the Servant of God learned about these objections, he consulted with Monsignor Strambi, of holy memory, who replied that a bishop, whenever he speaks, must be trusted and that it would be best to concede. But then he added: "Blessed are you for having managed to break the ice in Ancona."

In Ascoli, they wanted to have a Mission, but with none of the varied ceremonies. The Servant of God, who was in the vicinity, sent Fr. Biagio Valentini and another companion to speak to the bishop to find out whether he wanted the Mission conducted with the various ceremonies, or, whether he wanted simply a type of Retreat without the functions.

The two men went, conferred with the bishop, who insisted on having a Mission but without the ceremonies. Later, giving in, he agreed that they should conduct a Retreat. The two Missionaries, after taking leave of the bishop, were walking down the stairs when they ran into Fr. Giovannelli of the Oratorian Fathers, a man of holiness and learning. The latter asked them what decision had been reached.

When he heard that a Retreat was to be given, he had them turn back, making them wait in the reception room while he went in to have an audience with the bishop. He convinced the bishop to accept the Mission with all the ceremonies. He came out and announced to the others that a Mission would be held, including all the special ceremonies. The Missionaries then returned to the Servant of God, after completing their work as ambassadors, and the Mission was scheduled.

### The Mission in Ascoli

It seems appropriate, at this point, to report what Fr. Amici, a professor of elocution, says in his evaluation of the Mission:

"On June 10, 1821, he [the Servant of God] made his solemn entrance before a huge crowd of people. As the text of his introductory sermon, he selected *Predicamus Jesum Christum, et hunc Crucifixum*. So great was the sorrow aroused on that very first day that tears were seen in the eyes of all. To be brief in the description of the many and varied ceremonies that were observed and carried out in the short period of fifteen days, I shall adhere strictly to the principal ones that were witnessed by all. Far from giving lavish praise for the indefatigable, apostolic zeal of these gospel preachers, especially their number one man, their director Canon del Bufalo, a person who is very well known throughout all of Italy and one far beyond any words of praise, I shall continue by giving the bare facts that resulted in giving greater glory to God. That, as a matter of fact, is the only and sole objective that was set for this most difficult and apostolic ministry by their director, a rare and very extraordinary man, raised by Divine Providence for our times to bring about a renewal of life, a conversion of the wayward, a comfort to the children of light and a triumph for our Catholic religion.

The method proposed by him and scrupulously observed throughout the entire time of the Mission, was the following. All the stores and workshops, the taverns, the cafes, the lounges were to be kept closed during the periods assigned to the preaching of the word of God and the sacred ceremonies. Even private negotiations were interrupted so that each person could take part in the renewal of his heart. At night, the functions were only for the men, the women excluded. The latter were always kept separate and apart during the functions held in the daytime. They would go down different streets, reciting prayers and, with due composure, returned to the heart of their respective families.

These arrangements contributed a great deal to the glory of God. Far from needing the assistance of the military, even when the crowds were exceedingly numerous, a few of the members who belong to the Sacconi were the only helpers needed to handle the concourse of people. There was never the least inconvenience or disturbance, which is something to be concerned about in this type of situation."

I remark here that the Servant of God used this method in other places, as I myself witnessed. Fr. Amici then goes on to say that early in the morning, catechetical instructions on the commandments were given by Canon Ottaviani, and this was done after Mass. Then came the second Mass, during which an example from the life of the Blessed Virgin was delivered by Canon Tarulli.

While this was going on and attended by a large number of people, the Servant of God would make a visitation to the prisons, hospitals and military bases in order to preach and exhort them to repentance. When time was left over, he and some of the others were kept busy hearing confessions. They would have conferences for the priests and students in the seminary and these were under the care of Canon Betti, while the Servant of God spoke to the secular clergy or to the religious, in the church of San Filippo, where the bishop, the vicar and the chapter were also in attendance.

After the noon meal and the lessons of Christian Doctrine, instructions on the sacraments followed, and these were presented by Fr. Biagio Valentini out in the central Piazza del Popolo where the Servant of God also delivered the main sermon. The two principal themes were: our religion and the basic rules for good living. In his sermon on death, he showed a skull in order to impress on all the salutary thought of death. At night, he would have them toll the bells throughout the city. His sermon on indecency which he handled (as Amici says) with the most delicate reserve, was confirmed by a concluding use of the discipline (I point out here that this was not done everywhere) by himself and his four Missionary companions, who appeared on the platform in a penitential spirit. In this way, he taught the mortification of the flesh by giving an example of it in his own life. Many were led to tears and laments.

Amici says:

"These outward demonstrations, signs of public penance, although not too appealing to the delicate tastes of the times in which we are living, are not to be censured when they are carried out discreetly to effect the main objective of the Mission, which is, to be sure, the conversion of sinners. Very famous Missionaries, among whom are Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice and our own Fr. Giuseppe Pacifici, missionary of Ascoli, *cujus memoria in benedictione est*, always used it to the greatest effect.

"The sermon on the mercy of God was, in the judgment of everyone, a masterpiece of its kind in sacred eloquence. The sudden appearance of the image of Mary carried processionally with majestic pomp into the Piazza del Popolo amidst the "*Evivas*" emanating from the lips of the joyful people saluting the Mother of Mercy, caused a vibrant reaction in the hearts of all. It brought about a general feeling of excitement which grew even more feverish when the image was lifted onto the platform, handed over to the enthusiastic missionary who was spurred on wondrously to arouse in every soul a feeling of trust in divine mercy. Once again, in solemn procession, the image was returned to the church where, buried in heaps of flowers and surrounded by numerous candles offered by the devout, it remained in open view of the people until the conclusion of the Mission."

On the following day, the sermon on the Madonna was given, the image once again placed on the platform along with that of St. Francis Xavier and the large crucifix, which was the normal procedure. Fr. Amici continues to say:

"It was not so much the variety of comparisons drawn from the Scriptures and from the sublime concepts found in the Prophets and Fathers of the Church that made this sermon so outstanding and so complete in all the names applicable to her, but rather, the expansion of heart and the total transport of joy that shone on the face and in the eyes of the preacher, a most affectionate son and servant of the Madonna."

He also gave a sermon on the Passion, concerning which this author says:

"In the grandiosity of the theme treating the triple sacrifice of the Son of God, in the garden, in the pretorium and on Calvary, and in the sublimity of the prophetic concepts in this sermon, the

fervent preacher showed himself to be even more energetic in stimulating the emotions of all. It was crowned by a very solemn penitential procession, visiting several shrines erected in various places throughout the city. Each of the five Missionaries was assigned to handle different churches where he was to assemble the confraternities, the local clergy and the people. While leading them in procession, each Missionary wore on his head a crown of thorns or some other external sign of humility and penance.

At each of the churches to be visited, after a fervent discourse given by the Missionary, time was allowed for all to participate in a public discipline. The procession was divided into five different groups or companies, and, after making the rounds of the churches, all would reunite at the main church. The sacred silence and the composure that accompanied this unusual and complicated ceremony is simply beyond description."

On the next day, there was the sermon on the most Precious Blood and, at night, the procession with the deceased Christ, following the statue of the Sorrowful Mother. Three stops were made at different fixed points and different ceremonies were held in those locales, including a short *ferverino*. Finally, the Servant of God closed the service by explaining the reasons for the procession in honor of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, conqueror over death and victor over hell. In the sermon, he spoke of eternal salvation and here is Fr. Amici's observation:

"The invincible arguments were handled with the most robust and convincing eloquence, bringing his talk to a final point of proof whereby the intellect, overwhelmed from every angle, could find no escape or avenue of flight."

Impressive, too, was his sermon on heaven. At night, he would have all the church bells in the city rung festively. After the preaching of the "grand" sermon, the Blessed Sacrament was brought to the platform and a benediction was given. The Servant of God, after having exhausted (Amici continues to say): "the forces of his body and soul, still found himself ready to give Retreat talks to groups of nobles and civic personnel."

In addition to all this, the Servant of God, when he had completed the Retreat for the nobles would then proceed to have talks for the women of the nobility and the wives of the civil leaders, and these would occupy him for four days. He also gave conferences to the cloistered in the monasteries of the Immaculate Conception, Sant'Onofrio, Sant'Andrea and San Giuseppe, as well as to the nuns in the monastery of the Bambino Gesu and the Servites. He reestablished among them the pious practices that had been interrupted because of the upheavals of the times.

For a special conference, he invited all the directors and the principal officers of the confraternities in order to urge them to a faithful observance of their respective institutes. Also, he gathered together in the four churches, the fathers, mothers, young boys and girls, so that he and his companions could have the opportunity to explain to them the obligations of their particular state in life. In the church of the Suffragio, he revitalized the organization for the noblemen. He set up an organization for the women which we call, "sisters of charity"; likewise, an organization of St. Aloysius Gonzaga for young boys, and one of St. Francis Xavier for the men. For the priests, he provided the Society of the Apostles, so that the good results of the Mission might be supported by their steady work, especially by selecting one priest who would preside over the group and direct the pious work of teaching Christian doctrine, visiting the hospitals, and preaching outside in the open square on one Sunday of each month, following the old style of the Jesuits.

Our author then continues to present other facts, pointing out that, on Friday, communion

was taken to the sick of the twelve parishes, as the Eucharist was carried from three of the churches. The missionaries would give a brief fervorino to each infirm person. On that same morning, the first communion ceremony was held for the boys and girls who had already been prepared by making a special retreat. They numbered one-hundred-eighty. This function was accompanied by a flood of tears.

On the following Saturday, there was a general communion for the women who wore crowns of thorns on their heads. Communion was distributed by the most reverend bishop assisted by four of the missionaries. In between verses of a hymn, the Servant of God delivered brief fervorinos. The number present for this ceremony reached three thousand two-hundred.

On the Sunday that followed, communion was distributed in the same way as above to the men, and here the number rose to three thousand seven-hundred.

After the noon meal, with no sermon to be given, the Servant of God had the men and women gathered, but in separate churches. In processional form, he and the men went to bless the cross which was to remain erected as a reminder of the Mission. The cross was implanted in the Borgo di Salestano where he gave the crowd a moving discourse.

In the meantime, the women, also in processional form, went to the church of the San Antonio, under the care of the Padri Riformati, while carrying along the standard of the Sorrowful Mother. The Servant of God joined them there and, after giving them also a discourse, benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was given. Then, processionally, they too were directed by him to visit the cross that had been implanted, as the men returned to the city and the church of San Augustino. The Servant of God returned there to give yet another sermon which concluded this "memorable function" (as the author calls it).

When the final day of the Mission arrived, a multitude of outsiders, not to be seen again, filled the church, the streets, the houses and doorways around the piazza. With this mass of people present, the sky, which had been serene, all of a sudden changed and it began to rain. The Servant of God mounted the platform where the images of the Crucifix, the Madonna and St. Francis Xavier were placed and he was escorted by the Sacconi who were transporting playing cards, condemned books, forbidden weapons as well as gifts which were to be offered to the Blessed Mother. The books and playing cards were burned, the weapons smashed to pieces to the accompaniment of devout hymns.

Since the final sermon giving the people "reminders" was to begin, he turned to Mary, blessed the air with her image, and the listeners stood there imperturbably for more than a half-hour in the rain, listening to his sermon. The rain, indeed, stopped and with the return of serenity to the skies, the sermon came to a tranquil conclusion.

On that day, there were close to twelve thousand people in attendance. That night, in the oratory, he preached again and, amidst tears of compunction, they all received his blessing. In the morning, he departed for the Mission in Offida. Fr. Amici completes his report which, as I said before, was printed in Ascoli, by saying:

"Prayers have been said and are being said to God for the long preservation in life of this apostolic man, so that he, though weighed down with so much work, will not succumb, but continue for many, many years in the salvation of souls, in bringing victory to religion, and greater glory to God."

Next, I shall present a letter written by this Fr. Francesco Amici, author of the report of the

Mission in Ascoli, addressed from Ascoli to the Servant of God who was giving the Mission in Offida, June 7, 1821. This letter is preserved in our general archives under the title "*ministero*":

"Dear Father: the report of the holy Mission given in Ascoli, written hurriedly by me and put into print, did not have nor does it have any other intent than simply to give glory to God and to stimulate in other people the desire to share in such a bountiful good work. If I have intermingled in it some very well deserved praise about your most illustrious person, as well as about your highly talented companions in the apostolate, that too was done with the same intent and purpose: *et cum haec feceritis, dicite: Servi inutiles sumus*. So, I have written now to ask for your forgiveness and pardon. I hope that you will deign to accept ten copies which I hope to get to you through the kind cooperation of Fr. Vincenzo Belenghi as a sign of my veneration and respect for you. I now have the pleasure of adding here my signature, most illustrious lordship."

Even though all of this solemn adulation may strike a note of satisfaction, nevertheless, I have also read a letter from a certain Palmucci in which he says that the Servant of God had to endure much opposition which seemed to make less extensive the fruits of his apostolic labors. He notes that it was something very difficult for him to bear, namely, that there were educated and enlightened people who were critical of his method of conducting Missions, even though experience showed them to be highly productive of good results.

Palmucci adds that the Servant of God assured him that one must expect to feed on the bread of sorrow because of some malcontents. From Father Biagio Valentini I learned that the bishop himself was somewhat displeased with the Servant of God for not having informed him of the ceremonies that he was going to conduct, even though the bishop would, in general, have given his permission. If I did not misunderstand him, this same Fr. Biagio pointed out that it was because of this that the rumor got started that the missionaries refused to be subject to the bishops. This frightful rumor, I learned, even got back to Rome. I do not know how such a thing could be said since we have never assumed the work of the ministry without first obtaining the permission of the respective bishops.

It is true, however, that someone was abusing the reputation of the missionary and I suspected that it might be someone associated with us. But, *NON ERAT EX NOBIS*. This could only confirm our reputation. I do know that a young priest presented himself to the vicariate of Rome while wearing a crucifix on his chest, contrary to our practice, and pretended to have permission to celebrate Mass. When he was asked to show a document proving that he had this permission, he replied that he was not subject to the bishop but to Canon del Bufalo. But then, he could not produce a line of proof to show that either.

This was related to me by his Eminence Falzacappa. I had to show him that, in no way at all, could such a priest belong to our group. No one was able to give me the young man's name or surname, nor was I able ever to find it out.

Just what the Servant of God felt in his own heart can be seen from some letters written by him to Fr. Giovannelli of the Oratorian Fathers in Ascoli. Those letters were donated to our general archives. In one<sup>7</sup> of them, written from Frosinone on June 17, 1825, he says:

"If it pleases God that I should come to Ascoli to carry out your desires, how delighted I would be to see you again. But, others will be able to do much more good for the glory of God than

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<sup>7</sup> Lett. n. 1161.

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In another,<sup>8</sup> dated June 30, 1825, he says:

"If God is inspiring you in prayer that I should come to Ascoli, behold I am ready. You do your utmost too. The pious associations could be revived and, with the giving of retreats to different groups of people, just imagine how much good could be done, how content the bishop would be. With regard to the method used in our Missions, it is not my own but that of the saints. When we give retreats, there is nothing done in an external fashion, but, with the working of God's grace, much, indeed, very, very much is accomplished. Then, too, in order to keep expenses down, I and one other sturdy companion, or at most, two would be enough to carry out the work over two or three months, or, as much time is needed. I repeat, with respect to my coming there, say a prayer, for it is written: *Bononun meorum non indiges*: I am truly a *vir videns paupertatem meam*. You should not fail to continue counselling the bishop in whatever you consider useful, for God will bless your words."

In still another letter<sup>9</sup> of September 26, 1828, among other things, he asks him to extend best wishes to the most reverend bishop. In the letter<sup>10</sup> from Rimini, dated April 25, 1829, he remarks:

"With pleasure do I hear of the good work that is being done in that city, so very dear to me. I thank the Lord for all the zeal that he pours into your soul to work for his glory.

He continues by urging him to take care of the pious associations of the people, and especially, the association of the apostles for the clergy.

Venerable Merlini's comments on the use of external ceremonies

Since I have said all of this with regard to the usual ceremonies used in giving Missions, I permit myself now to add that no one is in a better position to speak of them than one who has been engaged in the ministry.

I will say, in all truth, that I myself, before getting involved in the Missions, was of the opinion that those ceremonies were mere externals that could very well omitted. It seemed to me that to exert every effort to appeal to the intellect of people would be the better approach and therefore not to use, for example, the discipline. I expressed this idea to Monsignor Spalletti, new bishop of Nepi, and also to Fr. Antonio Lipparelli, since I had been engaged in Missions with them before I joined up with the Servant of God. The fact is that I have seen firsthand how, in our times, these ceremonies and the use of the discipline are not only just useful, but very effective means in giving Missions, thus producing the results that I have seen flowing from them, not only in one or the other place here and there, but wherever I shared the mission work with or without the Servant of God.

Despite the fact that I was, at first, prejudiced at the time of those earlier Missions, I have become more and more convinced that those ceremonies are the very soul of the Mission. In dealing with those people who say that past ages were times when people were simpler and hence functions of this type were called for in the practice of noteworthy missionaries, I have discovered and experienced firsthand that these present times are just the same as those of the past, so that what was applicable then is just as applicable now.

Monsignor Marchetti, former administrator of the Church in Rimini, said one day to

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<sup>8</sup> Lett. n. 1182.

<sup>9</sup> Lett. n. 1814.

<sup>10</sup> Lett. n. 1925.

archpriest Fr. Francesco Galli of Savignano, an opponent of those ceremonies as something to be used everywhere and by everyone, not even for those who were evil-minded (as I read in one of his letters), that he was very well-acquainted with Canon del Bufalo, his penitent in Rome, and that to his gifts of kindness, zeal and learning he blended the simplicity of a child. He had based his method of giving Missions on solid examples from the past and they were approved by the Congregation in Rome. With soundness of judgment, he believed that they would be greatly advantageous, regardless of time or place.

Furthermore, Monsignor Mattei, Archbishop of Camerino, in writing to me about this matter, said that Monsignor Strambi, bishop of Macerata and Tolentino, had no difficulty at all in recognizing in the Servant of God and extraordinary person chosen by the Lord. For that reason, too, he respected the practices that were employed in his ministry. Indeed, in a letter written by Bishop Strambi to our Servant of God, dated April 20, 1821, sent from Maerata, preserved along with other letters of his, he says:

"For the love of God, help me with your many and fervent prayers, remembering me especially in your Missions which God accompanies with such great blessings and joy."

At this point I would like to add something with respect to the use of these fruitful ceremonies, objected to in some places, which the Servant of God himself wrote and eventually had printed concerning his method of giving a Mission. On page 42, we read the following:

"I have been advising Fr. Balducci that, on the occasion of giving a local Mission, it would be a good thing to vary the ceremonies somewhat and substitute others that have been used by former noteworthy missionaries. Thus, for example, the use of the discipline: do it when giving the sermon on sin as well as the sermon on hell. This, for two reasons: first, because people are moved, in the order of providence, by an action that occurs unexpectedly; second, because in using sacred ceremonies, variety produces greater results in souls. For people who are spiritually mature, the practice of religion is for them a source of animation and a way of life; but, with the ordinary people, one must, so to speak, take them by the hand and lead them on toward the good. You must follow the teachings that have been left to us by those previous outstanding missionaries.

The director of a Mission is the one who is to take charge of these practices and see that the ceremonies are carried out only at the proper time and only for those for whom they are judged to be necessary. I refer now to some ceremonies that could be used by way of substitution. Fr. Segneri, Jr., for example (his life has been written by Fr. Galluzzi who describes his method) would display to the people a picture of a person who had been damned. Liguori, also, used this when he preached on hell and he says (Selva, p. 389) that during one of his Missions, it happened that one or the other who had remained obdurate throughout all the other sermons, upon seeing this picture, was moved to conversion.

Human beings are not pure spirits, and what strikes the senses has an effect on the soul. Another thing is to have them think, *verbi gracia*, about death, or to meditate on it while viewing a cadaver. How many conversions do we not read about that have followed from these methods. Jesus Christ himself, says the Angelic Doctor, wished to institute the sacraments as tangible signs for, in that way, the human being could more easily come to a knowledge of invisible things.

We see that on such reasoning the Church strips the altars during the last days of Holy Week and so many other rituals and ceremonies used at different times of the year as an aid to her children to come to the perception of the more important realities to which they refer. Likewise we are

responsible for both the learned and the ignorant; the time of a Mission is a time for fishing for souls. Some are converted by the sermons, others by looking at the image of most holy Mary, and so on and on. Let everyone take to heart the statement enunciated by the celebrated Fr. Pinamonti, who when he was dying (his life has been written by Fr. Gian Francesco Durazzo, cf. p. 201) said to his companions with the greatest expression of affection, that they should continue the holy missions in the form practiced by Fr. Segneri, whose amicable companion he had been, knowing from the experience of thirty-eight years, the great good that it produced in souls. At times, Fr. Segneri, Jr. would show an image of the holy face of the Redeemer so as to arouse compassion upon seeing that, out of love for all people, that face *in quem desiderant angeli conspiciere*, had been reduced to such suffering. In those places where there is some object of special veneration, such as the sacred thorns, the wood of the Cross, one could, at the conclusion of one of the sermons, have it brought forth.

Finally, prudence and assiduous experience in, the life of missionaries will help the director to become wiser in the handling of these things so as to establish a good system, carried out with care. Thus, often the missionary on the platform will be joined in the use of the discipline, cowl drawn down, as they strike themselves with the ropes. To stimulate compunction it is helpful, at times, to hold up a skull during the sermon on impurity; or, at its conclusion, to bring forth the statue of the Sorrowful Mother, Mother, indicating to the people that the sword that pierces the purest heart of Mary is in a particular way the horrible vice of incontinence. In some Missions, at the end of the sermon on hell or on the final judgment, the image of the most holy Mary of the Missions is solemnly presented. On another day, when the sermon is about the Blessed Mother, the people can be asked to make peace with each other for the love of the Virgin. Prayer, of course, must be used by the one who is in charge of that ministry and he will see how God accompanies his work with an abundance of his mercies."

In the revision of this composition, made by the Servant of God in 1835, he added the following:

"Ultimately, everything should be adapted to the time, the place and the circumstances, and prudence must be the governing power determining what manner of presentation is most fruitful in producing good results."

Venerable Merlini recounts noteworthy events during the Mission and Retreats

We turn now to the retreats given by the Servant of God in Velletri at the end of 1816 and the beginning of 1817. Canon Michele Cella writes that, after the sermon on the Blessed Mother, those exercises resulted in a most beneficial Mission directed by the Servant of God without the help of anyone else, for the assistance given to him by Canon Muccioli, his companion there, was rather minimal. Also, that in a penitential procession held at night, the city became a veritable converted Nineveh.

A certain fellow, by the name of Mirimich, a tailor by trade in Velletri, told me that the fervor was so high-pitched that after the Servant of God had left to give the Mission in Cisterna, many of the people of Velletri went to Cisterna, despite very bad weather, on the day that he was to give the final blessing.

The people of Velletri, with lighted torches at night, then led him back to Velletri where he was to preach again. This was not all that happened there.

When he was scheduled to go back there again for a Mission in 1820, the people went more

than three miles out of town to meet him. Then, when they were close to a mile from the gates of the city, they were seized with an overwhelming fervor. They climbed up on top of the carriage in order to unhitch the horses and then pull the coach by hand.

Realizing that his words were not going to stop those enthusiastic citizens of Velletri, the Servant of God quickly got out of the coach with his companions. Surprised by this, the people nevertheless hitched themselves to the carriage and with a sort of furious joy began to pull it along with its baggage and the Brother-helper still aboard, all the way to the place where they were to be lodged.

In the meanwhile, the Servant of God and his companions made their way on foot, saying prayers as they went on. They were met by the clergy and the confraternities at the gates of the city. There, the usual ceremony took place, namely, the consignment of the souls in that area to them, symbolized in the handing over of the Crucifix. He then proceeded to give the introductory sermon.

I learned all of this from Frs. Francesco Pierantoni and Biagio Valentini. The Mission was very successful, but the devil also got his tail involved. Since the members of the association of St. Francis Xavier wanted to be the helpers during the Mission, but this was something that belonged by custom to the Sacconi group, there was some friction evident. The dispute, however, was settled by the Servant of God the best he could, contenting one group without alienating the other. I found this out from a Mr. Lesinelli.

A similar incident as this one that occurred in Velletri happened also in Albano. When the Servant of God was expected to be there for a Mission, some members of the St. Francis Xavier association approached me and begged me to mediate for them to give assistance during the Mission. In order not to disappoint them and discourage them in the performance of the good works which they had begun doing only a short time before, I told them I would do my best.

When we were actually into the Mission, the members of the association of the most Blessed Sacrament were upset because it was their prerogative to render assistance. So, the Servant of God realized that he had to distribute the various tasks, which he did quietly and tranquilly. He satisfied both groups.

As is well known, this Mission likewise turned out to be greatly successful. Among the many benefits achieved, the Servant of God had restored a peace which had long been sought, and it proved to be long-lasting, as is well known. I recall that all of us, as a family in San Paolo, were besieged by the people, night and day, as they would leave their work in the fields to come to hear the preaching. I remember, too, that in hearing the confessions of the men, we scarcely had time to hear the usual confessions of the women. Each one of us recalls how, in those circumstances, the enthusiasm of the various groups, recently established, was increased.

Unforgettable was the saintly death of a certain young fellow, Antonio Moriggi, a member of the St. Aloysius Gonzaga group. His body was accompanied to the church by all the other young boys. From among this group of young men, some have become priests, some consecrated themselves to God in religious life, and, in all, there were twelve.

From among the children of Mary group, around sixteen became nuns in one or the other monastery. We noticed also how the spirit of the group of the daughters of charity was enkindled, especially in Giacinta Leuci and Anna Sessi who unselfishly, night and day, gave their help to the sick up until the end of their lives.

Everyone remembers how frequently the members of the St. Francis Xavier group took part

in carrying the Crucifix through the city before ending up at the Oratory and how they always participated in the solemnities. Furthermore, everyone recalls how, on the occasion of the Mission that the Servant of God gave in Genzano, the new organization formed by the leading citizens also moved in the procession and how they have diligently promoted devotion to the most Blessed Sacrament in our church of San Paolo.

I must point out also, for I still remember this, that in that area whenever there was a festive celebration in the past, there always seemed to be an occurrence of a homicide or a death. After the Mission, this was a very rare occurrence and it seems to me that it has been some eight years or so since anything of the sort happened again. All of these things are evident to everyone and the people of Rome, who come here for their vacations, are very happy to know this.

Next we take up the Mission given by the Servant of God in Cori. Canon Pietro Petricola wrote that this Mission turned out to be most fruitful. On the day of the blessing, among the evil books that were brought to be burned, there was also a handbag thought to contain evil-bearing spirits. During the discourse which the Servant of God was delivering, he fell and hit his mouth causing the loss of a tooth. But, he simply got up and continued to preach.

In a letter from Canon Taddei of Sermoneta, I read that, while the Servant of God was conducting a Mission there, several confraternities from other towns were in attendance. I know for a fact, which I myself witnessed, that in the Mission of Ariccia in 1821, the members of the association of St. Francis Xavier of Velletri were present even though it was a very rainy day. This was a source of amazement for the citizens of Ariccia and the Servant of God had the consolation of seeing them go in processional form, while wearing their uniforms, from Ariccia to Marino, and this they did, so to speak, in the twinkling of an eye.

Also, the ladies of the daughters of charity came processionally from Ariccia to Marino, accompanied by a Canon. On one day, both the men and the women arrived, bearing with them, as a gift to the Madonna of the Missions, a supply of wax. They all received communion.

During this Mission in Marino, it happened that after the procession from Ariccia got there, it was impossible for them to return home since it had gotten too late. The people of Marino worked it out that by distributing them throughout the city, lodging could be provided for all. The enthusiasm that had been aroused in Ariccia was communicated by the Servant of God to the people in Marino who came in large numbers to the Mission.

I recall that on the very night of the introductory sermon, we began hearing confessions and into my hands came a sizeable fish in the form of a distraught sinner.

One of the most beautiful ceremonies that was held there was that of the dead Christ. It turned out to be very impressively and devoutly done because of the large number of men in attendance as well as for the silence and recollection. The windows of the homes were all illuminated with burning candles, the confraternities were present along with the clergy and others dressed in black, carrying burning torches. Contributing to the whole scene was the very blackness of that placid and tranquil night. The decorations and the huge number of candles placed before the Madonna of the Missions was truly exceptional.

The processions were repeated with edification and devotion in the other Missions that followed, that is, in Castel Gandolfo, Civita Lavinia and Porto d'Anzio. To the latter, people came in processions from Civita Lavinia and, I feel certain, also from Ariccia.

These sacred wanderings, meant to keep people of neighboring towns united in the bond of

religion, also served to demonstrate the fervor that had grown in their hearts as well as to stimulate others to lead a good, Christian life.

It was 1817 when Monsignor Bellini, bishop of Loreto and Recanati, who had been impressed by the reputation for achieving great results in the work done by the Servant of God, especially in Ancona, invited him to give a Mission in the two cities. I learned this from a letter<sup>11</sup> written by the Servant of God to Monsignor Cristaldi on July 27, 1817. He says:

"I have received a letter from the most reverend bishop of Loreto and Recanati inviting me to conduct a holy Mission in the two aforementioned cities. Since he is concerned about the time of arrival in his diocese, so as not to clash with vacation time or the time for the harvest, he writes: 'I recommend that the Mission be held at the beginning of the upcoming month so that, after a brief rest, you can go from the Mission in Loreto to the one in Recanati. This arrangement will prevent a great variety of suggestions that might be offered as to the best time for it. I have come to this decision for the benefit of my flock as well as for offering atonement to the Lord to free us from the present chastisement. I shall take care of the expenses that are incurred'. So, as director of the work of giving Missions, I feel that I must go along with him, especially since I have the good fortune of having as my companion your very dear nephew. Keep me in your prayers, and, with the fullest esteem, respect and gratitude, I always have you in mind. Yours ..."

In a postscript, he adds:

"The most reverend bishop will cover the travel expenses for anyone who shows him my letter."

Just what results were attained in the two Missions can be learned from two letters that Bishop Bellini wrote to the Servant of God, letters that are still preserved in our general archives. The first, undated, seems to have been written around carnival time in 1819, since it refers to this event as well as to the Mission given in the diocese in 1818. Likewise, it mentions Cristaldi with the title of Monsignor Uditore Santissimo, a title that the Pope gave him in the summer of 1818. That letter says:

"Every time that I see your handwriting, I am reminded of how obliged I am to you for all the difficult but most useful work that you effected in these two cities and in the diocese to their spiritual advancement. Canon Cristianopoli, who sends you his best regards, conducted a retreat for Christmas time in the Oratory and has helped a great deal in reviving the fervor and the piety of all. Every night the place was filled and I have been happy to participate. They also continue the Oratory in Recanati and, I might say, that it is flourishing robustly. Fr. Galli, joined with others, does all he can to keep the members in shape, and, presently has even attracted the young people to a bit of recreation so that they do not submit to the lures of carnival time. Throughout the diocese, the fervor, a result of your labors, continues to thrive, which only leads me to express again my indelible obligation to you. Everywhere, the devotion to the most Precious Blood is practiced. I take part too.

If you wish to add me to your list, you will be doing me an honor which I do not deserve. This morning, in obeisance to you, I went to celebrate Mass in the Santa Casa. It is a bit unsteady. Please do as much for me by keeping me in your prayers to God and most holy Mary. Monsignor Uditore Santissimo has probably recovered. Thanks be to the Lord. I send him regards from all, from all of us. I am and will always be filled with esteem and respect for you, as well as unalterably

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<sup>11</sup> Lett. n. 148.

obliged."

In the second letter, also undated but apparently written in December of 1819, since he speaks about the death of the bishop of Terracina whom I knew to be Monsignor Albertini, the Servant of God's spiritual director, who died in November of 1819, amongst other things, he says:

"One is reminded that whoever wants to really work hard has to be fit for it. I am an old man and I have seen several who have tried to bite off more than they could chew and had to gently yield. Excuse me for saying all this, but you can attribute it to my yearning that you continue doing your great work. I send you my very best wishes for this feast of Christmas. Pray for me to the Lord. I have already offered suffrages for the outstanding bishop of Terracina and I am continuing to do so. When you hear of my death, which will be soon since I am well into my eightieth year ... please be mindful of this poor soul. I have for you only the greatest respect."

I learned from one of the letters of the archpriest Fr. Luigi Pantanetti that the Servant of God gave a Mission in Civitanova that was so well received that when he went back the following year to give a Mission in Sant'Elpidio, word got around that he was going to be in that town and all of the inhabitants of Civitanova, as well as people from the outlying countryside, left their homes to go and see him.

He adds, further, that the compunction was so great that it drew tears from the hardest of heart, and that this was more a particular rather than a general reform.

He continues by saying that one night, while the Servant of God and his companions were using the discipline, including the most reverend bishop of Nocera, he was so moved that he climbed up on the platform to take the discipline away from the bishop. The bishop would not allow him to do this. Father Biagio Valentini told me that at this ceremony with the discipline, the entire audience broke out into uncontrollable tears and that certain unbelievers were converted as they came to the realization that some supreme intervention must have been present and that the bishop must have had an unshakable inner principle of life which caused him to discount and humble himself to such a degree.

One woman, however, ignored the Mission and God struck her dead, suddenly. She was found lying in the middle of her room. The news and the horrible appearance of this poor woman brought about the conversion of another young lady who, when the Mission was completed, became seriously ill, very near death. She asked them to take her to the church just as she had gone there for the general communion, that is to say, wearing a crown of thorns on her head. She died in such a manner as to edify all the people of the city. Fr. Biagio Valentini gave me this information.

In 1818, while the Servant of God was busily occupied with his pious works in Rome, as can be seen from his letters to Monsignor Cristaldi, he received word to go immediately to the Missions in the Marche. Canon Muccioli told me that Pius VII felt that he had to send either Missionaries or troops there to restore public tranquility and that he had spoken to Monsignor Cristaldi about this. The latter, knowing the mind of His Holiness, called to his nephew, urged him to speak immediately to the Servant of God and to make arrangements for Missions. That was done that very night.

Here, I must give you just a short selection from a letter<sup>12</sup> written by the Servant of God to Monsignor Cristaldi. As I indicated elsewhere, it must be assigned to this particular period, even though the year is not mentioned but the date of March 31st is. In it, he says:

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<sup>12</sup> Lett. n. 160.

"Remind the aforementioned Canon about the safe-conduct pass for Seni. The other things have already been taken care of by me and all has been done with full regularity. Also, on your own, recommend to your nephew that the greatest exactitude in the daily schedule of the Missionaries should be observed along with everything else. The Mission is just like a piece of holy machinery, something like a clock, which requires that everything run smoothly to attain the final outcome, many tears being shed and prayers to be said. ... We shall meet again via the mails."

Mr. Vincenzo Severini, who went with the Servant of God as a helper, told me that they went first to Nocera, that is, at the beginning of April, and that the Mission turned out successfully. One morning, when a corpse was brought to the church, the Servant of God took the opportunity to speak about death.

What occurs to me now in a particular way is that the Servant of God had Monsignor Cristaldi remind his nephew about adhering closely to the daily schedule because that young man, endowed with a very generous heart, could not turn away those people who importuned him for confession even when it was the period for taking a siesta.

The Servant of God was fully aware that, to be able to withstand the labor involved in the ministry, one had to approach it methodically. In a very practical way, I saw how concerned he was about this matter, and he always showed this same concern towards all, whoever it may have been in the group of his companions.

At times, however, it may have seemed to one or the other as a bit harsh. I recall that I too was given a warning, when I was not ready on time, and he then cited an example from the life of Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice. For him, it was something exceedingly displeasing to see his companions disregard the schedule, and very quickly he would see that order was restored.

In our general archives, under the heading "*Ministero*", there is a letter from Canon Muccioli, written from Fabriano and dated May 4, 1818, in which he says to Monsignor Cristaldi:

"The Mission ended with great glory to God and, on Wednesday we shall begin the one in Matelica."

Canon Bracci, pro-vicar general, says in one of his letters that the Mission began on April 20th and adds that the change in their way of life was significant. I read, also, in a letter from Fr. Francesco Saverio Mattioli, pastor of Cerreto, that while the Servant of God was going with his companions from Fabriano to Matelica, he stopped off in Cerreto. After having been escorted there by mounted military personnel and a cluster of young people who sang hymns as they marched in front of his carriage, he proceeded to give a sermon. The Servant of God, in that sermon, thanked all of them and, after dismissing them, continued on his way to Matelica. This was an example of the fervor he had aroused in the people of Fabriano where he had just completed a Mission.

In speaking to Fr. Valentini about the Mission in Matelica, he told me that it was truly very fruitful and that Canon Piersanti said that in the Servant of God one could see a person who was indescribably extraordinary. Fr. Valentini also remarked to me that some soldiers and leading gentlemen of that city, on seeing him direct so well the functions of the Mission merely by a gesture of his staff, said that he could have been a general in the armed forces.

He added, further, that since the use of the discipline had been opposed, some people spread the false rumor that it was omitted because of the bad effects that it had on pregnant women. This was summarily disproved by the Servant of God by having the doctors examine the situation, for he did not want any detriment to the glory of God.

Finally, he aroused the fervor and enthusiasm of the clergy to take care of the various associations, especially to look after the Oratory which they had initiated and continued to manage, even by preaching in the streets and inviting the men to the Oratory.

It happened, too, that a woman was converted, one who had asserted that she could no longer oppose the infallibility of the Catholic Religion without deserving a thousand hells. She surrendered to God and, by her example and words, led others of her kind along with her.

In the Mission of San Severino, the number of candles that were offered to Mary most holy was so great, as Vincenzo Severini reported to me, that the image of the Madonna seemed to be placed in the midst of a huge fire. The same observations concerning this Mission were made by Bishop Ranghiasi in a letter written to a nun, Mariangela dell'Assunta, dated June 4, 1818, and preserved in our general archives. In it we read:

"We have completed the holy Mission and a fruit of it, one might say, is the opportunity of sending you this spiritual letter. The Mission, conducted by Canons del Bufalo and Muccioli, began with a grand entrance. They came from Matelica accompanied by many of the people of Matelica, escorted by foot-soldiers and mounted cavalry and a number of carriages. At the entrance of the city, they were met by a procession of the confraternity assigned to be their assistants, along with all the clergy. I handed to them the Crucifix, while presenting a short address.

"There was a huge number of people present and a beautiful ceremony of introduction was held in the piazza, including the use of the discipline by the Missionary Fathers who were four in number. Later, they gave sermons, catechetical lessons and conducted ceremonies over the next ten days. They must have given as many as twelve to fifteen talks per day, while at the same time directing Retreats for the priests, nuns, the women, as well as instructions to the nobility, artists, men and women separately, in addition to the regular sermons.

"The attendance of the people was most numerous, so that no one could recall ever having seen such a gathering of people in San Severino, for they had come from all the neighboring towns and cities. There were three beautiful processions with a magnificent display of candles: one, held at night, was a penitential procession with a fervorino delivered every so often. It was handled so quietly and so orderly. But, the thing I liked best was to see the sincere general compunction of the people. On hand for confessions, morning, noon and night, were some fifty confessors, and that did not seem to be sufficient to handle the situation because of the innumerable general confessions.

"There were four general communion ceremonies: one for young girls, one for married women, another for the men and finally one for the boys and girls who were to make their first communion. Among this last group, there was one individual who was twenty-six years old. He had never received communion. In short, the communions each morning numbered in the thousands, since (as I have said) they came in from countryside and neighboring towns. It is quite evident that the people were thirsting for the divine word, after so many upheavals, and this same thing has been experienced in all the cities where these Missionaries have gone up to now.

"The devotion of the people has led them to give generous amounts of wax to the Missionaries' Madonna; they have offered nearly one thousand pounds of wax, almost all of it burned before her image. You can imagine the magnificence of candles and lamps that are placed on her altar. Votive gifts of silver, rings and necklaces and other valuables are placed and left here by the visiting Missionaries at the altar of the miraculous Madonna who is venerated in this city. In the public square, they burned a huge quantity of forbidden, evil books that had been brought in by the

penitents. Weapons, turned over to the Missionaries, were smashed into bits. This is my report of the Mission.

"I cannot give you a full report of the sermons, but they dealt with man's goal in life, death, judgment, hell, the mercy of God, the triumph of religion, indecency, praise of the Madonna, mortal sin and the principles for good living. Those were the ten principal sermons given during the days of the Mission. In short, they did an infinite amount of good. The entire city has demonstrated its contentment and the Missionaries were well received and treated. So, I give thanks to the Lord for having provided us with such a beneficial good."

In the Mission of Sant'Elpidio, which followed the one given in San Severino, was the conversion of a leader of one of the sectarian groups. After an apologetical sermon on religion, as Fr. Biagio Valentini informed me, the man still entertained one or the other doubts. He then had a conversation with the Servant of God, after which he was fully convinced. Then, he made his confession. No other remark was heard than this: "You know what you have to do." The man, mounted on horseback, set out to contact those whom he had lured away. After returning, he joined in the general communion ceremony to the edification of all.

The now-deceased Fr. Raffaele Brandimarte has left us his report of the Mission given in Sant'Elpidio, his home town. I shall present here a brief recap of what he wrote.

The plans for the Mission were made and donations were collected to cover expenses. The devil, the enemy of good, put into the minds of the less devout the idea that the Missionaries would engage in clamorous ceremonies that would disturb people; also, that they would take it out on people of rank; that they would look with discredit on working people; that they went to preach in suspicious houses; and other similar unsubstantiated rumors. As a result, letters were written by certain superiors which called for the prohibition of some of the ceremonies.

As the Servant of God was enroute, he got word of all this. Since he was always one to observe good order and to avoid causing any trouble or scandal, he went forward, protesting that he had never given any Mission where they impeded the ministry.

The entrance for that Mission was magnificent. There were triumphal arches erected, painted and ornamented with greenery, all along the way to the church. The windows were adorned with coverings and tapestries. Many people joined in the procession along with the secular and regular clergy and the various confraternities. The Servant of God gave the introductory sermon to the satisfaction and compunction of all. In speaking of his preaching, it was said:

"His reasoning strikes one vividly, his arguments fully convincing and overwhelming. No need is there for more words or repetition, for one cannot help but be fully persuaded and satisfied.

"Never has one heard or will one hear another like him; he has all the gifts of nature and grace. He far surpasses all those that we have listened to in the past, even the most learned and cultured."

Very effectively fruitful was the ceremony for making peace. They said that Jesus and Mary had sent them a saint. Exceedingly numerous were the general communions and on the last day, to the accompaniment of musical instruments, weapons were destroyed and books were burned. A crowd of people were present on that day: the piazza and streets leading into it were teeming; people hung out of windows and dotted the roof tops, and the church was jammed with listeners.

Brandimarte adds that he was inspired to join up with the Servant of God, so he went to see him. The Servant of God asked him first to make known his intentions: "Are you willing to go to

Giano, to practice giving sermons and then go out on Missions?" After obtaining the approval of the vicar forane, he accepted him and directed him to go to Giano. However, since Brandimarte could not leave immediately, he remained there in his home town, but went to help with the Mission in Castelfidardo where he was confirmed in his vocation by the Servant of God.

When he had to go to the Mission in Forlimpopoli, as I learned from Fr. Biagio Valentini and others, the Servant of God was advised not to go there, for his life had been threatened. However, seeing that it was a properly set-up Mission, he, without showing the least bit of fright and even ready for death, went there with his companions.

His introductory sermon was based on the text of St. Paul: *Mihi vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum*. Fr. Biagio Valentini told me that it would be impossible to compose another like it. Some time ago, while discussing once again that introductory sermon, he told me that he was so magnetized and forcefully held by the words, that even in the opinion of experts, it could not have been improved. He added that in that situation he proved to be a man even beyond his own capacities. Mr. Severini told me that he heard that they threw stones at him as he was returning from giving the sermon.

Also, but I do not remember who told me, in the morning they discovered that someone had posted insolent and humiliating signs on the public streets. Canon Salvatore Cortesi wrote that a strange, ugly-faced man turned up and asked to speak with the Servant of God. Since he had given indications of sinister intentions against the Servant of God, the latter was warned to be on guard.

He answered: "We are not afraid; I will go out now and meet him." After he was introduced, he spoke to the man and shortly after, he led him outside, holding him by the hand as he had done before, and nothing more was heard about him.

Likewise, I was told that he had been given something to drink which they feared had been poisoned. Nevertheless, the Servant of God took it, made a sign of the cross over it, saying: "*Si mortiferum quid biberit, non eis nocebit,*" and he drank it all.

With respect to the Mission in Forlimpopoli, I shall say also that I heard from Fr. Biagio Valentini that even though the most needful were astounded by the apologetical sermons that he preached, they still did not convert. On the other hand, when the Servant of God spoke on the topic of hell and concluded it with the use of the discipline, general compunction was evident in all the listeners. A few approached the platform and with warm tears flowing they embraced the crucifix. One of them was a sectarian leader who was converted and, dressed in sackcloth, wanted to be the bearer of the crucifix to the platform for the remainder of the Mission.

Ludovico Camporesi wrote that there were around forty people who publicly made peace during the ceremony for peace conducted by the Servant of God. Fr. Cristofaro Rufilli also referred to this and added that the evil sect shook with rage against him because he was taking away adherents.

I shall relate here what Fr. Michelangelo of Forlimpopoli wrote, speaking of the Servant of God:

"A most fortunate blessing is that of having met him in Forlimpopoli when he was here with three of his companions to announce the divine word to a very needy people. A clearer or a more distinct description I cannot give of him other than that of saying that at every turn he displayed an extraordinary zeal in preaching, in instructing, in hearing confessions and, if it were possible for such a grand soul to have succeeded in converting all of the people and leading them to the

observance of the commandments, I am convinced that he would have made himself a victim at every possible opportunity during his indefatigable labors. Equipped with sublime knowledge, as became evident, highly versed in the Sacred Scriptures and the traditions of the Fathers of the Church, he joined to all of this, the force of his own talent for reasoning, the efficacy of his own Christian piety, the attractiveness of his own exemplary life as a religious, based on the example of so many past, great religious heroes.

“It was at this first Mission he gave in Forlimpopoli that I came in contact with this man, so massively endowed. It was clear, in the eyes of all, that here was the recipient of many divine blessings. The immensely beneficial results that this apostolic man effected are a brilliant proof of his being pleasing to God. I am not referring to the tears, the weeping or pitiful sighing and other sorts of laments that were uttered in the church or out in the piazza whenever he preached; nor do I intend to mention those few people who fainted or fell to the ground shouting out: "Mercy, I want to convert now, I want to convert now, mercy!" and then lie there mute and deprived of strength. I do want to speak of so many, deep rooted hatreds which, at a certain point and at the word of the crucified Lord, people were once again reconciled and brought together in peace. I want to speak of the many souls who, perhaps seduced by bad example, were seen dragged along the current of the times and then, at the first moment of lights issuing from that divine voice, leave behind their vanity, say farewell to all the allurements of the world and with constancy follow Jesus Christ either in the quiet of their families or in the solitude of a monastery, desirous only for the performance of good Christian works in order to gain eternal life.

“The present abbess of the Capuchin nuns of Cesena, formerly her name was Teresa Bazoli, entered that very strict monastery after having tasted the sweetness of divine grace at the time of that Mission. Her cousin, Teresa Vittoria Bazoli, entered the monastery of the Augustinians in Urbino, having the title of Santa Caterina. Michele Ariusi took refuge with the Friars Minor. And, in order to give glory to God who directs and sustains me, I, too, was caught up with that Mission.

“It is now some twenty or so years that I have been wearing, perhaps unworthily, the sacred habit of our Patriarch of Assisi. If it had been possible, while wearing my habit, to go along with the above-described Canon del Bufalo or the very praiseworthy Canon Muccioli, my guide and considerate spiritual father, I would certainly have experienced the peak of contentment. I would give my thanks now also to the latter, if he were still among the living. I do give my thanks to both of them and I hope that this miserable sinner will be propitiously remembered by them at the throne of divine mercy, just as he has been in the past.”

Sister Teresa Maria Vittoria Bazoli wrote:

"I still remember that happy moment, during the holy Mission preached by the Servant of God, when I determined to abandon the world and devote myself solely to God. That was a most fortunate occurrence for me; even now, it stands out, as it were, like an inscription of victory which I can enjoy as long as I live and will be, I hope, a trophy of eternal happiness before the throne of the supreme Lord. No, I shall never fail to thank divine goodness which, through Canon del Bufalo, was shown to me and which, through the mercy of God, led me to dwell in the sanctuary of religious life.

During that Mission, also, the conversion of a certain Count Mazzolini took place. He was seen later at the Mission in Meldola, the one that followed immediately after Forlimpopoli, carrying in his hands a large, heavy crucifix; dressed in a cloak, he went about in tears and kept calling out. Luigi Baldi of Meldola, the Canon of Bertinoro, wrote about the same individual. Fr. Cristofaro

Rufilli asserts that the Missions given by the Servant of God in Forlimpopoli were always the source of various conversions, but the one in 1818 was especially so. During that Mission, there were those who, on hearing the word, gave up a life of vice, left the world and everything to devote themselves to the Lord and to the salvation of their neighbors. To this he adds:

"We glorify God that through the efforts of Canon del Bufalo the nocturnal Oratory was erected, along with the association of St. Frances Xavier, dating from 1818, in the church of the Carmine. Through his work, too, the Confraternity of the most Precious Blood was canonically erected in the abbatial church of San Rufillo. He also established daughters of charity and the children of Mary. We owe to him the great advantage of a Mission every six years. For these things and everything else, all of Forlimpopoli will always be grateful to him."

After the Mission in Forlimpopoli, the Servant of God moved immediately to the one in Meldola. There, as I have been informed by Vincenzo Severini, the Mission again resulted in a huge success. He added that the love and veneration for the Servant of God was so great that, in order to avoid any tumultuous demonstration and show of honor, when the time came for him to leave at the end of the Mission, he decided to depart during the night, which is what, in fact, he actually did. But, in passing back through Forlimpopoli around midnight, he discovered that the citizens there had been alerted and had prepared a platform in the piazza, while torches burned in all the windows. So, he had to step out of the carriage to satisfy the desires of the people who had gathered to hear his voice once again. There were a few among them who wanted to accompany him as far as Cesena, despite the insistence of the Servant of God that they all return to their homes.

Severini also mentioned that when the Servant of God had gone to Castelfidardo to conduct a Mission there, two young men from Forlimpopoli arrived. They had been converted during the Forlimpopoli Mission at the ceremony when the discipline was used. Now, they threw themselves at the feet of the Servant of God, wept copiously and thanked their loving Father. They refused to rise until he had given them his blessing. It looked like they would never leave him to go back to their home town. Both of them were dressed in the habit of the association of St. Francis Xavier and were making their way to the Santa Casa.

Fr. Biagio Valentini told me that the Servant of God, during his Mission in Meldola, would go out into the countryside, now here now there, to preach to those who were occupied in the fields, making use of the workers' period of rest. Thinking over what I said before concerning the drinking of that poisoned beverage, I believe that it happened during the Mission in Meldola.

Fr. Francesco Saverio Mattioli, a pastor in Cerreto, writes the following report of the Mission given there by the Servant of God:

"They made their public entry into Cerreto on September 1, 1818, being met by the confraternities, the clergy together with Monsignor Buttaoni, bishop of Fabriano, who performed the formal ceremony of handing over the crucifix to the Missionary director, del Bufalo. Cerreto was the central location for the Mission and the towns that joined in were Collamato, Albagina, Porcarella, Domo, Precicchia, Castelletta, Rocchetta, Argignano and San Michele. In some of these towns, invitational sermons had been delivered and later the people, with great piety, devotion and benefit, took part in the Mission in Cerreto. They would frequently arrive with their confraternities. As a result, the extent of success reached beyond just the people of Cerreto, indeed, even beyond any previous or subsequent Mission.

"For the entire period of time that he stayed there, in all of the services that he directed, in all

the situations that he faced, the Servant of God always maintained the same steady spirit. He revived old organizations and established new ones, such as: the nocturnal oratory, the pious union of the most Precious Blood, the association of St. Francis Xavier, the Association of the Apostles, that of St. Aloysius, the observance of a general communion on the fourth Sunday of the month, the Chaplet. Many of these are still practiced: the nocturnal oratory, the monthly general communion, the visit to the Mission Cross, the Chaplet recited on Fridays.

“On the day for giving the papal blessing, there was a procession of ten confraternities, including representations from San Severino, Mateliea, Santanatolia, and an audience of around twenty thousand people. On September 13, the Sunday dedicated to the name of the most holy Mary, the Mission in Cerreto was concluded and on the following day, the one in Serra San Quirico began.

Vincenzo Severino informs us that the Servant of God was supposed to go to Sassoferrato, but the people of Serra San Quirico pleaded for a Mission and the Servant of God accepted it, but with the understanding that it was not to exceed ten days. His introductory sermon was on repentance and the whole Mission was so blessed by God that the people, reluctant to see him leave, went so far as to lock the gates of the city. However, he managed to exit secretly.

In 1819, a Mission conducted by the Servant of God in Pievetorina produced copious results. Next he moved on to a Mission in Caldarola beginning on May 3rd. Canon Girolamo Barlesi writes the following description of that Mission:

"The opening of the Mission, executed with a newness never before seen, was so astounding that it resounded throughout the city and the surrounding area of the Marche. People came to hear him from quite distant towns such as Monte Giorgio, Mandola, Macerata, San Severino, Camerino etc. Likewise, priests and laity of rank and learning were present, expressing admiration of his method, his delivery and his development of themes. The most reverend Archbishop of Camerino made a special trip to come to hear him and stayed for four days.

The conversions were impressive and numerous. Father Antonio Mariotti adds further that this Mission was so striking and beneficial that it resembled those that had been given by Blessed Leonard and Father Scaramelli. It made the name of del Bufalo celebrated throughout the entire Province of Picena.

Canon Antonio Ricci, in describing the Mission in San Ginesio, says that this was one of the most brilliant ever because it was accompanied by so many stupendous conversions: "as I myself saw the most hard-hearted individuals in the town shedding warm tears. He introduced the confraternity of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the so-called Sacconi, the confraternity of the most Precious Blood, the nocturnal oratory, and moved the hearts of all to a feeling of consolation and peace.

In reporting about the Mission given by the Servant of God in Comacchio, its Bishop Michele writes:

"Just what the results of this Mission were can be deducted from the many enmities that were removed, from the large numbers in attendance that people never fail to speak about, from the crowds who came to the sacraments, from the change in the mode of living from one that was so evident at the time and still can be observed in some, and finally from the surrender of weapons, bad books and ornaments yielded by the women. The weapons were smashed; the books were publicly burned."

He adds, then, that Fr. Gioacchino Cavallari states that in the Mission given in Massenzatica

in which he took part for five continuous days, there was an endless number of people who came from Rovigo and from all the towns bordering Ariano on the Po as well as from Austrian seaside towns as far as the grand Po. People, who for many, many years had not made a confession, did so here on the last day, when the general communion service was held; more than a thousand particles were distributed. Finally, the most reverend bishop says that when the Servant of God left his diocese, many men and women followed him along the way, reluctant to lose him.

Canon Gregorio Lucarelli writes about the Mission given by the Servant of God in Sarnano and says that it was greatly fruitful, especially as a result of his sermon on religion:

"I know this to be certain because I was assigned to be close to him as a helper. He asked me if I thought it would be good for him to give that sermon, since I had mentioned it to him previously. He thanked me profusely because, after that sermon, as I myself noticed, a certain person, whom I shall not name, changed his whole attitude and is still living in accordance with Catholic principles."

In another letter, along this same line, he says:

"It was believed by people of sound judgment and proper associations that there were some individuals present there who were enrolled in the Masonic sect and that one of them was its leader or master. From a person worthy of credence, I learned that this master, at the end of that sermon, approached Canon del Bufalo to pronounce his adjuration and that after his own retraction, his followers did likewise. In fact, they all changed their manner of speech and bearing. I can say, indeed, that the aforementioned leader continued and still continues to lead a praiseworthy and Christian life. His allies also have given a good account of themselves and a proof of this can be seen in the revolution of 1831. I attribute this change to the aforementioned sermons on religion."

He points out, then, that there was a generous collection of alms given to the pastors so that they could provide the poor with mattresses, sheets etc. so that they would not have to have their children sleep in their beds. In addition, he had them apply for the indulgences attached to the Stations of the Cross, for, even though the faculties were available, they had never been made use of. Finally, that the reverend Archbishop of Camerino brought the Mission to a close with the benediction of the most Blessed Sacrament.

I must point out here that in the Mission given by the Servant of God, if I am not mistaken, in Canonica, Savignano and Sant'Arcangelo, after the one in Comacchio, a criticism was raised with regard to the combs and mirror that the women surrendered to the Blessed Virgin, as being objects of vanity.

When I was in Rimini in 1830, I read a short treatise that had been published, written by the now-deceased Fr. Luigi Nardi, in which he expressed his disapproval of this sort of behavior that took place, if I am not mistaken, in Sant'Arcangelo.

I spoke of this with the Servant of God who, modestly evading any discussion, was content to answer by saying that it was something that was not of his doing. Fr. Biagio Valentini, with whom a bit later I discussed this short treatise, informed me that the Servant of God had nothing to do with the occurrence and that one of our new companions in the ministry had accepted those offerings. The same thing happened in Comacchio and the same companion was involved. I noticed, then, that in following Missions, those offerings were no longer made with such external show as was referred to in that short treatise.

I observed that the Servant of God was content with recommending to the women modesty in dress, bearing etc., and he was forceful about that. Also, that they should remove from their lives

objects that were dangerous such as obscene pictures or things that were suggestive, as well as anything else that could arouse the passions.

In our general archives, there are a few letters from Monsignor Albertini, bishop of Terracina, that speak of a Mission given in that city by the Servant of God in November of 1819. The bishop, in speaking of him, calls him his beloved, first-born son and remarks that the Mission turned out to be immensely fruitful and replete with heavenly blessings. Amongst other things, he says:

"Oh, how much good one can do through the mercy of God! Oh, how much! I do not know how to describe the crowds of people, the compunction, the reception of the sacraments that I observed. Truly, one could say that this town has been made holy. On Wednesday night, they led the penitential procession, and last night, the one of the dead Christ, accompanied by all the confraternities, the clergy and myself. Oh, one would have to have a heart of stone not to weep. Tears were evident everywhere. In all this, may the most Precious Blood be blessed. Oh, balm of eternal life, preserve him for a long time for your glory and for the good of souls."

In a memorandum describing the Mission in Spello, I note that the Servant of God gave the Mission there in 1820, from the 11th of May to the 27th. He gave instructions to the people so that in the course of a few days he had presented some ten discourses, in particular, to the clergy, the nobility, the monasteries, the seminary, the school and the oratory. He established the nocturnal oratory and the union of priests and accomplished a great deal of good work. Here is a letter<sup>13</sup> written by him from Spello, dated May 20, and addressed to Monsignor Cristaldi, in which he expresses his efforts in accomplishing good work:

"I thank you for your most appreciated letter which I quickly enclosed with one to the bishop, since right now I was unable to meet with him. However, I assure you that this problem with the Liguorini deserves a great deal more reflection; the people are disturbed about it. The arguments are justifiable, but there are other means of making use of the bishop's ideas, and contenting the people and the clergy who, generally speaking, are opposed to the suppression. Excuse me, but very soon I must go to the pulpit. I am trying my best to quiet the situation down, and I fervently pray to the Holy Spirit. More about this in another letter. I would like you to consider this as confidential and secret, since our ministry is so very, very delicate. I understand the bishop's reasons, *but they are to be otherwise evaluated*, as I shall discuss with him in person. I shall not show him, however, that I have made mention of it. Pray for me *sine intermissione*. In this unfortunate situation, at least *ad tempus, this action should be suspended*. On the other hand, the copious fruit of preaching the divine word is mounting, so much so that souls are enkindled to achieve good results. With esteem and particular affection, I am ..."

In a postscript, he says:

"If I do not quiet things down in time, now that the rumor of the rescript has spread abroad - though I do not know how; they are even at the point of shouting out publicly in the church. I have overlooked their quarreling, which deeply distresses me. It is a story that is so long that even I have not managed to come to an understanding of it all."

At this point, I submit still another letter,<sup>14</sup> dated June 5, 1820, written by the Servant of God from Fiammenga where he had gone for a Mission after the one in Spello:

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<sup>13</sup> Lett. n. 286.

<sup>14</sup> Lett. n. 293.

"In Jesus Christ, the love that I nourish for you urges me to have you share in the delightful consolations that the Lord has given to me during the Missions in Umbria which I completed today. I attribute everything to the efficacy of the Blood of Jesus Christ, the prayers of most holy Mary and St. Francis Xavier, my most beloved protector. I assure you that these Missions will always be for me a special remembrance because of the great good that has been accomplished. In particular, most moving were the penitential processions; the compunction shown with the appearance of the sacred image of the most holy Mary of the Missions was truly extraordinary.

"The Mission given in the countryside to people in houses of care turned out to be a most singular experience because of the prodigious cure of a sick man who had been given up by the doctors; he had already received Viaticum. He was blessed with the image of St. Francis Xavier that was given by the pastor, while that man was still out in the countryside quite distant, rather far along the road from the house of care. I simply cannot tell you how many people were moved by the excitement of the Mission. I trust in God that, in his time, there will go forth from our Mission Houses, squadrons of workers for the Propaganda Fide. For this reason are we priests, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ to the extent that it is possible for us. Blessed is the one who offers himself for the Missions, for that is a means which God provides for the renewal of the people. After God, I place all my hopes in you, since I see that God wishes to make use of this, his Society, to establish only these pious institutions. May these also be the objectives of the government. What a consolation it is to see oratories set up, etc. Oh, dear God, if everyone were to love you, how many there would be, of those who waste money on other things, who would make it available for the ministry and cooperate in the reformation of the world.

"The ministry makes me feel as light as a feather; I never enjoy such good health as I enjoy when I am giving a Mission. All of my companions, likewise, are in good condition and most energetic. May God increase his holy love in them. I always ask for one favor of God, that is, ever to be involved in giving Missions, to die in this holy ministry. Oh, if only one day, I would be able to see in Goa the incorrupt body of my Xavier. In the meantime, offer prayers that Jesus will fill us with his holy love, make us saints - all of us, so that we can always repeat with de Sales: if I were to discover that a single thought in my mind, a single affection in my heart, or a single work of my hands were not entirely for God, then I would want neither mind nor heart nor hand. The remembrance of you is for me most pleasing since I rely upon you for everything; you are an influence on my sanctification, through the ministry which I exercise for you. I never forget you in my prayers, and I can truly say that I love you deeply *in charitate non ficta in visceribus Jesu Christi*. "Within a short time, I shall be moving on to Pievetorina where I shall be awaiting your most esteemed letter. There I shall be giving two local retreats, one for the seculars, the other for the priests."

From Fr. Marcello Azzolini, an Oratorian, with whom I spoke one day about the Mission given by the Servant of God in the Rocca di Spoleto during 1820, I learned that he brought about great fruit on that occasion. I found a letter<sup>15</sup> of the Servant of God, written to Monsignor Cristaldi dated from Rome on October 13, 1820, in which he says:

"In bringing to a close the present concerns about the Rocca in Spoleto, I am sending you a number of memoranda for Fr. Camillo Lepari. I recommend all of them in general and in particular

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<sup>15</sup> Lett. n. 344.

to your kindness. The news that I get concerning the perseverance in good work shown by those prisoners is most consoling. So, I am encouraged to look after the relief that they are asking for. God will reward your most reverend excellency a hundredfold for so much good that you do for the greater glory of the Lord.

"What will you say of me, my Monsignor, for bothering you so frequently? Well, I just have to say this. Everyone knows, also because of Canon Muccioli, that you are the protector of the Missions and that you are zealously behind the Reform etc., and, because of that, very, very many people are bold enough to have recourse to us. God knows how willingly I involve myself in such undertakings and how earnestly I desire a total success of it. If I were to refuse to do this, as I exercise my ministry, I would prejudice the glory of God. I felt that I had to make this observation so that you will realize the source from which my importune actions arise."

In a hand written report of the Mission given by the Servant of God in Chiaravalle in 1821, I discovered the following:

"On May 27th, the Mission was begun with the welcome by the clergy, the ecclesiastical and secular authorities. It is impossible to describe the apostolic labors that were endured on that occasion, for, besides the population of the place comprising some two thousand five hundred, approximately, there were people coming in every day from the nearby towns of Montemarciano, Monte San Vito, Masciano, Camerata, Castelferretti, Falconara and even from such distant places as the cities of Iesi, Ancona and Senigallia. Attracted by the reputation for learning and holiness of the above-mentioned person, many came to enjoy listening to the word of God, to consult about spiritual matters with such an expert worker in the vineyard of the Lord.

"The Mission of fifteen days was truly replete with the blessings of numerous conversions, as well as stimulating fervor for virtue in those who were lukewarm. Groups of every kind enjoyed his learned conferences: the clergy, civic personnel, magistrates, men and women of rank, young people, sacred confraternities. He set up in Chiaravalle the nocturnal oratory, the association of the sisters of charity, as well as initiating that of St. Aloysius for boys and the children of Mary for girls. During the days of that Mission, he visited different nearby towns, established the nightly oratory, conferred with the priests, encouraging them to be energetic in the care of the people entrusted to them.

"His Eminence Cardinal Francesco Cesarini Leoni, of happy memory, would come from Iesi to listen to him and wanted him to come one night to his city to stimulate anew the oratory of S. Filippo which had become almost extinct, so that with his zeal it might be given new life. It can be said that his apostolic work knew no bounds for the glory of God. In the area of the Marche, the Missions he conducted in Ancona, Camerino, Matelica, Fabriano, San Severino, Montefano and other cities, are famous. His name there is still very much alive and will live for a long time because of the wonderful results achieved."

In Chiaravalle, something that was outstandingly wonderful was that, on one day during the Mission, after he had begun the sermon in the main piazza after the noon meal, with almost four thousand people in attendance, all of a sudden a violent, threatening whirlwind arose which terrified his audience. The awning over the platform seemed to be on the point of being shredded into pieces and collapsing, and the platform itself seemed to be caving in. Above the shrieking of the people who were ready to flee, the Missionary proclaimed loudly that they were not to be fearful of the devil's cleverness but to have trust in the Lord who is master of the winds. Almost immediately, to

the astonishment of all, the whirlwind subsided, became gentle and the sermon was brought to its completion.

Monsignor Antonio, bishop of Segni, writing about the Mission given there in 1821, says that it was a Mission conducted in a most unique way. A copious down-pour accompanied the Servant of God both at his arrival and at his departure. Among the associations that he succeeded in establishing were a large number for the Gonfalone and the Sacconi, investing them himself. He also erected the association of the most Precious Blood.

In 1822, the Servant of God went for a Mission in Vallecorsa where he again achieved great results. He reactivated the almost defunct association that had been set up there by Fr. Baldinucci under the title of the Immaculate Conception. He instituted other pious works and when the time came for him to leave, he was accompanied along the road by a multitude of people shedding warm tears. I learned this from Fr. Michele Palombi, one of our Missionaries. Also, I discovered that the people there were so animated by the Mission that they did everything they could to have him arrange for a foundation of our Society there.

In Piglio, too, as I read in a letter of the Provost Vincenzo Bonacci, he preached four to five times a day, and there was no group of people there to whom he did not speak. He had no moment of quiet or repose, but at every opportunity kept himself busy for the sanctification of his neighbor. He left, on foot, at an unusual time so as to avoid the acclamation of the people.

A second Mission was given in the year 1822 in Forlimpopoli and Fr. Cristofaro Ruffilli writes that he had them bring, unexpectedly, the two highly venerated images of the Sorrowful Mother and Christ Crucified - both objects of great veneration in the church of the Servites. When they appeared, the Servant of God used the discipline, causing a general commotion among the people so that from every corner of the church, you could hear sobs and pleading for pardon and mercy. He remarks that the Servant of God had a remarkable manner for settling people down and leading them in procession, doing so with a mere gesture of his hand. Finally, he adds that in the Mission of 1834, which the Servant of God returned to give, he led the confraternity and the clergy in procession to the most holy virgin del Popolo, the protectress of Forlimpopoli, where he blessed and implanted a cross as a constant reminder of the Mission.

The Servant of God returned for the second time to Benevento. There, in June, gave a mission concerning which he wrote the following to Monsignor Cristaldi: "I see that God is blessing it. Penitents are coming here in crowds."

#### The Mission of Teramo and in the diocese

Having gone on to the Mission in Teramo which occurred at the end of 1822, he worked very hard. As can be read in the summary printed in Teramo and written by Canon Nicola Palma, he arrived there with only one companion and started the Mission. Even though, after three days three others joined him, he still did not let up on all the preaching to be done.

Now, I shall speak a bit about the formal sermons mentioned in Palma's summary. The first sermon had as its theme the obligation of serving God and on the misery of the person who does not satisfy this obligation. The second sermon, which was apologetical and produced a profound effect, was on religion, proving its possibility, its necessity and the existence of revelation. He emphasized the glories of the Catholic religion, especially its miracles.

The topic for the third sermon was a series of conclusions based on the preceding

apologetical sermon, and demonstrated the obligation to love, respect and be zealous for a religion already proved to be divine. He combatted indifferentism toward religion and the accusations made by unbelievers with respect to the externals of Catholic cult, the severity of the Church in condemning evil books, and the practices of monasticism.

He gave a sermon on the evil of mortal sin and showed how abominable it is in itself as being something in opposition to all the attributes of God, as well as how injurious it is in its consequences in the social and moral orders, including its effects with regard to a future life. He ended this sermon with the chanting of the *Miserere*, moving all.

Furthermore, he presented another sermon on disillusionment, using the passage from the Apocalypse: *Effundite septem phialas irae Dei*. He went into detail about the seven sources of anguish that go to make up the desperation of the sinner at the point of death. Finally, he held up before them a skull and had them ring the death-toll that night. His sermon on the final judgement pointed to God's power, his wisdom and his justice.

In still another sermon, he spoke energetically of the triumph of the most Precious Blood, restricting himself to the three principal blood sheddings: in the garden, in the tribunal courtyard, and on Calvary. He listed the happy effects that we all enjoy because of that Divine Blood.

Finally, the image of the dead Christ was brought out and carried at night in solemn procession, begetting a deep feeling of recollection and edification. In his sermon on mercy, he singled out the reasons why God waits patiently for the sinner to return and the manner in which he welcomes those who repent. He likewise gave a sermon on the spirit of Christianity as opposed to the spirit of the world, demonstrating the need, the wisdom and the sweetness of practicing one's religion.

His sermon on hell was meant to remove the stupidity of those who went about saying: "If I am damned, I won't be alone; a person is damned for one sin as well as for many; God will not keep count of our sins." He showed how the reprobate will always be out of tune with his companions, with himself and with God.

In his sermon on heaven, he referred to the incidental and extrinsic joy of the blessed, the product of the praise given by their glorified bodies; of their dwelling with and in the company of God, deriving from the beatific vision, the very essential and intrinsic joy.

He preached on the glories of St. Francis Xavier, a model of purity before his becoming an apostle, and then strong and intrepid in the work of the apostolate; also, how he yearned with impatient love to be united with his God through death.

With that type of energy that flows from a soul singularly devoted to the great Mother of God, he described her in terms of the sea, because of the expanse of privileges that are hers and because of her power of intercession. In the first part, he showed what God had brought about in her. In the second part, how she works in our behalf. He pointed out that the circumstance of being a festive day made the crowd larger than anyone could ever remember.

Already in a previous sermon, he had the image of Mary most holy presented to the people when he spoke on the theme of the vice of impurity. He rejected the frivolous excuses that lascivious persons usually assert, by showing that this sin in its consequences produces a host of evil effects; that it is not sheer weakness but the subtlest of evils and that it brings down the severest chastisement from God.

The appearance of the image of the Blessed Virgin took place after he had already orated for

a good two hours. The audience was moved as he proceeded to use the discipline, accompanied by their sighs and laments of compunction. On another day, that image was carried in procession as a cross was blessed and implanted as a reminder of the Mission. The boys and girls who had just made their first communion took part in this procession and they numbered one hundred and seventy-five.

In addition to the confessors located there and the companions of the Servant of God, seven more priests from Ascoli, sent there by the most reverend bishop at the request of the Servant of God, assisted with the confessions. Even so, it was necessary for the Servant of God to leave behind one of his helpers, Fr. Giovanelli, with the task of preaching twice a day until the following Sunday, and then to repeat the final blessing on the last day. In that way, those who were unable to unburden themselves during the Mission, now had the time to go to confession.

After establishing the pious organizations there, he returned to the diocese. He formed five distinct squads of missionaries, including auxiliaries, as best he could and brought them wherever he could. I shall now add here what Nicola Palma wrote: "The mission was happily concluded in the city (he says) on the morning of November 27th.

"He selected five squads of evangelical workers formed into missionary groups for the diocese, ... interns and externs and priests from the neighboring diocese of Ascoli as well as from our own Abruzzi diocese. To each one he gave encouragement, instructions and a supply of booklets, figurines and similar things. From that day on, his labors multiplied since he found it necessary to keep in letter-correspondence with all five of those squads who constantly had recourse to him as the head man for advice or for other needs. 'I am very content,' he wrote to me, 'heading for Civitella del Tronto from Campi on December 3rd, for the general communions, one on Monday and the other on Tuesday. You should remind the women about the crown of thorns and the usual warning about the exclusion of men.'

"In another letter of the same day. 'Tomorrow, if the weather is good, send a missionary for the procession from Civitella to Campovalano and make sure he is there on time. ... Have him prepare the cross to be erected and see that he has the names of Jesus inscribed'. On the 5th: 'The request for forbidden books, private weapons and paying cards'. On the 16th, from Bellante. 'Upon receiving this letter, you are to go to Notaresco where two other companions already are present. ...I urge you to get a cleric to do the reading at table, something that is not to be omitted. ... Take care of the clergy, give conferences to the leaders of the people. I will be sending devotional materials for the oratory there (i.e. Civitella). ...I am sending two disciplines. ...'

"Again, from Bellante on the 18th: 'I need to remind you that you will give the retreat to the priests even though there are only three or four.... Furthermore, I remind you of the spiritual conferences so that everything turns out for the greater glory of God. ...I am sending devotional materials for the oratory for that mission (i.e. Notaresco). If you should get a request for a mission from Montepagano, you will accept it, in case the other two of your present companions will not be able to ... we'll see. For Lent, I urge you to take care of Campi. When the weather is better, off to the mountains.' In a postscript: 'You make the selection of confessors, as a more practical procedure and first instruct them to exercise the ministry. With regard to the disposing of things, ordinarily there are no doubts, but there is to be exactness at the time of questioning and particular attention to contracts.'

"For this apostolic man, it was not sufficient that he regulate all their activities with a laborious letter-correspondence and an active participation with them as a dedicated leader, but he

would make a personal appearance in those places where they were whenever the glory of God required his work. Then, he would assign to himself the more difficult tasks. He went from Teramo to Campli on November 28th where he conducted the mission until December 8th."

"From the 9th to the 11th, he spent time reviving the mission in Civitella where I was also present. ... With deep concern, he asked me whether there was anything else that he still had to do in Civitella whether that meant the removal of scandal, the promotion of piety or anything else, saying to me that he wanted to leave there without having a single scruple about something omitted. Despite a heavy downpour, he left Civitella for Bellante, where he spent five days. In keeping with the needs expressed by the five squads, he went from Bellante to Castellalto and from Castellalto back to Bellante. That took place in the very heart of winter which, as everyone knows, is a very severe thing in the Abruzzi. ... He directed the mission in Montorio up until the 26th" All this was information from Palma.

Returning now to the printed report from Nicola Palma, he closes by saying that the Servant of God joined together the two missions of Nereto and Corropoli, preaching alternatively one day in one place, one day in the other, spontaneously drawing a large crowd from both places. The Servant of God did this same thing also in Romagna, where he joined together the two missions of Savignano and Sant'Arcangelo. He revived the fire of our holy religion in both of them as is reported by the Archpriest, Fr. Francesco Galli.

The results of the Mission in Teramo were truly significant. Fr. Nicola Palma, in his work *Storia Ecclesiastica e civile*, wrote:

"Scandals were removed, sinners steeped in vice for many years were reconciled, hatreds were set aside, peace was publicly restored, forbidden weapons surrendered, the restitution of property was made, reception of the sacraments increased, and the introduction or revival of pious practices followed. Everywhere, these were the felicitous results of that most powerful remedy that our religion provides. The most precious of them all, however, was the revival of the spirit of the priests. In my own case, I do not blush when I confess that because of the retreat given to us in the seminary chapel by Canon del Bufalo, I, too, began to look more seriously at the obligation that is incumbent upon priests to exert all of their strength for the salvation and sanctification of souls."

This same Fr. Palma speaks likewise of the Mission conducted in Campli, saying:

"No less than in Teramo were the fruitful results of the Mission in Campli. There, more than all the others, the sermon on most holy Mary stood out. In that sermon in her honor, del Bufalo depicted her using the symbols of the lily of the valley, the cedar of Lebanon, the olive tree in the field. He aroused his audience to such a peak of excitement that even he was seized by an emotional throbbing so that he was almost unable to terminate the third point of his sermon. Three hundred forty-two pounds of wax burned in front of her image. Placed there, also, were six ladies' hairpieces, a hundred or more gold rings, two rich garments, plus a heap of daggers, pistols, pocket-knives and prohibited books as offerings to Mary. This scene caused Canon del Bufalo to say several times from the platform: 'In all the following Missions that I give, I shall cite as an example of devotion to the Madonna the example of the people of Campli.' Those precious articles then came to form a perpetual deposit at the miraculous statue of the most holy Mary of the Conception, venerated so dearly in the ancient cathedral there."

It happened that the Servant of God left Teramo secretly so as to avoid the accompaniment of the confraternities of the city while he would be on his way to Campli. However, the people of

Teramo took a different route and arrived beforehand in Campli in full array at the station of San Michele. When the Servant of God arrived, he was so moved that he dismounted from his horse and paraded into Campli along with the people, and the first words that he addressed to the crowd were to the people of Teramo, thanking them for the honor that they showed him, despite his protests. In a letter<sup>16</sup> from the Servant of God, written from Campli, to Monsignor Cristaldi, dated November 28, he says:

"Through the grace of the most high God, the Mission in Teramo was one of the most glorious. With that precise expression, I say all that has to be said. Now, I have five squads of workers covering this Province and I shall try to arrange everything as soon as possible. However, no matter how energetic that activity has been, it is still necessary that I remain here a bit longer, unless you direct me otherwise, for I am always ready to obey you, even though I may be half-way through a Mission. I must confess truly that in the course of giving a Mission, I witness singular things. Praise be to God. Through his mercy alone, I notice that my passing through the Provinces has renewed the good work of the Missions, especially in the attendance at the oratories. I conclude this letter by saying: 'If working for God is so sweet, what will it be like to be in his presence?' I would not leave the ministry, not even for a prince's realm nor for the whole lot of them thrown together. The time will come when workers will be sent out from Rome *ubique*; that is why it is so close to my heart to do this work that is so necessary for our times: *Fides enim per verbum Dei*. In some places, it is really urgent to give apologetical instructions. Well, I have written more than I was intending to."

Describing the Mission given in Atri, Nicola Palma says that the retreat and the sermons given there by the Servant of God were on a different level than those given in Teramo. He adds:

"What a touching scene for the friends of religion to see the *duomo* of Atri, the largest sacred building in the Province, filled with the local people as well as with outsiders, their cries of sorrow resounding as soon as the holy Missionary takes hold of the Crucifix in his hands and arouses their emotions with the words of his sermon. After the sermon on the Madonna, in which the devout orator outdoes himself, and with her image left there for public veneration, the offering of candles was so great that in order that all of them could burn there, it was necessary to set up a scaffolding almost to the roof of the church. The good results of the Mission in Atri were extraordinary. To reconcile all the converted sinners, there were scarcely enough confessors and many others had to be summoned from Penne, Citta Sant'Angelo and other places. The Servant of God, writing<sup>17</sup> to Monsignor Cristaldi from Atri on November 4, 1824 states:

"In this place, the good is immense and the needs, extreme. Let us offer prayers."

## Other Missions<sup>18</sup>

Venerable Merlini comments on hearing confessions during Missions

Not only did the Servant of God apply himself to preaching, but he also made himself

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<sup>16</sup> Lett. n. 658.

<sup>17</sup> Lett. n. 987.

<sup>18</sup> Translator's note: Merlini next mentions a number of other Missions which St. Gaspar conducted in various other locations. The material is very similar to what has been observed to this point, so I have opted to skip those paragraphs.

available for hearing confessions. Concerning this, I must point out, first of all, that even though he made himself available for the confessions of women and, as I myself witnessed, he would enter the confessional to hear their confessions as well as those of nuns, still he did not make this his principal occupation, preferring much more to be of assistance to men. He recommended this practice to us also, saying that when one leans his head toward a man, he is contacting a whole family.

So, for example, if there were three missionaries handling a Mission, he would assign one to hear the confessions of women and two for the men. At times, even the one that he assigned for the women would be asked to lend a hand in hearing the confessions of the men, noting that the men were more needful and that confessors for women would not be lacking elsewhere. He would make sure that there would be a sufficient number of confessors for both sexes.

When he observed that the men were well cared for, he would send a few more of his associates to hear the confessions of the women. This occurred on a particular Mission when his own companions themselves were not too eager to assume the task, but I do not recall precisely the place. However, it was rare during a Mission for him to hear the confessions of women.

Here, an incident comes to mind which Fr. Francesco Mattioli, pastor in Cereto, wrote about. While the Servant of God was conducting a Mission there, a man from Fabriano begged him to hear the confession of a lady. The Servant of God started to walk away, but, finding himself surrounded by the country people who were asking him to hear their confessions, he turned back to satisfy their requests, saying: "*Deus non est acceptor personarum.*"

I recall (but only feebly) having brought to him certain women for confession and getting the response from him that he had the appointment to hear the confessions of men and that other confessors for the women were not lacking.

Speaking of the men, I saw with my own eyes that men of every sort sought him for confession, that is to say, priests, noblemen, employees, artisans, farmers and soldiers. I know that some of them would send a delegate to arrange an appointment with him to hear their confessions. In the best way that he could, the Servant of God would satisfy the many requests of all and, when there was question of different groups, he would at times show his sagacity by setting up an appointment to serve them in such a way as not to cause distress to the others (whom he might not have been able to serve immediately, especially if they had been there waiting longer).

I noted, too, that he would begin the confessions for one particular group and then would assign them another convenient time. From this practice, I learned a good lesson from the Servant of God. In addition, I remember that when it was a question of long confessions, he advised me to divide them so that the other men who were waiting would not be annoyed and also that they would not have occasion for saying something about someone who was making a long confession. He used this practice on various occasions which I myself witnessed.

Then, too, I remember how some of them who sought to be first to unburden themselves would frequently shout out in a clear voice from among the gathered crowd: "Father, hear my confession for I am a sinner, not having gone to confession for so many years, etc. " He would ask for silence.

He himself told me that one such fellow who had done that just as an excuse, after hearing his confession, he was required to withdraw those words publicly in order to remove the *admiratio populi* which they might have aroused.

In the Mission of Oriolo, I remember that when I asked him for a special faculty which he

was accustomed to grant in particular cases, since a certain man was in need of it, he took me aside and instructed me on how I should deal with it so as to preserve the propriety of the ministry.

Whenever cases that called for special treatment arose, he did not want us to solve them on the spot, but first to make a thorough examination, and this, too, was something that he regularly did himself. If time for study was not foreseen, he would advise the penitent to select another confessor from whom to get an answer, if prudence required that he himself should not give a direct answer to the penitent. Then, he would write in such a way that only the penitent could identify himself.

In treating cases of obligations of occult restitution or cases involving contracts that required further study, he would set what was past in order and then in regard to the rest, would extract a promise to fulfill whatever would be required. Whenever he had the possibility of directing the penitent to a well prepared confessor and there were no other difficulties involved, he would tell the penitent to abide by the judgment of that priest.

In a different case, he might ask the penitent to return to him and, in the meantime, he would consult Liguori as well as the judgment of another companion.

In general, I am aware of all this since I would discuss things with him and he would instruct me on situations that had occurred. Not only was I enlightened by him, but I know that he did the same for others, not only our companions in the ministry, but also confessors from the various locales, as *alius agens*. He particularly gave instructions in matters of contracts, reparation for damages, validations of marriages. With respect to denunciations, he insisted that the case be studied carefully. He did not always trust his own memory or learning, and consequently he always carried along with him the instructions for confessors of St. Alphonsus Liguori which he would consult for the cases that he had encountered.

Many times, as I mentioned, he would ask the advice of one or the other companion and even put questions to me from time to time. In our general archives, I found letters from judicious people who were offering answers to some of the questions that he had posed to them.

In particular, I recall having read a letter in which he deals with usury. The thing that I noticed when he would ask about a problem was that he had a way of doing so without indicating in any way whatsoever the confession that he had heard. That is what he wanted us to learn how to do whenever we would be called upon to submit a problem. However, he would not allow those problems to be aired when there were others present, even if they were companions in the ministry, if there was danger to the sacramental seal.

He always leaned toward the benign interpretation whenever it was a matter of leading the penitent away from formal sin, in keeping with the teaching of St. Alphonsus Liguori. Nor could he abide austerity, saying that the saints have left us lessons in kindness. Whenever he discovered that an opinion could be safely followed, he would embrace it willingly, always safeguarding conscience. He recommended this benign approach also to us.

With regard to basic principles, he insisted always on the renewal of those that nourish proper living and saw to it that this was done from the very beginning by giving instructions wherever they were needed. He directed us to do likewise. One day he said to me and to some others: "People say that we are too benign, but, in practice, we are discreet." What he meant was that our basic approach in this matter should be unanimous.

He tried to dispose the penitents for sacramental absolution, which, he said was ordinarily not to be in doubt during the Mission. Whenever he was able to unburden them without the

obligation of returning, as I observed, he would do so gladly, being concerned not so much about the physical act of returning as he was about a real change of heart.

With respect to this topic, it occurs to me that when he was discoursing about disposing penitents, with a touch of humor he said once and even more often: "When one is hearing someone's confession (substantially this is what he said) one must carefully comb, smooth out, powder and arrange the hairpiece so that the person can go out content and present a fine picture of himself".

He wished to say that one must not send a penitent off without having prepared him well with solid religious principles as well as giving him, when not impeded, sacramental absolution. Likewise, he would have the penitents helped by proper questioning, done charitably and patiently, so that they could be instructed, at least in substance, in necessary matters, if they were ignorant of them.

Thus, sacramental absolution could be given to them together with the obligation of becoming better instructed with the help of a friend or others, especially when it was discovered that attendance at the Christian doctrine classes would be difficult. He would make use of all the means available, as best as he could, in order to make Christian living less burdensome.

He was discreet likewise in the penances that he gave, adapting them to the level of the penitents, and, in a way that they were capable of being filled. He was displeased when he heard that someone imposed penances that called for an advanced understanding of a spirituality. To those who found it possible to frequent the sacraments, he might ask for something like that. For those who were able to attend the Oratory, that would be the penance imposed, asking the penitent to attend a certain number of times, etc. In order to avert the danger of the penance not being fulfilled, he warned against imposing those that extended over a period of days. This is what I discovered on the matter from his general discussions.

In handling general confessions, he recommended the use of the *Direttorio della confessione generale* of Blessed Leonard, with Venerable De Rossi's additions. I know that he would distribute this material to those whom he felt needed it.

He had the wonderful talent of drawing the best from a general confession, making a distinction between what was habitual and what was an isolated act. More than once, I heard him relate to me that a very learned man, who had not confessed in some forty years, made his general confession in Latin and was unburdened in about a quarter of an hour.

In certain delicate matters, he did not want the penitent to go into details, except with great reserve and caution. He would question the penitent in only what was necessary for the confession, and, in certain lubricious matters, he preferred to move on, dexterously, to other things. Later, he would come back to that same matter, following the practice of not exposing the penitent to the danger of enjoying those pleasures anew. He would often say: "In certain matters, you cannot be too cautious." He did not want us to become upset when we were unable to hear all of the penitents who were waiting, but insisted that it was enough that we employ our time in hearing confessions well. He, himself, adhered to this and was wont to say: "Scrupulous, no; exact, yes."

I would not be able to give you specific facts about his prudent treatment of penitents other than the ones referred to already. Here, I will say that when I was with the Servant of God in Civita Castellana for a Retreat, even in the fortress there, some of them did not have the courage to go to confession.

As soon as the Servant of God found this out, he seized the opportunity to advise those, who

were at liberty, to go down to the lower level of the Cathedral where we would meet them at an agreed upon time of the day.

As a matter of fact, several of the soldiers showed up and we began to hear their confessions which we handled with ease. In Sermoneta, likewise, at the time when we were there for a Mission in 1832, some men, because of the terrible heat of August, were seen lazing around in the piazza, not in the least bit interested in going to confession. The Servant of God told us to go out to them and invite them to come to confession; he would go along, too. In doing this, many came to confession, including some who had been away from the sacrament for years.

I add that when I was with the Servant of God, I always went to confession to him, to my fullest satisfaction, for I never had to repeat a word. I point out that since he was my spiritual director, as I mentioned elsewhere, I had firsthand information of the skill and the charity that he showed in seeking the spiritual welfare of the penitent.

I can say that in this matter of spiritual direction, he possessed a special gift. He guided the person in such a way that he was not even aware of it. He made the pursuit of the spiritual life easy, following the rules of De Sales. He removed doubts, he offered suggestions and made delightful the practice of the virtues. Gently he would detach the person from self-interests and would lead him to the acceptance of sacrifice as a freely chosen item. Not only did I, personally, experience the ability he had for spiritual direction, but I observed it also in other persons with whom I conferred. The Servant of God told me that he had learned a great deal from the saintly Albertini who had supplied him with fundamental principles.

In regard to the diligence with which he would hear confessions, this was greater or lesser depending on his other occupations. He had as a basic principle that the general good of the Mission was to be preferred to the particular good of a single penitent and that the missionary must first prepare well his sermons, look after the establishment of the various associations and the proper method to be followed in the mission itself, and then the matter of confessions. The latter item involved the search for other confessors who could be provided as the needs arose. He based this procedure on the example given by Fr. Segneri and Fr. Pinamonti.

Likewise, he maintained that the director of the Mission should always be on the move, otherwise some good would be done but not the true good sought after by the giving of a Mission, thus diminishing the possibility of a more fruitful outcome.

Also, when I went out on a Mission with him, I was frequently put in charge of one or the other service or to look after the audience; but, at the insistence of a penitent, I would seize a spare moment or two to satisfy that person. The Servant of God would then remind me of the things that I just mentioned.

Still, I myself noticed that when he had finished giving a sermon, he would go to the confessional as soon as he had changed his vesture and he would give the impression that he had not been hard at work. This would move me deeply.

It was only before giving the principal sermon that he would take a bit of time for recollection. In later years, he would occasionally say that after the noon meal he was unable to hear confessions because of hoarseness and, it seems to me, that he would take a rest from time to time after that sermon, showing signs that his strength was beginning to wane.

I learned that in the Mission in Bassiano, which took place in 1837, he became so indisposed that on one or the other day he was unable to preach, and yet he used the time to hear confessions.

This information came from Father Francesco Ricciardi.

I must also point out that when his occupations kept him very busy, especially his letter-writing, from time to time he would exempt himself from hearing confessions.

This gave rise to some gossip that the Servant of God did not make himself available much for confessions.

On the contrary, whenever he noticed that there was need for him to hear confessions, rather than unburden himself of his letter obligations, he would set them aside in order to be present in the confessional.

At times, I saw him come back from his ministry with a massive pile of letters. He told me that he simply did not have the time to answer them and that the Lord did not facilitate this burden by providing him with a companion who would expedite the correspondence.

Not only during a Mission but also outside it, he would make himself available for confessions. As I mentioned before, he preferred to adhere to the basic intent of the Mission as the better procedure. With all of his numerous duties, he did not set aside that of hearing confessions. I do not know whether, in hearing confessions, he did anything wrong. I am fairly certain, rather, of his exactitude in all things from what I personally know of him as a confessor: learned, prudent and charitable.

I heard only that from time to time he made an exception in the setting up of the time for a mission and took on too many jobs. Truthfully, I did not pay much attention to that. Indeed, I knew very well that, if at times the missions were shortened, that would take place for good reasons and not to omit the little good work that had to be left undone elsewhere. For example, the two missions that were joined together in one of the larger areas of Savignano and Sant'Arcangelo lasted only ten days, since he did not have any more days available because of a commitment made for another area where they had made a previous request. The missions in the diocese of Teramo were set up in a letter written by Monsignor Cristaldi. This required his return to the Papal State as I noted in a letter written by the Servant of God to Cristaldi. The missions in San Salvatore Maggiore and Farfa were short ones, both to be more economical as well as the fact that fewer people were taken care of. He made up for this by sending some of his companions there later to conduct spiritual exercises.

In reference to his taking on too many jobs, I will comment that this resulted from his desire to arouse a holy fire in favor of the aims of religion and to eradicate the inertia toward the things of God, as I myself noted in the various conversations that I had with him.

Not too long ago, Count Don Giulio, a canon of Castelli, asked me whether it was true that the Servant of God in a mission that he conducted said from the preaching platform that they should learn from him to give up everything (substantially that was it). I replied that this could not have taken place and that it simply was not his way of doing things, and I, as a matter of fact, could show the opposite. I told him that when I went with the Servant of God to Anagni in 1821 on the occasion when we were making the rounds in the Province of Marittima and Campagna in search of locales for our new foundations in accordance with the written order of Pius VII, we had meetings at night with the most reverend bishop and the principal leaders of the city. A gentleman showed up there and in paying a compliment to the Servant of God, said: "Sir Marquis" - and before he scarcely had those words out of his mouth, the Servant of God took over the situation and pointed out clearly that he was not a marquis, but Canon Del Bufalo. When I beheld a certain change in the Servant of God and noted that the meeting had not turned out as he had wished, I then told him that he could

overlook that remark and let the man think whatever he wished to think. He, however, did not give me any reply, but then I really did not deserve one.

At this point, I remember that the last time that I was with the Servant of God in Porto d'Anzio, and it was (if I am not mistaken) in 1837, I took on the responsibility of speaking with a certain individual to get him to seek a peaceful settlement. I talked to him, but got nowhere. When the man was summoned by the Servant of God, in just a few words, he put everything in order, and he told me that all should be accompanied with prayer. One day, when I was conversing with his Eminence Frasoni, I learned that the Servant of God in Romagna had received a letter from him seeking to obtain a special faculty from the Holy Father. If I am not in error, that took place during the final mission in Forlimpopoli. Among the letters written by the Servant of God to Monsignor Cristaldi, I found one that is dated December 19, 1828, in which he asks him for an extension of the faculty which the Holy Father had been pleased to grant him, and that it should cover all of 1829 and that it was more urgent than any other objective that he had. He showed this same insistence in other letters that preceded the year 1828.

The Holy Father Leo XII charged the Servant of God, through Monsignor Cristaldi, to contact a certain person with whom he was to speak. The Servant of God looked into it, spoke to the man, admonished him, heard his confession and saw him leave his presence in tears, giving thanks to the Holy Father for showing such kindness. I found out about all of this in a letter written by the Servant of God to the beloved Monsignor Cristaldi dated April 20, 1825.

This same Servant of God, one day, told me that in a certain locale the crowds of penitents was so large that two of them came to him asking to have their confessions heard contemporaneously since the sins of the one were the same as the sins of the other. He had to convince them that they should confer with each other and that one of them should leave while the other remained. A similar situation, if not the same exactly, is registered in one of his letters to Monsignor Cristaldi on the occasion when he was conducting a solemn triduum in Giano in 1815. From the Servant of God himself, I learned that, when a penitent approached him who had taken some medicine without knowing the reason for it, he prudently imposed upon him the obligation of setting that aside until he was completely instructed about it. On another occasion, to a certain individual who was assigned to assist the mission but found it difficult in every regard to do his best, the Servant of God directed that he should not seek this work as assistant in future missions, since God did not give him that gift.

In dealing with questions of restitution, he did not care to get involved and many times when the need became urgent, as I noticed in some of his instructional talks, he would accept the money involved in order to return it to the one to whom it belonged, thus, in that way, maintaining the balanced delicacy required in the ministry. When we were returning from the mission in Gaeta with the reverend archpriest of Lenola, Fr. Luigi Grossi, the latter summoned an individual to whom he delivered a sum of money as restitution and with no further ado, concluded it. The Servant of God praised him for his conduct. In a letter from the Servant of God, dated January 14, 1825 written to Monsignor Cristaldi, I observed that he asked him to obtain from the Holy Father the fifty scudi (due to be given to a commune by an heir) for a mission, making use of the remainder for pious works. In another letter of July 23, 1827, he asks that a certain individual, obliged to make a restitution of three hundred scudi to the Camera, and unable to do so, be allowed to make a gradual restitution of it, and making that restitution available to the churches of the Institute. In still another letter of

February 23, 1828, he requests him to obtain from the king of Naples the restitution of fifty scudi to be made to a church and its sacristy of a named town, which he indicates therein.

Various observation concerning missions

First of all, I shall report here what can be read in the minutes of the meeting of the St. Francis Xavier group set up in the city of Montalto on the occasion when the Servant of God gave a holy mission there, as given by Camillo Silvestro Celi.

*"Multiplices atque auro praetiosiores fuere fructus, quibus enitueri quam qui maxime apostolici labores Gasparis Del Bufalo Romani Canonici, cum sacris expeditionibus ad animarum salutem hac in Civitate perfungeretur. Ex incluta, qua Italia in universa hic eminent existimatione non tantum verum quocumque, emuncta doctrina, morumque sanctitas in pretio est fructus hujusmodi multo ante incomperito habebantur. Ab ejus tamen immota sollicitudine, ac triumphante eloquentia, quae omnifuit gladio ancipiti penetrabilior, expectatio nostra victa fuit. At postquam hodierna sacrilega Philosophorum commentatio retrofuit abire jussa, doctrinisque evangelicis fidelium animi indesinenter innutriti, quot salubriter ipse perfecit, hoc est modum proposuisse quo pietatis exercitium perennaretur, virtutesque in cordium penetralibus redintegrari possent. Indicta synaxeos generalis die, qua fideles in Altoduni Arde Principe saginati fuere, singulariter affluentes octavo Kalendas Quintilias anni millesimi octingentesimi vigesimi tertii cum Sancti Ioannis Baptistae Nativitatis memoria refricaretur, pium sodalitiu instituit, quot tantopere in deliciis fuit Pii Septimi Pontificis Maximi, atque a Praetiosissimi Divini Verbi Theandrici Sanguine nomen iniiit, Sancti Francisci Xaverii protectione munitum... Oratorium Ecclesiasticis Praesidibus annuentibus erectum fuit in veteri Cathedrali quae Sanctae Mariae ad Collem vocabulo designatur, in qua piorum virorum benemerentium sollicitudinem, atque opera plurima eleganter resarcita, et concinnata fuere, sanctae functiones digne, decoreque celebrantur. Hoc quod fauste, Jeliciterque inceptum est, magis magisque sperandum, quo splendore, qua pietate enitescere, cum tantum a compertafratruum religione, ac liberalitate sit expectandum. Relationis hujusce in calce opportunum erit subtexere elenchum illorum omnium qui spontepraedicta in Congregatione coopulati sunt".<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> Plentiful and more precious than gold were the fruits with which the apostolic labors of the Roman Canon, Gaspar del Bufalo, gleamed as much as possible when in This City he carried out the sacred missions for the salvation of souls. Not only by this well known reputation does he stand out in all of Italy, but also sound doctrine and sanctity of life, which is the cost of this kind of fruit, were had much earlier when he was unknown. Nevertheless by his steadfast solicitude and triumphant eloquence, which was more piercing than any two-edged sword, our expectation was overcome. Moreover, after the day's sacriligious commentary of the philosophers was ordered put aside, and the souls of the faithful were consistently nourished, the task he himself so wholesomely performed, this was the manner proposed by which the exercise of piety was to be made and lasting virtues could be renewed in the depths of hearts. On the day appointed for the general assembly, in which the faithful of the district of Altoduno Ardes were nourished, singularly enriched on May 8, 1823 when the memory of the Birth of Saint John the Baptist was being renewed, he instituted the Pious Sodality, so much to the delight of the Supreme Pontiff Pius VII; it took its name from the Blood of the Divine Word, the God Man, securely fortified under the protection of Saint Francis Xavier ... The Oratory was erected with the consent of the Ecclesiastical Authorities in the old cathedral which was called Saint Mary at the Hill, where for the care of well deserving pious men many works were elegantly designed and arranged and sacred functions worthily and fittingly celebrated. What was begun auspiciously and happily, more and more looked forward to, gleamed with what splendor and piety, when so much was expected from the undoubted religion and liberality of the brothers. At the foot of such a relationship it will be fitting to

Also in the aforementioned archives there is a page containing the enrollees followed by the signature of the Servant of God and stating: "Having the duty to promote the Congregation under the title of the most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, of Mary most holy the help of Christians and of St. Francis Xavier, I request that the men of Montalto add their names hereto. Gaspar Del Bufalo, Apostolic Missionary".

In the mission given by the Servant of God in San Leo, a eulogy in Latin was put into print which I will not discuss at the present time. I shall add, however, that the Canon Penitentiary of Atri, Fr. Francesco Sorrichio, on November 25, 1824, wrote to the Servant of God, saying: "Thanks be to heaven, the permanent effects of the mission are still evident in the copious fruits in which every class of people are sharing. Without interruption, the nightly oratory continues to function and quite a number of people are in attendance. The other practices of piety urged by you have not been forgotten".

The most eminent bishop of Ancona, in a letter dated February 21, 1826, written to the Servant of God, says the following: "Your presence here in Ancona has left a vivid desire for Christian doctrine because of the zeal of your apostolic ministry. This gives me the hope that, being relieved of the other cares that you have, you will be able to come back here at a fixed time to re-animate the clergy and the people in the fulfillment of their religious obligations. Your thoughts have a strong effect on the people of our commune and you should make every effort to satisfy the desires of everyone". I found this letter among the letters of his Eminence Cristaldi, joined together with those from the Servant of God. One can see his written comment: "*In Domino*, I think that the Holy Father should see this, while during this period of time, we have handled the matters here for which we are responsible. But remove any word that refers to me. The substance is all that is needed".

Also, on other occasions, the Servant of God sought to have the Holy Father questioned about requests for missions that would be handled by him personally, especially in reference to the mission to be given in Aquila. Actually, he did not go out for that mission, nor the one in Ancona, that was mentioned above. He sent others in his place.

In the *Diario di Roma*, number 41, year 1833, the following can be read: "On May 5 in Veroli, Province of Campagna, the missionaries of the Institute of the most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ (note that the Servant of God was the director of this mission, as I have pointed out elsewhere) concluded the holy mission in the vast square situated between the cathedral and the church of Santa Salome, the principal protector of the city and the diocese. There was an immense gathering of the people, including also various groups that had come there in processional fashion from neighboring areas. The devout ceremonies which took place on that occasion made this mission particularly impressive. Also remarkable was the warm welcome given by the people, shouting out the names of Jesus and Mary, upon the arrival of the missionary fathers. The clergy and the confraternities, with the festive ringing of the church bells, indicated that during that mission everyone would be pleased by the granting of divine mercy. They welcomed the missionaries at the gates of the city where their sacred Shepherd, Monsignor Cipriani, had come to celebrate the ritual observed by the Institute in keeping with the practices that were directed by Fr. Paolo Segneri, by

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append a list of all those who of their own free will entered the afore-mentioned Congregation.

Blessed Leonard and other famous missionaries. He consigned to the director of the mission, the Crucifix to indicate the consignment of all the souls that were to be nourished with the divine word- This is what he stressed in a short, but fervent talk. No less impressive, as time set aside was arranged, was the visit made to the shrines in several penitential processions, as one procession did not interfere with the other. On this occasion, the churches were adorned with all the sacred relics, which were quite numerous. The sudden appearance of the image of most holy Mary was a spectacle of singular compunction. The general communion ceremony, participated in by huge numbers and administered by the most reverend bishop, featured the attendance of the boys and girls making their very first holy communion, This was held in the church of Santa Salome with great solemnity. In order that the good work of the mission would be sustained, the missionaries, following their regular system, set up, among other pious organizations, the special nocturnal oratory in accordance with the norms established by Fr. Caravita in Rome. They also initiated the organization of the Apostles for the clergy, animating the more fervent among those priests to engage in the various branches of the ministry. In all of this, the faith that was propagated through the preaching of the word during the mission, would be kept alive and sustained in the people.

In our general archives there is a handwritten article covering the mission in Meldola and it says the following: "Meldola of the Pro-Legacy of Forli'. This illustrious region "I pleasantly remember for a long time the past days during which we had a holy mission that began on the 15th day of the current month of September (year 1834) and concluded on the 28 day of that same month. The entrance for this sacred mission was the most moving experience. At the gate of the residence of the *Monsignor Vicario abbaziale*, the consignment of the souls was made by the presentation of the adorable image of the Crucifix to the director of the holy mission (it was the Servant of God). With devout attitude, there was in attendance the venerable clergy and the respectable magistrature. All of the confraternities showed up in processional form, accepting with joy the mercies issued by the Lord, and thus carrying out in that way the precious instructions of the famous Fr. Segneri, the true master of the apostolic ministry. The devotion of the faithful gained for them the benefits of the holy mission. Those evangelical workers were chosen by the apostolic Institute of the Missionaries of the most Precious Blood, endorsed by the supreme pontiff Pius VII and furthered by the support of the succeeding Popes, for the cultivation of the clergy and for the sanctification of the people. These zealous and tireless evangelical workers have corresponded perfectly to the holy intentions of the entire population. God, in the abundance of his mercies, has blessed their indefatigable labors by granting great effectiveness to their words so that many, many hearts are moved, faces dampened with tears, and every tongue readied to react piously and with vibrant outcries to the most lovable Jesus, for their religion. One cannot number the people gathered together there and the reply of the various neighboring dioceses to the hearing of the divine word and the reception of the holy sacraments. The ceremonies, all carried out in keeping with the rites of the Church, were very impressive and edifying. The people were obedient to every suggestion made by the director of the mission, always maintaining the separation of the men from the women and adhering to the order of the day which deserves a particular word of praise. Harmful weapons were surrendered when the image of most holy Mary was presented and out of love for her, many reasons for discord were removed as well as many other incentives to sin. Quite moving was the ceremony, among others, of the first communion of the boys and girls who had been instructed by their respective pastors as they approached the eucharistic table. Along with other devotions, the missionaries inculcated the

devotion to the most Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ through which the trust of every person is increased toward the goodness of the Lord and all are motivated to recall at what an inestimable price we have been redeemed in his divine love. May the present certificate serve to arouse fervor in the people for this holy mission so urgent in the conditions of our times and so glorious a means for exalting the adorable name of God to whom be glory and honor forever. Things to be remembered from this holy mission: First, remember, man, the evil of the world that you must hate; *Nolite diligere mundum*; remember, man, you must jealously be vigilant of your *soul*; *Agonizare pro anima tua*; third, remember, man, the means that you are to use in practice is the devotion to the Divine Blood; *Christus dilexit nos, et lavit nos in Sanguine suo*.

Finally, I shall add here that when the Servant of God began to take on companions for the ministry, he began by abstaining himself from going out so frequently. He did this, likewise, in order to train his companions and also to accustom the people to accept them for the mission. He used to say to me during these recent years, that unless it was a clear, a very, very clear will of God, he was not going to go out for missions. But, God wanted something else from him. Indeed, he trained his companions in the different conferences that he gave and in the missions that he conducted. In addition, I noticed that the missions that were given by others with his blessing also turned out to be fruitful. I shall note here that whenever he sent out his companions for the ministry, it was as though he were going there himself, since he kept control of everything through his letter-writing in addition to whatever he could give them by way of oral instruction.

Since I failed to mention something that I had forgotten, permit me to add, finally and in more detail, that the Servant of God's preaching was clear, genuine and decisive, just as I have remarked elsewhere. He would attack his theme with great energy and evangelical freedom and, at times, with such vehemence that he inspired holy fear. That would happen even when he was giving private talks. He would get so wound up that he seemed to be someone other than himself, yet never losing control of himself in the least.

Sometimes, he would be a veritable firebrand in his sermons and conferences to the leaders of the people and would inveigh against libertinism and against indifferentism towards religion. With a singular enthusiasm he would condemn selfishness, cheating, fortune-telling, licentiousness, hypocrisy. "How many schemers there are in these times of ours," he would say from the platform, "and let us begin the reform in ourselves, etc."

That was the beautiful and enviable manner of his preaching which, though he spoke out quite openly, did not irritate but rather won the respect and veneration of all.

When giving conferences to the clergy, he sought out every means possible for jarring them from their inertia and animating them towards a saintly and sanctifying life. He showed them due respect and, when his audience was a mixed group, he never said a word offensive to the clergy.

But, in preaching to the clergy alone, he spoke very forcefully and decisively, reprimanding any improper conduct that at times had been ascribed to priests, yet balancing that strong and energetic approach with something like this: "Let us remember, no, I should say let me remember, something that we all know for sure. God is not happy with us."

In the Mission in Teramo, the first point for the renewal of the clergy was to impress upon them the obligation that priests have, namely, to be saints. Second, the duty of growing in perfection day by day. Third, the means to personal holiness, that is, mental prayer which must never be omitted on any day, even when busily occupied in the work of the ministry. Such was the example

given by St. Francis Xavier, St. Charles, Father Avila - never excusing themselves from it. Fourth, the zeal that all, even the simple priests, must exert for the salvation of souls, demonstrating that the apostolic life is inherent to the sacerdotal character and that the means to be used are: purity of intention, application to study and, in practice, not to be limited by consideration of persons or time, not to be discouraged by difficulties, but to be concerned for the salvation of souls with a spirit of gentleness and charity. Fifth, there are obstacles standing in the way of a priest attaining sanctity, perfection and apostolic zeal, namely, impurity, pride and avarice; emphasis is to be placed on the chastity, humility and detachment that is required in the priest. Sixth, there is the Sacrifice of the Mass which he called the mystery of faith since it contains in compendium form, all the other mysteries which, in turn, flow from it. As a reminder, he would give them a saying of St. Joseph Calasanctius: "The good priest speaks little, works hard, suffers all."

I put together all of this information from the summary, that I have frequently cited, of the Mission given in Teramo, written by Fr. Nicola Palma, describing the conferences to the clergy. But, in addition to that, I know that he was accustomed to treat these same topics, though perhaps he would vary the method - in one place this way, in another place another way. In other words, he would adapt the conferences in accordance with the needs as he saw them.