



Blessed Justin Mary
of the Holy Trinity

Russolillo

Priest - Founder



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Premise

The Lord does not create people just to occupy space. God has a plan, a vocation, a mission for every human being. Maybe the modern world does not function properly today because people are more concerned about finding a place, a profession, or a career, rather than their own vocation and mission in life.

A profession or career is something we do to live, to earn what we need in order to live. A vocation is something we do out of dedication and love. A profession can be shaped by our family, or by human considerations but a vocation comes from on high and invites us to disinterested service of our neighbor.

Fr. Justin was born and called to help every human being discover and follow his vocation in life, because each person only finds true fulfilment by discovering and following his calling. Therefore, all life, every activity, every ministry, every life-choice is seen as vocation. The title of the latest biography of Blessed Fr. Justin, "*Called to Call*", written by Fr. Oreste Anella S.D.V., alludes to the mission of this man of God.





Discerning Vocation



The most important thing in the life of every human being is to discern their vocation. Justin, born on January 18th 1891 at Pianura of Naples to Luigi Russolillo and Giuseppina Simpatia, from his earliest years felt a strong and clear calling from

God to the priesthood. An intelligent and sharp boy, Justin was known among his friends for his dedication to his studies and for his exceptional piety. He went to school with his aunts and received private lessons from them and from his parish priest.

When he was five years old he received his First Communion and fell in love with Jesus present in the eucharist. At ten years old he entered the seminary at Pozzuoli, his native diocese, and passed the entrance exams in such a brilliant way that he was put in the second year of school.

Justin never doubted his vocation but more than once he feared that he would be unable to follow it because of the poverty which gripped his large family and because of the bouts of illness that were to accompany him throughout his life. When Baron Zambaglione, whom his mother Giuseppina had gone to and asked for financial help to pay the seminary fees, proved unresponsive to her request, both mother and son wept bitterly.



On this occasion Giuseppina told her son, whose strengths she valued, *"Don't be afraid, Mamma will make you a priest, even if it costs me my own eyes!"* What would a mother's love not do! All the family, including the aunts, set about making sacrifices so that Justin could follow his vocation.

When all seems to be going well for the young seminarian, a trial comes along that almost bowls him over: his Aunt Enrichetta dies suddenly. She was the one who provided a notable amount to help pay the seminary fees. Then straight afterwards his father Luigi falls from some scaffolding and is unable to work any more. There is no money for the seminary. Once again mother and son weep bitterly at the prospect of Justin having to leave the seminary. The superiors realize what is happening, are moved by it all and get involved in his case. Baron Zambaglione, this time at the bishop's request, agrees to pay half the fees. The sky turns blue once more!

As a result of his unsteady health Justin runs the risk on more than one occasion of being sent home from the seminary. The Superiors, who appreciate his holiness and his extraordinary intelligence, make some exceptions for him: they allow him longer holidays, provide him with a private room instead of the traditional dormitory, and sometimes even give him more nutritious food.



Poverty and

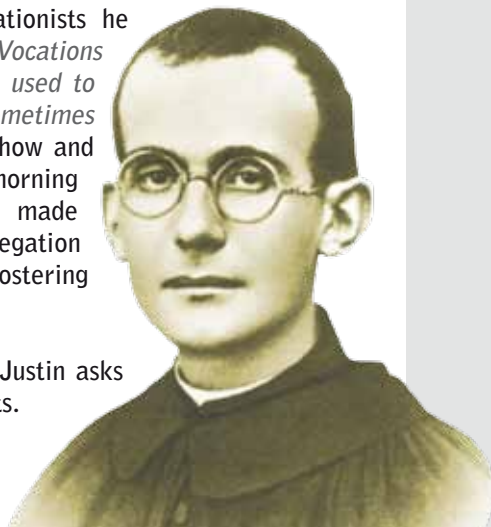
Vocation

With his financial problems sorted out, Justin continues with his studies and moves on towards priesthood. During the holiday periods he spends at home, he discovers the seed of priestly and religious vocation in many young people. He starts to get them together, to give them catechism classes and to teach some of them Latin.

Justin forms two groups, the "*Volunteers of Jesus*" and the "*Most Faithful*", and with them he organizes an oratory with recreation, songs, prayers, catechism classes, group Communions and social training. Among these young people, who are full of life and enthusiasm, Justin suffers as he notes that their families' poverty is preventing them from facing the future calmly.

When Fr. Justin was later asked about the birth of the Congregation of the Vocationists he replied, "*The Society of Divine Vocations was born from a seminarian who used to teach catechism every day and sometimes all day.*" This statement explains how and why, on September 20th 1913, the morning of his priestly ordination, Justin made a vow to found a religious Congregation dedicated to identifying and fostering vocations.

Speaking to his "*Most Faithful*", Justin asks them if they want to become priests.



Salvatore Polverino, who later would become the first Vocationist priest, answers for them all, "*No!*" The young priest, who can see all the true signs of a vocation in these young people, is deeply upset over this, and with the delicateness that characterizes his life asks his aunt Michelina to try and find out the reason for that decisive "*No*". It is Polverino himself who resolves the misunderstanding by explaining, "*We wish that we could become priests! We are poor. Where would we get the money for the seminary?*" Justin promises to try and get the necessary funds. Various poor boys begin to turn up from all over to Pianura where "*Fr. Justin makes priests free of charge!*" The poverty of the boys who flock to him is a cause of apprehension and worry to the ecclesiastical authorities who see the existence of the Vocationist family put in danger.

The Lord has always shown a certain preference for the poor and it is from them that he calls his chosen ones. Justin, a faithful follower of Jesus, pledges himself and his religious families to "*identifying and fostering vocations to the ordained ministries, especially among those who are less well-off*".

The desire, determination and concern of Fr. Justin are shown in this statement which remains the specific mission of his apostolate and that of his sons and daughters. "*Poverty must never be an obstacle to following one's own vocation.*" Relying on Jesus's words, "*The poor are with you always*", the Vocationists commit themselves to always help poor candidates.



Supremacy

of the Spirit



First of all, with his family and then in the seminary, Justin is fascinated by God, hungers and thirsts for the word of God and becomes an avid reader of books on spirituality. The fire of divine love burns within him and this fire can do nothing other than blaze. Justin stands out on account of his piety and his devotion in prayer. Often, both in the parish and in the seminary, he spends all his free time praying. In the parish his "*Most Faithful*" see him in ecstasy. In the seminary his school friends see him in ecstasy in front of the crucifix, and Fr. Salvatore Verlezza watches him in a state of ecstasy for 45 minutes, something that took place during

the celebration of Mass in private when he was once ill.

On the day of his priestly ordination, September 20th 1913, Justin made his vow of charity, promising always to do whatever would give the greatest glory to God.

When he is ordained a priest, the young Justin takes no part in the outward trappings of festivity; he thinks of the grace of the sacrament and the only gift he asks for is for all the children of Pianura to receive Communion on the day of his first Mass.

As a priest Justin never does anything for money and he never asks for money. He becomes a parish priest of St. George in



Pianura and sets about celebrating and promoting a 4:30 a.m. Mass to give the farmers and workers the chance of receiving Communion before going to work.

"Seek first the kingdom of God and its justice, and the rest will be given to you in abundance." This principle becomes the young priest's motto. Though beset by a thousand economic problems, since it is not easy to maintain the ever-rising number of boys, Fr. Justin devotes the parish's modest economic resources to maintaining and restructuring the church and to the needs of the poor.

What attracts a lot of boys, generous benefactors and several priests who approach Fr. Justin and offer their assistance, is that interior fire that can be seen in this man of God who lives, and tries to get others to live, what he teaches and enjoins on those he meets along his path: *"Be a saint... become a real saint because all the rest counts for nothing"*.



IV

A True Glory for

the Catholic Church



On the night Fr. Justin was born, between January 17th and 18th 1891, Our Lady appears to Fr. Salvatore Di Fusco, a priest from Pianura who was at the point of death, and tells him, *"Do not be afraid. You will be cured because today a baby is to be born in Pianura whom they will call Justin and he will be a glory for the Catholic Church"*.

Fr. Justin is a true glory for the Catholic Church in that he has enriched it with two religious families, the Vocationist Fathers and the Vocationist Sisters, as well as an Institute of Consecrated Life in the World, the Vocationist Apostles of Universal Sanctification. The Vocationist family is present and active in four

continents and fifteen different nations.

All of these hold the charism of Fr. Justin in admiration and are inspired by it, namely, that of identifying vocations and offering free training for the religious life and the priesthood. This commitment is something which belongs only to the candidates of the Vocationist family. Fr. Justin nurtures vocations and directs them to wherever God calls them. He never pressures a young person to become a Vocationist. It is the Lord who calls! Fr. Justin helps people to discover vocation by accompanying their discernment. To accept a young person into the Vocationary (a house for discerning one's vocation) Fr. Justin asks for no money. Nor does he require that the vocation has already been clearly discerned, but he asks that

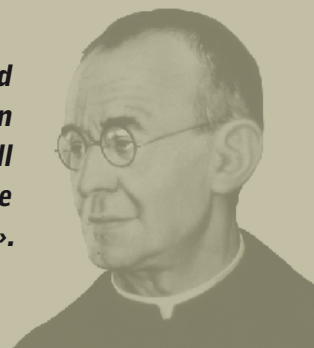
the young people have the willingness to become saints and show some sign of having a vocation. Anyone who decides after experiencing the Vocationary that he does not have a vocation to the religious life or the priesthood returns home freely and can always continue there to live his vocation to holiness.

Fr. Galasso, who later became the first successor of the Founder, stated that at the beginning he had not intended to become a Vocationist and that Fr. Justin never urged him to become one.

Fr. Justin is one of the glories of the Church because of his personal holiness, his charism, his mystical and ascetic writings, his stature, his meditations and his Trinitarian and eucharistic experiences.



«Do not be afraid. You will be cured because today a baby is to be born in Pianura whom they will call Justin and he will be a glory for the Catholic Church».





V

The Parish

for Vocations



How on earth does a priest who wants to dedicate his whole life to vocations become a parish priest and work in a parish?

On April 30th 1914, upon his return to Pianura, after completing his first appointment as prefect and teacher in the Pozzuoli seminary, Fr. Justin takes the

first steps towards community living. This date is held and celebrated as the day of the Vocationary's foundation, the work that most characterises the Vocationists: a place where young people who show signs of a vocation are given a free formation in prayerful devotion, in study and in work. On this date Fr. Justin welcomes the first three aspirants for the priesthood to community life. This experiment, begun in his father's house only lasts 15 days! For reasons unknown to us the Bishop of Pozzuoli, Monsignor Zezza, puts a peremptory stop to the young priest's experiment and Justin, while cut to the quick, ever obediently does what his Superior wants. In giving the sad news to the aspirants he says, *"We are sons of the cross and we should embrace it."* Two of these first three candidates would later become Vocationist priests.

Fr. Salvatore Verlezza briefly sums up Fr. Justin's personality by saying, *"He's the man who's never given up!"* When he is convinced that something is God's will, Fr. Justin does not concede, does not allow himself to be beaten. Sometimes he waits for better times, sometimes changes his method or

place, and sometimes he appeals to a higher authority. But he never gives in.

Fr. Justin continues his apostolate among the young with the external oratory, then prepares and accompanies a group of young girls on their path to consecration as Slaves of Mary and founds a Pious Union. His period of military service during the First World War takes him physically away from his young people but not spiritually. He often writes from the battlefield to his aspirants, encouraging them and following their progress. During his military service Fr. Justin is pained that his work for vocations has been held back, but the foundation project continues to grow and the project of founding the Vocationist Sisters matures.

Now back home in Pianura, Fr. Justin meets more opposition from Monsignor Zezza to the project for founding a religious family, at first known as the Servants of the Saints and now known as the Vocationists. Following the advice of his spiritual director, Fr. Justin opens his mind and heart to Monsignor Fortunato Farina, Bishop of Troia, who declares himself happy to welcome him into his diocese and allow him to set up his project there. While everything would seem to point to an imminent move from Pianura to Troia for Fr. Justin, Monsignor Zezza is transferred from Pozzuoli to Naples and the parish priest of Pianura dies. Monsignor Pasquale Ragosta, administrator of Pozzuoli diocese, begs Fr. Justin to apply for the job of parish priest of St George in Pianura and allows him to pursue his plans in Pianura itself.





The parish is like a womb in which a vocation is conceived and nurtured. For this reason Divine Providence prepares for the birth of the first Vocationary in the rectory of St. George's parish, where Fr. Justin serves as parish priest from September 20th 1920 until his death on August 2nd 1955.

Less than a month after becoming pastor of St. George's church, Fr. Justin gets the rectory premises ready and on October 18th 1920 opens the first Vocationary! October 18th 1920 is therefore celebrated as the birthday of the Society of Divine Vocations

This first experience convinces Fr. Justin that *"the Vocationary and the parish must always have a relationship of mutual growth and support"*. Every parish served by Vocationists ought always to have a Vocationary.

News of the opening of the Vocationary, which accepts and, without charge, trains boys who feel called to the priesthood, spreads almost miraculously throughout the regions of southern Italy. The number of boys grows bigger by the day. In the parish house and the area surrounding the church, transformation and continual expansion is required. Requests come in from all over and Fr. Justin, like a good father, doesn't know how to say no.

Showing his concern for vocations, in his work *"Spiritus Orationis"* Fr. Justin writes, *"When someone knocks on our community's doors, our heart is opened much more quickly than our doors!"*

The good people of Pianura welcome, love and sustain Fr. Justin's boys. Every day real and genuine miracles are seen, something that keeps the Vocationary existing and growing.

In 1948, when a mother begs Fr. Ugo Fraraccio to accept her son into the Vocationary and he is at pains to make her understand that there is no room and no beds, Fr. Justin, who happened to be passing by, realizes and sees what is going on and with a friendly smile says, *"Look, Ugo, there are at least another two beds free: mine and yours!"* What wouldn't he do to help a vocation!





VI The Vocationist Sisters

The parish of Saint George has the honor and glory of having sustained and nurtured the first Vocationary. Early on Fr. Justin decides that *"for the little Jesus to grow, we need Mary and Joseph."* In other words, to help these Divine Vocations to grow, Mothers and Fathers are needed.



The Vocationist Sisters branch was conceived and founded to provide real mothers to those with vocations. Probably only in heaven will we be able to appreciate fully the heroism and effectiveness of the Sisters shown to so many young people. Without the zealous care and attention of the Vocationist Sisters, without their maternal affection, many young people would never have made it to the priesthood.



The future Vocationist Sister, Rachele Marrone, who for some time has been teaching embroidery to various young girls, is attracted by the spirituality of the young Fr. Justin. She had been enthusiastic about the spiritual formation that the young Founder had been giving to his boys. In 1914 she asked him to be her spiritual director and to guide the young girls that she had been training. Fr. Justin agrees willingly to her request and guides the girls through their catechetical, ascetic and apostolic formation. These young women will form the first nucleus of the Slaves of Mary, of the Pia Unione and later of the Sisters of Divine Vocations.





Appetite grows by eating! These simple souls, full of love for God, are not content to have become specially favoured daughters of the Virgin Mary and be consecrated as Slaves of Mary. They feel that not even heroic willingness to work for poor vocations is enough for them. They want to consecrate themselves entirely to the Lord and belong only and always to him.

On the evening of October 1st 1921, with the blessing of the young Founder and the permission of their parents, the first six aspirants began the Congregation of Vocationist Sisters, going off to live a community life in "*Villa Caleo*", the present Mother House of the Sisters.



The Pia Unione of the Sisters of the Saints comprises an intermediate group somewhere between lay organizations and religious family. Fr. Justin founded it with the aim of seeking out and sustaining vocations. Given that it is the Founder's intention that this group should be the prelude to religious life for the future Vocationist Sisters, he only admits young, unmarried Christian women as members. Monsignor Zezza approves it on December 18th 1918. On February 1st 1919 "*at First Vespers of the Purification and St. Ignatius the Martyr's day*" with great solemnity he admits the candidates who had asked to be accepted and who have been prepared for taking this step.

These devout girls, prepared and trained by the Founder, calmly and joyfully cope with the difficulties and trials of poverty. Their enthusiasm is such that they hardly notice the discomfort of having to be in the dark because there is no electricity. The light within illuminates the outer darkness. The annals of the Congregation show that these first Vocationist Sisters are really heroic souls, prepared to make any sacrifice for the Lord and for vocations.

The Founder outlines the program for the Sisters and gradually prepares them to be mothers and servants of vocations. Each Sister ought to provide economic support for at least one candidate. As John Baptist prepared the way to the Lord, the Vocationist Sisters should prepare a Vocationary in every region and village for the Vocationist Fathers. The Sisters give hands on training and education to the smallest children and prepare that *"fertile land to receive and bring to fruition the seed of a vocation"*. The first Vocationist Sisters live for vocations and die offering themselves as *"victims for vocations"*.

Several times the good Vocationist Sisters happily leave their quarters in order to make space to the youngsters of the Vocationary. Then, following the example of the first Christians, Sister Clara Loffredo sells what she had inherited from her parents, and with the proceeds from the sale gives Fr. Justin the amount of money necessary for purchasing the land where today the Deus Caritas Vocationary stands, the Mother House of the Vocationist Fathers.

Fr. Justin's work with the Sisters is enormously helped by the fact that in 1922, his sister Giovanna entered the Vocationist Sisters and later became their Mother General. She would keep this role until she died on May 25th 1969.

The Vocationist Fathers and Sisters, whilst being two distinct juridical entities that are separate and independent of each other, continue to work together drawing enrichment from each other and complementing each other. Both Fathers and Sisters live out the same spirituality and develop the same charism, working wherever they may be for universal sanctification and together overcoming the administrative and financial difficulties that they meet.

Sister Giovanna Russolillo



VII

Apostolic Zeal



Fr. Justin writes that one of the distinctive characteristics of the Vocationists is an industriousness that spurs them on to "*do everything for everyone to bring them all to God*". The spirit of flexibility and availability in the way he works, which makes the Vocationist a "*Servant of the Saints*", explains the multiplicity of services that he provides. According to occasion and need, he takes on the role of Founder, father, Superior General, confessor, housekeeper, teacher, spiritual director, preacher, writer and poet.



This industriousness and zeal cause him to promise "*never to waste time*" and allow him and his companions to develop their capacities and talents in the conviction that rest is not about giving up activities but about changing from one activity to another.



Fr. Justin says that every Vocationist ought to do the work of at least 10 people and he does the work of at least 20! His working day begins at 4:00 a.m. and finishes around midnight.

In accordance with the principle "*contemplation in action and action for contemplation*" Fr. Justin's life is all about activity and elevating oneself up to God.



VIII

The Preacher



Several times a day Fr. Justin breaks open the word of God for his youngsters, for the Sisters, for the people of Pianura, for the faithful from other parishes, and for priests and Sisters from various Congregations in the innumerable courses of spiritual exercises that he holds. He almost always speaks seated on a seat placed by the altar. He speaks with a gentle clear voice, without gesticulation, and he uses simple words and examples in an almost conversational style. A constant



theme of his preaching is the "*direct words*" of the Lord, taken from the Old and New Testament". His talks are attractive, they penetrate people's soul and move the listeners.

During the homily a lighted candle always burns on the altar to recall the presence of the Holy Spirit, as if to remind his audience that it is the Spirit who is speaking through his servant. He often gets his listeners involved by asking questions that from time to time need a written answer, especially when he is dealing with the youngsters from the Vocationary.

Many religious communities, major and minor seminaries, noviciates and student houses seek him out for week-long retreats and many bishops invite him to lecture at their eucharistic, Marian and catechetical conventions.





A young Vocationist student disappears during Fr. Justin's sermons and the Superior asks him the reason for his behaviour and the student replies, *"Fr. Justin is so convincing that I feel guilty afterwards because I daren't risk putting everything he says into practice"*. Fr. Justin's words instruct, form and exhort at the same time. For this reason he does not content himself with giving isolated sermons: all his preaching engagements have to last at least three days so that people can experience real spiritual growth. He cannot imagine a liturgical or paraliturgical celebration without the ministry of the word. From the start of his apostolate he speaks of the *"banquet of the word and the banquet of the eucharist"*. Many Vocationist students and Sisters take notes while Fr. Justin speaks so as not to lose his precious gems. These notes contain the material published in various volumes for the benefit of future generations.

IX The Teacher

Fr. Justin teaches by preaching, taking catechism class, giving lessons in Italian, Latin, Greek and ascetical theology, as well as giving spiritual direction. Jesus is the divine teacher and every priest needs to be a teacher if he is to be an alter Christus. As a seminarian Fr. Justin taught catechism and succeeded in holding the students spell-bound. As a young priest he becomes diocesan co-ordinator of catechetical ministry. Pianura has at least one man or woman catechist for every courtyard. The pastor trains his catechists personally, visits them and takes part in the catechesis course.



During the early years of the Vocationary Fr. Justin teaches the students all academic subjects as need dictates. He teaches from the heart and the boys look forward to his lessons with great joy. He teaches with love and passion, putting himself at the level of each individual student, without ever humiliating anyone. The esteem in which he holds all the students causes him to be an optimist and this stimulates the youngsters and makes them not want to let their teacher down. Every minute of the lesson is used wisely to help the students assimilate what is being put forward. At the start of each lesson he goes over the previous one and tells them what he hopes to achieve in the present one. He is always full of examples and manages to involve all the students.

At the end he gives a synthesis of what they have been dealing with and assigns homework designed to consolidate what has been learnt. In his teaching as well as in his role as founder and educator, this good teacher uses the "*preventive method of St. John Bosco*", enriching it with a sense of esteem towards each pupil, an essential element of any educative relationship.



Prayer

Most Holy Trinity,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
for the good of the Church
you crowned Blessed Justin Mary
of the Trinity with gifts
and you made him a devout and zealous priest,
an apostle of *"Divine Vocations"*
and a keen lover of your Glory,
your Will and your Love
for Universal Sanctification
and *"Divine Union"* of souls.
Grant us the grace to experience
his effective intercession
and to imitate his devotion and humility,
his patience, zeal and kindness to all.
May any grace that you may grant us
through his intercession
be for our spiritual benefit,
and may it hasten his canonisation here on earth.

**(Three "Glory be to the Father..."
in honour of the Most Holy Trinity)**





X The Writer

As a student Justin takes class notes and as a young man, under the guidance of his spiritual directors, he begins to write the *"Book of the Soul"*, containing his everyday inspirations. Often he writes about his uplifting moments and the spontaneous prayers that spring from the heart. Over the course of his life he writes a good 24 texts of rules, directories and constitutions. Later he publishes the Offertories of the Most Precious Blood, Spiritus Orationis, Ascension, Heaven of Heavens, five different Devotionals (Ascent of the Soul, the III and IV Period, First Semester, Second Semester and Ordinary).

"Spiritus Orationis", contains several autobiographical references and in many ways can be compared to the Confessions of St Augustine. He writes:

"Through these prayers, every pure spirit and great heart can be part of that special relationship to which the poor human (alas, too human) spirit is most mercifully invited during his earthly life..."

These prayers are intended not to be formulas but to be read as a meditation, and because of their great richness, to be part of spiritual study.

They are divided into verses, like the psalms, in the form of strophes. (In fact, they echo very clearly certain aesthetic laws of interior rhythm from which that human spirit could not or would not refrain.)

(How lovely was the act of the one who was born a poet, but refused to write poetry on earth, in order to make his life a poem that could be sung by some beautiful angels in heaven: the only feast of glory! The only court of love!)"

All his writings have a mystical ascetic content and a melodic cadence. Fr. Justin encapsulates his thoughts in the form of prayer. Rather than being read, they are to be meditated upon if we are to understand and enjoy them. They have a classical style which evokes the structure of Latin, with long sentences and many subordinate clauses. The position of some words does not depend on any logical or grammatical structure, but on the importance, or emphasis, that the author wants to give them.

Fr. Justin's most fluent and pleasing writings are the conferences and numerous articles published in the monthly magazine, Spiritus Domini. Many people maintain that Fr. Justin's real masterpiece is the Faciamus Hominem. This piece is the song of creation!

Fr. Luigi Diodato used to say that Fr. Justin often wrote in the Sisters' Chapel before the Blessed Sacrament, with the tabernacle's door open. Fr. Justin himself, in the Book of the Soul, affirms that most of his thoughts, contained in Ascension, were inspired from on high.



XI

The Parish Priest

The saintly priest begins his parish service on September 20th 1920, taking as his guide and pattern the words of Jesus, *"The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve"*. His 35 years as parish priest are years of true service. In this mission of his he would always be highly esteemed by the people and those in authority.

He is at the service of the small children, whom he trains in catechism, along with the catechists to whom he entrusts this important task, personally administering the sacraments to them, preparing them to be altar servers and then giving them the joy of serving.

He puts himself at the service of the young people, taking in several of them to the Vocationary and admitting others to internal classes there, since Pianura made no other provision. He forms two thriving groups of Catholic Action, from which would come future animators for the parish and local area.



He dedicates himself to the poor by organizing the parish charitable work, assisting the sick, finding work for the unemployed, and houses for the homeless. The financial needs of the Vocationary never cause him to neglect the poor.

When he gets to know that an elderly blind woman is sleeping in a room with broken windows he personally takes charge of fixing them. Every Wednesday he gives 100 lire each to 30 poor people in honor of St. Joseph, Patron of Providence, even when there is no bread for the boys of the Vocationary. When a Sister working in the kitchen complains about this lavishness towards the poor, despite the needs of the boys from the Vocationary, Fr. Justin taps Providence on the shoulder. For example, a farmer once turns up at the Sisters with a cart full of goods, and on another occasion, when a wagon arrives full of flour for the Vocationary, he tells a Sister, *"Next time don't moan so much!"*



He makes himself all things to all people. Even when in his role of Founder and Director General he can no longer be personally

engaged in so many activities, he sees to it that his Vocationists working in the parish get involved. His reputation for certain miraculous cures quickly spreads and every time someone becomes seriously ill Fr. Justin gets called.

Besides all this, he restructures the parish house which then becomes the first Vocationary. He reorders the whole of the church building in an attempt to provide more decorum and dignity for the house of God.

He promotes the family apostolate. He prepares couples for marriage and immediately after the war, with a secrecy that charity demands, he manages to bless many marriages of convenience that had been undertaken without the blessing of God or the Church. Although he has never touched an alcoholic drink, after the celebration of these marriages of conscience he often provides a bottle of wine to toast the fact that God's grace has been regained.

Even when he is ill he devotes himself to preaching during Advent and Lent, and although he often preaches twice a day he organizes a parish mission every year and invites outside preachers.

Pianura is still today one of the areas with the highest number of daily communicants. Fr. Justin becomes ever more of a magnet to people. He cannot walk the streets of Pianura without queues of children, youngsters and elderly people coming up and trying to kiss his hand.



XII The Trials

Besides the trials of poverty and sickness, Fr. Justin, as founder, has to confront and overcome the trials of misunderstanding, calumny and persecution. The trials he suffered are a sign of the divine seal on his work. *"Blessed are you when they insult you, persecute you and say all sort of evil against you for my sake"*, says the Divine Master.

Monsignor Zezza always wanted him as his minister for the more solemn celebrations, intervened to resolve his financial difficulties and allowed him to stay in the seminary despite his health problems. Now he first tells him in a peremptory manner to give up his initial attempt at community living and then he will not permit the foundations to get off the ground, perhaps because of Fr. Justin's unsteady health and because of the family's modest financial position.

Monsignor Petrone gives the first canonical approval to the Vocationist Congregation on May 26th 1927, but he immediately afterwards begins to have problems with the Founder because Fr. Justin sends some Vocationist priests to minister outside the diocese of Pozzuoli. First he comes up with the problem of irregularity regarding the decree of approval and then he invites the Founder to find a new bishop to be the Ordinary of the Congregation.

The Cardinal of Naples welcomes Fr. Justin and the Congregation into his archdiocese, but two months later invites him to find another bishop.





One day Fr. Justin asks his first students,

"Who will be the first to carry the Vocationist flag up to heaven?" Carlo Cecchini replies at once, *"I certainly will!"* And that is what happens on November 18th 1921.

Fr. Antonio Palmieri, an exceptionally holy and zealous Vocationist priest and particularly fond of Fr. Justin who is his spiritual director and friend, dies in the seminary at Orte where he was carrying out his ministry as rector. He becomes the first Vocationist to enter the Father's house. Other fine young Vocationists follow him and many others narrowly escape death, in some cases through the miraculous intercession of Fr. Justin. He himself comes close to death in 1936. These deaths and illnesses create a void in Fr. Justin's heart and that of his family. They bring apprehension and worry that present a negative picture of the Congregation.

Monsignor Castaldo, Bishop of Pozzuoli and later Cardinal of Naples, had hindered Fr. Justin and his religious even before being nominated bishop and would like to make them a strictly diocesan Congregation dedicated exclusively to the service of the diocese. He forces Fr. Justin to send his philosophy students every day to the episcopal seminary in Pozzuoli, only so that he might have a quorum of students. The youngsters, who have to make the journey on foot or by bicycle, are unable to follow the normal community life and suffer discomfort, illness and disorientation. While externally showing great respect for Fr. Justin, Monsignor Castaldo continues to send very negative reports about the Founder and his Vocationists to the Congregation for Religious in Rome.

Repeated false accusations, sent anonymously to the Congregation for Religious, present Fr. Justin's Congregation as a bunch of poor and malnourished boys, all lumped together and containing people who had come from other Congregations or seminaries without proper permission. Many of these accusations were from people who had been expelled from, or refused admission to the Congregation.



The rehabilitation of priests who had "*left*" is something which the Congregation did very well and which was particularly dear to the Founder to whom it cost a good deal of work, sacrifice and humiliation. As a genuine good shepherd Fr. Justin rejoices and celebrates whenever a lost sheep returns to the fold, though this is the cause of much misunderstanding, resentment and lies. Because of this apostolate of "*recovery*", the Secretary of the Congregation for Religious, develops a hearty dislike that turns into hatred for this Pianura priest who restores dignity, peace of mind and rehabilitation to the ministry to so many ex-priests.

The sentence arrives in 1934: the Congregation can no longer admit anyone to the novitiate, to vows and to holy orders. It really is a sentence to a slow death! This agony lasts for seven years.

From 1941, until the death of Fr. Justin, the Congregation is assisted and practically ruled by a series of Apostolic Visitors who, while helping in the growth and organization of the Congregation, possess neither a father's spirit nor the Founder's charism.

In 1954 there is the additional problem of economic collapse caused by putting up a huge building on the Via Vallombrosa in Rome. The bills are not getting paid, one error leads to another, and the desire to cover this great mess and set things right leads the General Treasurer to seek punitive loans and finally fall into the hands of money-lenders. Fr. Justin is in Naples, far from Rome, in the dark about all this and deprived of any internal control which is exercised by the Apostolic Visitor. Nevertheless, Fr. Justin is held responsible for the financial crack and is practically demoted from his office as Superior General.

It has been leaked that on the occasion of the financial collapse Cardinal Montini prepared a bull of dissolution for the Congregation, but when he presented it to Pius XII for his signature, the Pope said, "*Prune, yes; but don't pull up by its roots a Congregation that has helped so many priests*". Montini himself, by now Pope Paul VI, in 1968 grants to the Congregation the Decretum Laudis, in other words its final approval on behalf of the Holy See.

To understand Fr. Justin's suffering we need to read the entire chapter entitled "Tears" in Spiritus Orationis:

"Now I weep, as you know, because I feel so alone in the world... and a deathlike cold chokes the life from my heart.

Now I cry, as you know, because I feel so poor...because I feel tired, so tired... because I understand the childishness of my tears... because I feel without protection, without guarantee of success, under the apprehension of imminent disaster, under the cloud of total failure.

Now I cry, as you know, because I see dying, in me and around me, so many things that I loved, so many people without whom I could not survive, and, my entire being mined all over by death.

These tears that I shed seem to be of blood, O my Lord! And those who could dry them are in far off abysses, those who make me shed them are no longer.

Now I weep, as you know, because I'm crossing this desolate desert in the rain, and passing through this dark tunnel beneath monstrous mountains, and I can't see the way out and am tempted to stop and turn back...

Now I am in tears, as you know, since I find myself under the surgeon's knife with all my wildest dreams, with all my feeling, in this poor heart of flesh that is mine.

Now I weep, as you know, because cunning bright scissors are pruning a vine while its branches are full of life...

Now I weep, as you know, because there's someone behind me, by my side, who is digging his claws into my living flesh..."

These laments, this grief, seem all the more cutting when we realize that Spiritus Orationis was published in 1931, before the really great trials. As Jesus sweat blood in Gethsemane pondering the cross, the lack of fidelity and betrayal that awaited him, so our bloodless martyr sees in advance what is to follow and sheds tears of blood, but does not shrink from his "cross of fire".

In Gethsemane Jesus is comforted by the angel; our founder is comforted in his agonies by many angels, specifically: Monsignor Camarota, Bishop of Vallo della Lucania, Monsignor Farina, Bishop of Troia, Monsignor Casullo, Bishop of Nusco, Monsignor Cesarano and Monsignor Palatucci, Bishops of Campagna, Monsignor Cerasuolo, Monsignor Cafaro, Monsignor Brandi, Fr. Piccirelli, Fr. De Giovanni, Fr. Mazzei, Abbot Fausto Mezza, Fr. Baldini and finally by Cardinal Lavitrano, who is instrumental in getting the pontifical approval of his religious families, received in 1947 and 1948 respectively. Among the highest protectors and defenders of the Vocationist Congregation, Pius XII and Paul VI must be mentioned.



XIII

Extraordinary Gifts

When in 1919 news spreads in Pozzuoli that Fr. Justin has presented a request to the ecclesiastical authorities in Rome asking for approval, blessing and advice regarding the religious family that he intends to found, Monsignor Dell'Isola asks him, *"Do you have the extraordinary qualities needed to found such an enterprise?"* Without hesitation Fr. Justin replies, *"No, but all the ordinary ones are there!"*

While he is on Naples's Camaldoli Mountain with Fr. Antonio Palmieri, Fr. Justin has a vision of the future Vocationary, with lots of priests reciting the Breviary. He suddenly says to his friend, *"Look, can you see how many priests are praying in front of that huge Vocationary?"* Naturally poor Fr. Antonio can see nothing!

Fr. Justin reads hearts and knows the intimate details of many people. At the end of a course of spiritual exercises a Sister approaches him and she wants the rosary that he wears round his neck. Without a word being spoken, Fr. Justin takes the rosary off and gives it to the Sister.

During the war he mysteriously sees or at least knows the fate of many soldiers whose families have not heard from them. He speaks about it with Father Mazzei, his spiritual director, whom he asks what to do. *"I can see them. How should I react?"* Word gets out and hundreds of people come to find news of their loved ones. One of the most extraordinary cases is that of a woman from Mercato Cilento, Salerno, who received news that her husband had died in the war. She sends her daughter to Fr. Justin to get a Mass celebrated, but

the priest sends the young girl back home saying, *"Go on, get straight back home because your father is on his way there"*. And that is exactly what happens. When she gets home the young girl meets her father!

In 1939 Fr. Justin tells Fr. Giorgio Saggiamo that he has had a strange dream: both of them were sucked up by a powerful vortex of water and wind and were about to drown when a stranger mysteriously appears, rather short and well built, and saves them from certain death. Fr. Giorgio takes the liberty of recounting the dream to various other colleagues. In 1945 Cardinal Lavitrano is named Prefect of the Congregation for Religious. Fr. Justin, while in a reception room awaiting the prelate, turns to Fr. Saggiamo and exclaims, *"That's the man from the dream!"* It is Cardinal Lavitrano himself who presides at the General Chapter in 1947 and is appointed as Cardinal Protector of the Vocationist Congregation!



On May 11th 1926, while reciting the Breviary in the garden of his family's house near the famous "*Pagliarella*", the Vocationist's porziuncula, the young founder has a vision of the Holy Trinity assuring him that the Virgin Mary will be Patron and Superior of all Vocationist Fathers' and Sisters' houses, present and future. This is why the Vocationists celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Divine Vocations on May 11th.

The "*Pagliarella*" is a sacred place for all the Vocationists since it is in this straw hut situated in the family garden that Justin, as a young seminarian before becoming a priest, and then afterwards, used to gather his young people together.

Fr. Justin prophesies that this *Pagliarella* "*will come to an end when I do*". A few days after his death, it mysteriously caught fire.

Going to Mercato, he finds Sister Matilde della Greca in bed with an advanced form of tuberculosis. He goes over to her, blesses her and says, "*Get up. You have to get well because there's a lot of work to do*". The illness vanishes as if by magic.

A mother brings him her deaf and dumb child to be blessed. Fr. Justin takes the child into his room, blesses him and gives him some toffees telling him, "*Go and tell Mamma that these are three toffees*". The little boy goes off, his tongue loosened and his ears opened, and manages to tell his mother, "*These are three toffees*"!

Fr. Justin's reputation for holiness grows and extends beyond the confines of Pianura. A woman comes a long way to meet the holy priest and she approaches Fr. Justin in the sacristy of St. George's parish. "*I want to see the saint of Pianura*", she says. He simply tells her, "*Come on*", leads her to the statue of St. George and then disappears.



The secret of his inner strength and the attraction that Fr. Justin held over so many people is his deep spirituality. Starting from the realization that we are created in the image and likeness of God-Trinity, he has a burning desire to enter as much as possible into the mystery of the Trinity so he can better understand what a human being should be.

In a certain sense all the divine attributes and perfections should be reflected in human beings even if in a limited way. Since each person of the Trinity exists in a relationship of love with the others, Fr. Justin arrives at the conclusion that the purpose of creation is to make us into a "*living, personal, loving relationship with each of the divine persons*" The whole of our life should be a relationship of love with God and neighbor.

This relationship of love is built up in the Militant Church, the Suffering Church and the Triumphant Church on the model of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph so that it can be fully lived out with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. "*The Holy Church, the Holy Family and the Holy Trinity are the unique yet triple center and axis of the Society of Divine Vocations.*"



The prayer books written by Fr. Justin are called "*Books of Devotions*" (Devozionali), not because they contain popular devotions but, because prayer should be spontaneous, voluntary and not forced by external obligation.

One of the key words in Vocationist spirituality is "*Ascension*". Once we open ourselves to the Lord and allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit we can never stop. The hunger and thirst for love, the hunger and thirst for God can never be satisfied. The Holy Spirit uses his inspirations to bring our soul to the point where it becomes the "*bride of the Trinity*". This relationship of the soul as bride is enjoyed within the Communion of Saints and is made present and perfected ever more deeply in the eucharist and the word of God.



«The Holy Church, the Holy Family and the Holy Trinity are the unique yet triple center and axis of the Society of Divine Vocations.»



In the Father's House

In the spring of 1955 the religious and people of Pianura notice a more marked flurry of activity on the part of the Father Founder of the Vocationists. Fr. Justin trails around from courtyard to courtyard and wherever he finds himself he teaches and gives out catechisms and blessings. Once more he devotes himself to preaching during Lent and the month of May, both in the morning and in the evening. He looks emaciated and exhausted. People fear the worst but they are all used to seeing him in such a state of suffering that they do not get alarmed.

In December 1954 Fr. Justin had been struck with the so-called "*St. Anthony's Fire*", a type of herpes, and this was to be with him until he died. Boils and sores cover his body and prevent him from even wearing his collar. His spleen becomes enlarged; his feet swell up so much that he can hardly walk. Nevertheless, on June 9th, the feast of Corpus Christi, he insists on going ahead with the procession and carrying the Blessed Sacrament through all the streets of Pianura.





Doctor De Simone, a friend whom Fr. Justin has known from his seminary days and who is his own doctor, insists that the priest go to hospital to recover. But he fails to convince his friend. Fr. Justin reassures the doctor and tells him that he is fine. Only at the beginning of July, to keep his doctor friend happy, does he go and visit Doctor Cataldi.

On July 16th the doctor prescribes complete rest for him, and his prognosis to Fr. Fraraccio is that Fr. Justin has no more than two weeks to live.

As if unaware of all of this, Fr. Justin carries on preaching a course of spiritual exercises to the Sisters of the Naples Sanatorium. Then he asks the Vicar General for permission to spend a few days in the house at Mercato Cilento, *"where I can have a bit of rest and perhaps be of use to the novices in Altavilla or to the professed students in Laureana Cilento"*, as he puts it.

On July 20th, accompanied by Fr. Raffaele Castiglione, Fr. Justin undertakes his last journey. Rather than a chance for some rest, it turns out to be a final farewell to the Noviciate House in Altavilla, to the orphanage at Laureana Cilento where the students were spending their summer holidays, to the house at Mercato, to the Vocationary at Cava dei Tirreni and then to the communities at Posillipo. Finally, on July 27th, came the unexpected return to Pianura.

Everyone can see that the situation is getting worse. Sister Concetta becomes worried and alarmed. Fr. Justin is visited first by Doctor De Simone, then Doctor Russolillo, the

Founder's brother, and Doctor Cataldi. They take a blood sample from the patient. Analysis confirms that the Founder is suffering from leukemia. His sister, Mother Giovanna, arrives from Rome and the Fathers and Sisters start to come and go thick and fast. On August 1st, at the request of Fr. Alberto De Fusco, Fr. Justin agrees to be hospitalized *"if this is really necessary"*. When his brother, Doctor Michele Russolillo, finds out that he is willing to go, he says, *"It's too late. Fr. Justin is as good as dead"*. Aware of his situation, Fr. Justin allows Fr. Castiglione to keep watch over him during the night.

At about 2:00 a.m. on August 2nd Fr. Castiglione sees Fr. Justin sitting on his bed and asks if he wants anything. Fr. Justin replies, *"Last night you never gave me absolution; give it to me now"*.

At about 9:00 a.m. on the same day Fr. Justin says to Fr. Michele Esposito, *"Today, August 2nd, is the feast of St. Alphonsus. It's the patron saint's day of the bishop. I beg you, go to the bishop and give him my best wishes"*.

In the afternoon Doctor Russolillo gives his brother a blood transfusion. Fr. Justin lets him do it and then says, *"Why go on torturing me? It's all useless now"*. Fr. Ugo Fraraccio arrives from Rome and gives him the Anointing of the Sick. As he is anointed with the oil of the sick, Fr. Justin gently opens his eyes. He seems to understand and he nods his head without saying anything. At 9:10 p.m., without any complaining, he peacefully hands his day over to the Lord, happy to enjoy the fullness of that divine union that he taught and experienced throughout all his life.

The body of the beloved priest is hurriedly readied and put on view to the faithful in the Vocationary chapel.

The day following his death, Fr. Justin's body is transferred to St. George's Church where it remains on view for three days to be venerated by thousands of people who come to pay their respects to the holy parish priest. His body is buried for a time in Pianura cemetery and on April 14th 1956 is taken and entombed in the Vocationary chapel. His funeral and the procession that accompanied it through the streets of Pianura are a real triumph with the bells ringing out an uninterrupted festive peal.

The day a saint dies becomes the saint's dies natalis, the day of his birth into heaven. Fr. Justin's triumph began on August 2nd 1955. His teachings and his spirituality spread beyond the boundaries of his human person and his place of origin. His mission becomes more effective, his teachings more persuasive and sweeping, and his charism ever more attractive.



XVI Fr. Justin's Mission

Continues

The Vocationist family, made up of Vocationist Fathers, Vocationist Sisters, Vocationist Apostles of Universal Sanctification, Friends of Fr. Justin, Vocationist, Missionary Co-operators, Servants of the Living Christ, Sons of the Light and Shepherds of Youth, works in 15 countries and continues to follow and develop both the charism and mission of the Founder.

Fr. Justin passed on to his sons and daughters his love and concern for vocations in general and for vocations of the poor in particular. Just like Fr. Justin, his children nurture *"a real veneration of each vocation"*.

Thanks to Father Justin, hundreds of young men who live in poor areas are preparing for the priesthood in the various Vocationaries, thousands of young people are receiving a solid Christian education in the schools run by Vocationist Fathers and Sisters, millions of people are made aware of and helped in their response to the vocation to holiness. The Vocationists work in Italy, Brazil, the United States, Argentina, Nigeria, the Philippines, India, Madagascar, France, Indonesia, Colombia, Ecuador United Kingdom, Chili, South Africa. The appeal launched by Fr. Justin for union with God and the apostolate for universal sanctification is received in today's world not only through Vocationist men and women, but also through the witness and apostolate of ex-students, ex-parishioners, members of various groups and lay movements that take their inspiration from this far-sighted man with the heart for everyone. This man, Fr. Justin, cannot and does not want to exclude anyone at all from being prayed for, from being taken care of and from being trained for holiness.

Vocations to the religious life and the priesthood remain important because in the present economy of divine grace they have to develop, water and promote the vocation to holiness. The hopeful greeting that Fr. Justin used for his contemporaries as well as his *"future friends"* remains: *"Become a saint"*.

The Vocationary at Pianura and the Mother House of the Vocationist Sisters have become the powerhouses of Fr. Justin's spirituality and charism. It is this that accounts for the impetus, the invitations and the missionaries who are sent out to all parts of the world to assist every human being in discovering and following their own vocation and becoming an apostle of Divine Vocations by helping others to do the same.





The Miracle



Immediately after he was proclaimed to be Venerable, the miracle happened which would lead to his beatification.

Gaetanina Meloro was born on June 23rd 1938 in Newark, New Jersey, USA. Ever since 1962 she had been attending the Vocationist Fathers church in Newark. Besides teaching in Newark's public schools she taught catechism in Vocationist parishes for over twenty years.

Her gynaecological medical history was negative until January 1st 1998 when she suddenly experienced blood loss from the outer parts of her genitals. She was visited by the

doctor treating her and by a gynaecological specialist and was diagnosed as having a large tumour the size of a lemon situated at the rear of her vagina.

After a biopsy was taken on January 27th, Dr Denehy, who was her gynaecologist and oncologist, in the light of the clinical exam pronounced a diagnosis of *cancer of the vagina with a 4x6 mass in the recto-vaginal septum, stage 3b, with scaly carcinoma cells*. The same doctor suggested a therapeutic plan involving chemotherapy and radiotherapy, first externally and then internally, at the St Barnabas Hospital in Livingston.

From February 23rd to 28th she underwent chemotherapy treatment with Mytomicin C and 5FU. Both Dr Denehy and Dr Eastman, her radiologist and oncologist, witness to the fact that at the end of the external radiotherapy, before the start of the intravaginal radiotherapy, an objective examination showed the complete resolution of the neoplasia.

Dr Denehy also visited the patient in the months that followed and testified to the absence of any sign of vaginal tumour, and a CT scan of the pelvis on June 17th 1998 showed the absence of abdominal masses and of metastatic adenopathy. A gynaecological check-up in October 1998 and a Pap Test turned out to be completely negative. No evidence of recurrence was detected in the course of the numerous checks performed in 2001, 2002 and 2003 by Dr Denehy. The two doctors "*ab inspectione*" in 2004 and 2005 verified totally negative gynaecological and abdominal results and pronounced her to be in excellent general condition.

While the doctors were working hard with their treatment, the sick woman herself, her mother, her brother, some friends and some male and female Vocationists were sending up fervent and constant prayers asking for her to be cured through the

intercession of Fr Justin. The whole group said together the prayer for the glorification of Fr Justin, in a chorus that expressly asked for Gaetanina Meloro to be cured.

The cure took place and it proved to be total, lasting and inexplicable to medical science. All of this is fully documented and proved by the various documents, examinations and medical visits, witnesses, treating doctors, "*ab inspectione*" doctors, doctors who examined the case, other witnesses and theologians.

The extraordinary nature of this cure consists in the fact that the tumour was not shrunk or burned by the chemotherapy and that no trace, no scar and no sign of the tumour remained.

By signing the decree that recognises the inexplicable nature of Gaetanina Meloro's cure, obtained through the intercession of the Venerable Justin Mary of the Trinity, the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, has opened up the way for our Blessed to be beatified. In Pianura itself where Fr Justin was born, lived and became holy, Cardinal Angelo Amato, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, as the papal delegate, will proclaim him to be

Blessed on May 7th 2011.

In the glory of those who are Blessed, Fr Justin continues his mission and assures us of his intercession so that we may always take pleasure in that true joy which leads us to union with God.



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