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*Blessed Justin of the
Trinity*
At the Service of Vocations



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Blessed Fr. Justin M. of the Blessed Trinity



*Painting of Fr. Justin contemplating the emblem of the Congregation,
Florham Park, USA*

Tribute
to
Blessed Father Justin, my teacher,
guide and inspirer,
to
all my Vocationist confrères, relatives and friends
on the occasion of my 50th anniversary
of priestly ordination.

“I shall spend all my life
at the Service of Vocations”

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FOREWORD

Fr. Louis Caputo, Superior General of the Society of Divine Vocations, with this in depth biography of the earthly journey of Blessed Justin Russolillo has highlighted the essential features of the noble figure of the mystic priest.

With simple but meaningful episodes, the author offers to the reader the possibility to immerse himself into the religious atmosphere of those times and to understand the context, in which Blessed Justin has grown, has been formed and carried out his apostolate.

The dominant Justinian ethical thought appears clear and straightforward from the exposition of the themes of catechesis, spirituality and vocation.

The Charisma of Fr. Justin has made possible the formation of thousands of students and the institution of the Congregations of the Vocationist Fathers and Vocationist Sisters, today active and operative in Italy, Brazil, United States, France, Argentina, Nigeria, Philippines, India, Colombia, Ecuador, Madagascar, Indonesia, United Kingdom and Chile.

This extensive Vocationist presence in the world, the actuality of the charisma and the profound spirituality of the founder appear in all their power of attraction and charm in these pages.

The biography presents also eloquent points for theological and philosophical reflections and makes the reader ponder the depth and complexity of the teachings of Fr. Justin, a humble priest, dedicated to help and meet the needs of the most needy.

From the reading of these pages appears a present-day moral profile because Fr. Justin is a continuation of the shining figures that over the centuries have illuminated the firmament of Christianity by making humility and discretion their banner. He, like St. Francis and Mother Teresa of Calcutta, with the example of his life, reminds humanity that it is still possible to follow the path of virtue and holiness, without fanfare, with simple daily manifestations of abnegation and penance.

The testimony that Blessed Justin wanted to leave us is that everyone has to get rich interiorly through purification and devotion to others, without counting any sacrifice to get closer to God, as a heavenly father magnanimous and ready to welcome his beloved creature at the end of this earthly life.

The purpose of human existence is the reunification with the Triune God. The unflinching faith and the inner depth

of Blessed Justin lead us to deepen his thought, to reflect on the fatuity of material goods and the importance of spirituality for the elevation of human life.

Tracing the life of Father Justin we realize the centrality of formation, and the golden tread of the Justinian charisma that all life is vocation and that the most important task in life is to lead every person to discover and follow his vocation. The talent that God has given to every man must not be directed to egocentric purposes but to the service of others with unselfishness and love.

True Vocationist is one who understands and internalizes this intuition of Fr. Justin that life is a vocation.

The author has admirably traced the eclectic and visionary personality of the founder of the Vocationists, who was a tireless speaker with a vast cultural background. Ahead of time understood the importance of communication; he had strong and persuasive speaking skills, and was able to adapt his language to his audience and explain in a simple and linear manner complex concepts.

Those who listened to his homilies and retreats lent the utmost attention to his words that remained imprinted in their minds and hearts.

His main objective was to be understood; he inculcated the basics and the importance of catechism in such a way that all the faithful could draw inspirations and motivations for their meditation, prayer and action.

Blessed Justin has never conceived, even for a moment, the idea of reserving the gifts received from the Lord to satisfy his ego; he worked hard for his parishioners and his disciples devoting to them all his attention and efforts. He fought hard against corporal sufferings caused by his physique undermined by disease, and against moral distress occasioned by some members of the Church's hierarchy who opposed, first the religious congregations that he wished to institute, and afterward the ones he had instituted.

With gentle persistence and steadfastness throughout life he has shown to be the instrument of the Most High, an apostle of his word, without being intimidated or having hesitations in spite of adversity, obstacles and backbiting. He wanted to serve the Lord paying attention to each divine inspiration that came directly from the Holy Spirit the Sanctifier.

The life of Fr. Justin must be a guiding light for all young men and women who want to question themselves about the profound meaning of their life on earth, and are willing to abandon every egotism and superficiality in order to embark on the road that leads to God Trinity following the exemplary, frugal, sober and simple style of life on the footsteps of Blessed Justin.

Today, as did their founder, the Vocationist Fathers and Sisters continue with charitable spirit to welcome those who knock on their door and to bring back to the right path every soul that has gone astray.

Upon all readers of this book I invoke the constant protection and intercession of Blessed Justin so that man may not pursue the false appeals of hedonism and materialism, but may rediscover the evangelical values and give himself at the service of others without any hesitation and limitation.

Cosimo Rodio, Ph.D.

CHAPTER 1

The Road of Divine Providence

Blessed Justin Mary of the Trinity was an insatiable reader of the lives of the saints and taught us, his children, to do the same, because he wanted to know in depth the virtues of men and women, who throughout the centuries have revealed the most beautiful face of mankind, becoming a revelation of the holiness and glory of the Lord.

This helped him to make his relationship with God not only a doctrinal but existential bond. He taught his followers how to achieve their ultimate goal taking inspiration and imitating the example of the heroes of our faith.

He considered it essential to read the lives of the saints to grow in the knowledge of Jesus, because he considered every life of a saint as a page of the life of Jesus; to be taken and inspired by their examples, because the good words only stimulate us, but the good examples pull us, becoming for us true sources of inspirations. They form us to Christian heroism, and remind us that mediocrity does not glorify the Lord. The authentic heroism is made accessible to us in the lives of the saints.

In the light of these teachings and aiming at the above objectives I present this biography of Blessed Justin Russolillo of the Blessed Trinity, beatified on May 7, 2011 in Pianura of Naples, the neighborhood where he was born, worked and completed his ascensional journey towards divine union with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This biography is a synthesis of what I have learned from the teachings and personal contacts with Fr. Justin, from the authentic testimony of many Vocationists and lay people who had a direct contact with him, and from what others have already written about him, as well as from a personal study of his works that I edited and published both in Italian and in English. As much as possible I like to combine biographical data with the inner story of his spirituality and holiness taking abundantly from his writings. While I try to narrate the historical sequence of happenings, events, ministries growth and expansions, achievements and failures, I will let Blessed Justin reveal his interior life and world of thoughts, feelings, teachings, charisma and mystical experiences through his own writings.

The life of the saints, as the life of Blessed Justin, centers upon a teaching, a word or a particular aspect of the life of our Lord, re-lived, incarnated and translated in their daily life, in the circumstances and needs of the time in which they lived.

Saint Francis of Assisi, with his example, showed to the world the evangelical love lived in poverty and humility.

St. Dominic of Guzman, with his preaching ministry, taught the gospel truth to a society that was groping in darkness. St. Ignatius of Loyola awakened in the heart of his contemporaries, as well as in ours, love for the Church, fought and fragmented then no less than now. Saint John Bosco understood and highlighted the need for the formation and assistance of the youth. Saint Pio of Pietralcina, in our own time, with the gift of miracles of which he was endowed, has enabled us to touch with our own hands the continuous intervention of God in our life. (St. Pio of Pietralcina and Blessed Justin met briefly in Naples during the war, and they had great esteem for each other. A group of Vocationist students went to see Padre Pio; he asked the Vocationist students where they were coming from; the students almost chorally answered from Pianura. And Padre Pio quickly dismissed them saying: *Avete quel grande sant'uomo a Pianura e venite da me?*- You have that great holy man in Pianura and you come to me? In 1954 during a meditation Fr. Justin asked us to pray for that great saint of Puglia because the external manifestations of affection and devotion of so many people were causing him a lot of problems and pains).

The testimony of the Italian parliamentary, Honorable Crescenzo Mazza, alumnus of the Vocationary, may be precious to this effect: "The providence that values and solves human problems in relation to the ultimate goal for which men were created and redeemed; the providence that chooses the elect and shows them, through their vocation, the task that has been destined for them; the providence that speaks through the voice of conscience and enlightens,

encourages and assists the chosen ones to take the greatest and most enduring initiatives, when aspiration to the priesthood was fought in young people by a spontaneous and childish philosophical scientism, and the apostolic mission of the Church was challenged by a purported social universalism, providence, in a time when sacred ministry was debased by laws that made it a commitment without particular attribution, raised Father Justin Russolillo!"

Providence is a reality, often and wrongly neglected and ignored, when we do not carefully weigh the signs that illuminate our earthly journey. At the beginning of this work I like to share as a tribute of love and gratitude, my dear reader, how divine providence worked in me, when I was only twelve years old, and led me to Fr. Justin.

On a hot and muggy summer afternoon (it was July 16, 1953), after numerous unsuccessful attempts, I managed to say to my parish priest, Father Guido Sarno: "I want to become a priest and you have to help me to enter the seminary." His response was disconcerting, to say the least: "you cannot go to the seminary, because your father with eleven children cannot pay the seminary's fees!" I stammered something like, "I do not know if my father may or may not pay the tuition, but you must help me to enter the seminary." The poor priest was lost for words and after several unacceptable proposals said: "*Do you want to go to Pianura?*" And I: "*What is Pianura?*" Father Guido with his normal phlegm explained: In Pianura there is a certain Father Justin who makes priests without charging anything!"

I exploded with enthusiasm but also with a sense of despair in my heart: "I want to be a priest, and if I cannot go to the seminary for lack of money, and if in Pianura there is this Father Justin who makes priests without money, I will go to Pianura!" Then and there Fr. Guido wrote a letter to Fr. Justin presenting me and asking that I be admitted in the Vocationary. That was the first time I heard Fr. Justin's name, and since then he became and remains an integral part of my life. On September 15, 1953, accompanied by my father and my pastor I arrived at the Vocationary in Pianura, and was blessed with the singular privilege of living two years with Fr. Justin.

Three years later, in the month of August of 1956 my father informed me that our pastor, in the name and for the diocesan bishop, Most Rev. Guido Casullo, asked to send me to the seminary. He also assured my father that the bishop himself would take care of all my expenses. My father also shared with me that the pastor also explained to him: "If Louis continues with the Vocationists he will never be able to help you financially, while if he joins the diocesan seminary, when you will be old, he will be able to help you." I was stunned and perplexed and asked my father: "What did you answer him?" And my father with the most amazing simplicity said: "I told him that I am willing and happy to help all my children in any way possible, but I do not expect to be helped by them" and continued: "Feel free to follow your vocation without worrying about me." Happily relieved I responded: "Thank you, daddy. Three years ago I was denied the opportunity to enter the seminary for lack

of resources. With your blessing, now I prefer to continue in Pianura, I want to be a priest and follow the example of Fr. Justin; as he helped me, I want to help others to become priests”.

I have been in the Congregation of Fr. Justin almost sixty-four years and never regretted and never stopped thanking divine providence for having placed me on the footsteps of this great saint!

I fully agree with the Honorable Mazza, who said that Divine Providence raised Father Justin “because there was in him the divine sadness for the abandoned vineyard; there was in him the anguish of the evangelical lament; God raised him, because more than anybody else, he shared the anguish of the divine Master, and realized that the world was not disavowing the apostolate, but the apostolate disavowing the world; what was missing was not the bushel basket on which to put the lamp, but the lamp to be placed on the bushel basket ... not earth, but the salt.”

Each page of this book aims to highlight a particular aspect of the figure of Father Justin, the marvelous, enchanting view of the life of this man who has reached the highest peaks of holiness, devoting himself, body and soul, to the service of God and of souls in the elect of the divine vocations, with the greatest fidelity and docility to the divine inspirations.

Father Justin continues to be the bright North Star that

guides us on our journey, which leads us to the divine union and to discover always more and always better the value and the beauty of imitating Jesus Christ into his specific work of calling, educating, training and supporting new apostles, many holy priests and fervent religious for the sanctification of the souls. In him and with him we open our hearts to listen to the divine inspirations and to follow the path and vocation, which divine Providence has planned for us.



Sofa bed of Fr. Justin

CHAPTER 2

The Russolillo Family

We are born, grow and develop within a family from which we inherit our physical, psychological, pathological, spiritual and cultural characteristics. Today more than ever before, medical science and research seems to attribute good, bad or indifferent traits of every person to family heritage. It is taken for granted that lifestyle, culture and behavior of our ancestors affect our health and our inclination to certain pathologies.

It is difficult to exhaustively know a person outside of his family context. With breast milk we imbibe also values and principles, which then become like a second nature to us. Love for one's family is at the basis of love of God. One who did not have good relations with his family, certainly will experience difficulties in relationships with peers, with co-workers, or with the confreres of a religious community. One who is a good son in the natural family will also be a good son in the religious family.

Notwithstanding the crisis of the traditional family model and the many current problems, because no man is an island,

more and more he feels the need for warmth and security of an authentic and united family. In one of the most expressive and poetic passages, Fr. Justin describes the propensity towards the affection and bonds with the family nest within which man can develop and reach his full realization.

“With the creation of the woman, the Lord completed the creation of the visible world. He led man to the relationship of spouse and settled him in the state of the nuptial relationship; after that the Lord entered the Sabbath of his eternal rest.

Since then, every child that comes into this world, notwithstanding the charm and beauty of childhood, does not want to remain a child, but hastens to become an adolescent. Notwithstanding all the charm and beauty of adolescence, the teenager does not want to remain a teenager, but hastens to become a young adult. And then, notwithstanding all the charm and beauty of the springtime of his life, the young adult is not satisfied with the flowers of spring; he longs for the fruit and makes the transition into full virility.

The charm and beauty of every age, in the life of man, consists precisely in this progressive blooming of childhood into teenager, into youth, into adulthood, in the perfect virility.

Likewise and simultaneously, a man is born as a son, but notwithstanding all the sweetness of the filial relationship, he does not want to be only a son, and he is not satisfied with the sole native family. He tends to develop other relationships, as friend, with an ever-growing number of people, and so he forms a larger family, and – at times it seems - a more sweet family of election. Notwith-



Fr. Justin's Family

standing all the sweetness of friendship, or better, because he is totally taken by the sweetness of friendship, he does not want to be only a friend, and he is no longer satisfied with the larger family of election, but he tends to the relationship of spouse with the person that seems to embody the ideal and the synthesis of all the goodness that humanity may offer. With this person, more friend than all other friends, he forms the family of his heart, where he can finally rest for all his life, in the sweet and strong exercise of the dominion of his conquering love."

In a letter to his cousin Christina, Fr. Justin reveals his tenderness for the members of his natural family, writing: I may appear too rude, but I love my family wholeheartedly".

In a poem written for his father's birthday, very young

Justin gives us a glimpse of the spirit of unity, love and joy that reigned in the Russolillo family. Let us enjoy some more meaningful verses:

*More around you abound
smiles this day
Your lively, dear children
and your wife
of radiant joy
seem adorned with beautiful halos.*

*On the blond naughty heads
many kisses you stamp
and coaxing them
endlessly
happily enjoy and laugh.*

*But I wish you happy
birthday and the fulfillment
of each and every
beautiful and pious desire.
This is the most profound
and joyful wish
of your son, daddy dear.*

What a beautiful picture of a mother radiating joy while the father is delighted between kisses and caresses without end! Deeply religious principles, spirit of faith alive and active, untiring laboriousness, intrinsic inclination to overcome obstacles, all the values and virtues that animated the

Russolillo family to do always more and better are easily recognizable in the life style of the Vocationist family.

Having benefited immensely from the solid formation of his family, Justin is convinced that the formation of the children within their own families is the seed of every development for future generations. In the Constitutions of the Society of Divine Vocations he recommends: "The Vocationist parish priest pays special attention to the care of families, both for their sanctification and for the great contribution of support to the possible vocation of their children."

In order to further emphasize how deep-rooted was the conviction of the importance of family values and virtues for future generation, I report a fragment of a letter written to me on March 3, 2008 by Ida Del Prete Russolillo, sister in law of Fr. Justin: "Fr. Justin's parents have been the first Vocationists. They reflect in everything the spirit of Fr. Justin, having been very close to him, with humility and generous charity toward the poorest of the poor and suffering all he suffered." On account of the *vocationistality* of the Russolillo family, Villa Simpatia, the Russolillo home, is considered as the *porziuncola*¹ of the Vocationists, the true cradle of the Congregation as the first oratory and the first Vocationary.

¹ Porziuncola, also called Portiuncula (in Latin) or Porzioncula, is a small Catholic church located within the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels in Assisi situated about 4 kilometers (2.5 mi) from Assisi, Umbria (central Italy). It is the place from where the Franciscan movement started.

In his parents' house Justin, while still a seminarian, started to gather his children, divided them in two groups: *Voluntaries of Jesus* and *Fedelissimi* (the most faithful) organizing catechism classes and recreational activities. In his parents house he started the first experiment of community life, the first *Vocationary*. Fr. Justin's parents welcomed the first Vocationist aspirants and treated them with great love, just as if they were their own children! In his parents' home Fr. Justin experienced the most well known mystical experience: the vision of the Blessed Trinity and the patronage of the Virgin Mary.

On May 10, 1926, while Fr. Justin was praying the Liturgy of the Hours, he had an interior vision of the Most Holy Trinity, who assured him that the Blessed Mother would be the immediate superior of "all Vocationist residences, both of Fathers and Sisters, both present and future". This happened in the shadow of the well-known *pagliarella* (hut), a tent-like structure of wood and hay, where the first aspirants used to have their meetings, classes and prayers. This *pagliarella* mysteriously was destroyed by fire a few days after Fr. Justin's death, as he had prophesized many years before.

Villa Simpatia, located in Via Marano 12, in Pianura of Naples, adjacent to an old farmhouse, was built by Luigi Russolillo and by him named "Villa Simpatia" as a tribute of love to his sweet wife, Giuseppina Simpatia. The old Russolillo home is now the residence of a Community of Vocationist Sisters for the first formation of the future Vocationist Sisters and for the first education of hundreds of



Inside courtyard of Villa Simpatia



External façade of Villa Simpatia

local children. In his letter (n. 2794) to Msgr. Cerasuolo, Fr. Justin explains how this house became the property of the Vocationist Sisters: "My brothers have decided to earmark forever our parents' house with the annexed garden as a religious house and pre-school donating it to the Vocationist Sisters. I kindly ask your permission to establish there a small religious community and kindergarten; this community can provide assistance to Our Lady of the Rosary Parish. I also ask permission to have a chapel for the Sisters with the Blessed Sacrament."

Paternal grandparents of Fr. Justin were Francesco Russo-lillo of Pianura (1816-1896) and Giuseppina Scherillo (1819-1900) of Soccavo. Paternal uncles and aunts were Maria Giovanna (aunt Giovannina), Maria Enrichetta, Maria Michela (zia Michelina), Maria and Vincenzo. Zia Giovannina, the most long-lived of the family, was an elementary school teacher and helped little Justin in his studies. Aunt Enrichetta paid part of the seminary's fees and Zia Michelina collaborated very much at the beginning of the community life, becoming a real second mother for the first aspirants in the early years of the Vocationary.

Maternal grandparents of Fr. Justin were Gennaro Ferrara and Carmela Calvi, who adopted Giuseppina Simpattia at her birth and treated and loved her just as a natural daughter. Of the maternal family we have some news only of her uncle Luca, who worked as warden of the natural reserve of Astroni, located between Pozzuoli and Pianura, and was often visited by his niece. This made possible the

meeting between Luigi Russolillo and Giuseppina Simpatia, the holy parents of Fr. Justin.

Luigi and Giuseppina got married in St. George's Parish in Pianura on March 14, 1886. The newly weds established their residence at Via Marano 10 in Pianura, an old farmhouse belonging for generations to the Russolillo family. In this house were born all 10 Russolillo children.

Luigi was a very highly esteemed and respected bricklayer for his honesty, punctuality and precision, he always had plenty of work to do and soon became a small building contractor and gradually grew to be a respectable building company. He built many big palaces in the newly developing areas of Posillipo, Parco Margherita, Via Martucci and Vomero of Naples.

Giuseppina was an expert seamstress and in a short time, thanks also to her jovial friendliness had numerous customers, who used to bring their work at her home. In addition to being an attentive wife and a mother all-heart she was also a very good administrator; she greatly contributed to the prosperity of the family.

Giuseppina was a strong woman, prudent, authoritative when needed, and at the same time sweet, caring, and sensitive to the needy, eager to support in every way the work of her husband and children. Her neighbors esteemed her very much and often turned to her for advice, to bring peace between spouses, between father and children, and between one family and another.

The deep faith of Luigi Russolillo becomes particularly visible when, after having given his son Justin to the service of God and his Church, did not hesitate when two other of his children Giovannina and Ciro told him that they had decided to follow in the footsteps of Fr. Justin and consecrate themselves to God in the newly formed religious families of the Vocationist Sisters and the Vocationist Fathers. Reacting to the hesitation and opposition of the brothers and sisters, Luigi stated simply: If God calls, who are we to hinder his call? Michele also studied in the seminary of Pozzuoli and for a time even Orazio was part of the group of Fedelissimi.

The great virtues of Fr. Justin's parents have been re-emphasized by their daughter in law Ida in a recent letter addressed to me affirming: "Luigi Russolillo was an honest and respected contractor. He and his wife have raised 10 children giving them plenty of opportunities to work and to study, according to their inclinations. When he fell off a scaffolding, while restructuring city hall of Pianura, he broke a leg; since at the time the orthopedic systems were not up to par, Luigi's leg instead of getting better kept deteriorating; seeing that things were getting from bad to worse Giuseppina asked her son Justin to pray for his father. My mother in law kept repeating that the healing of her husband was the first miracle obtained through Justin's intercession while he was still alive. It is a fact that Luigi Russolillo, from 1920 till he was able to move, was a daily communicant; every morning at 4:30, before going to work, used to go to Mass and receive Holy Communion."

Fr. Mario De Rosa, SDV, first biographer of Justin gave

us the testimony, based on a particular episode that reveals both the spirituality and the immense love of Justin for his mother:

“His love for her shone during the war. As he reached the war’s zone, Justin felt nostalgia for the mother. He had left his last will in case of death and had constituted his sister Giovannina executrix. To her therefore he asked for a photo of the mother. ‘I have never said I want but this time I say it’. He added that the picture should be paid with the little money he had left, and as a convincing reason, enclosed his own picture. It was unrecognizable, especially since he had not put on his glasses. Giovannina fainted for the emotion. The mother, just to satisfy her blessed son, overcame the natural reluctance and for the first time posed in front of a camera.”

Once the children had grown, Luigi and Giuseppina together participated at the early Mass in the parish receiving Holy Communion with great devotion till the end of their lives being lovely assisted by their natural family and the religious families of the Vocationist Fathers and Sisters. When Fr. Justin visited his mother for the very last time, she confided: *I cannot endure any more pains; I feel death coming!* Justin added: *Courage! A little more and then... paradise.*

Father De Rosa left us the following detailed account of the last moments of Mamma Giuseppina’s life.

“The holy woman from the bed of agony, was staring at

her son [Justin], who was prayerfully recollected in a corner; he noticed it and changed place, as if fearing to divert his mother's attention from God and eternity. He wept and left. The older brother, rude and affectionate, knowing that he was dining at eleven, urged him to withdraw. Always docile, Justin obeyed, but before leaving he murmured: mom will go to heaven at noon. Around noon she said to the bystanders: I thank you all for your love and care, and I greet you before departing for eternity. At the first toll of the Angelus' bell she expired. They ran to inform Father Justin. He opened the door, and before they could talk, he whispered: My mother died.

Blessed Justin lived an intense relation with his parents and neighbors following the example and maxim of St. John Vienney, his beloved patron saint: "Virtue passes from the heart of the mothers to the heart of the children, who willingly do what they see others doing. On account of all the good received, a son should never look at his mother without experiencing deep emotions."

We get to know the nature and quality of a tree by its fruits. The fruits of the Russolillo family were abundant and healthy.

Francesco, the first child of the family was born on December 11, 1886 and he died on April 29, 1971. He became a well-known businessperson and an excellent father of family. Together with his father he built the second floor of the Vocationary of Pianura, motherhouse of the Society of Divine Vocations.

Maria, who was born on November 11, 1888, died at the very young age of 19 and was an exemplar of virtues for the contemporaries.

Justin, born on January 18, 1891, became priest, Pastor, Founder of the Vocationist Fathers and Sisters, and of the Vocationist Apostles of Universal Sanctification, preacher, writer and, most of all, a great saint in the Church of God.

Vincent, born on December 24, 1892, died on January 30, 1976, was a successful building contractor continuing the family business.

Giovanna, better known as Mother Giovanna, was born on June 22, 1895, she became Vocationist Sister and Mother General; for her great contribution to the growth of the Vocationist Sisters was given the honorary title of Co-Foundress of the Vocationist Sisters. She governed the Congregation with motherly wisdom and many virtues. She was a real gift of God for the Sisters; her presence and her role facilitated greatly the work of Fr. Justin in guiding, assisting and forming the Sisters. She died on May 25, 1969.

Giuseppina, born on November 29, 1897, died in Asbury Park, New Jersey, on April 8, 1982. She married Giorgio Baiano, eyewitness of the first known ecstasy of the young seminarian Justin in the Church of St. Giorgio in Pianura. Both Giuseppina and Giorgio were devout Catholics, daily communicants and loving friends of the Vocationist Fathers and Sisters in USA.

Michele, (October 17, 1899- February 22, 1973) was a well-known surgeon and primary care doctor for many Vocationist Priests, Sisters and Students, was a man of profound spirituality and daily communicant. Sister Orfelina, SDV, who assisted him as a nurse in the Russolillo Clinic, affirms that he would never enter into the operating room, without having first participated in the Mass and received Holy Communion.

Carmela was born on March 22, 1902 and died on January 19, 1993. She was a devout spouse and mother, dedicating all her life to the family.

Ciro was born on May 21, 1904. He became a Vocationist Priest and served brilliantly the Congregation as superior of various communities, as missionary and Pastor. He collaborated with Fr. Justin restructuring and rehabilitating most of the Vocationists' residences in Italy. He personally rebuilt the parish house of St. Giorgio's Parish in Pianura that served as the first Vocationary and also worked extensively in the construction of the motherhouse. To him the Congregation is indebted for the existence and restoration of the houses of Altavilla Silentina, Perdifumo, Mercato Cilento, Laureana Cilento, Montesano, Marsiconuovo, Montesardo and Acquaviva di Isernia, where he concluded his earthly mission on July 9, 1972. He was a missionary in Brazil for four years, and upon explicit request of Fr. Justin, in 1955 came to the USA, to explore the possibility of implanting the Vocationist Fathers in this blessed land. Knowing his spirit of laboriousness and sacrifice, Fr. Justin used to entrust to him

the most difficult and demanding assignments. Fr. Ciro has been a shining star in the Congregation for his untiring laboriousness, sacrifice and spirit of poverty.

Orazio, the last of the ten Russolillo children, was born on December 19, 1906 and died on March 5, 1985. He spent his youth as a Vocationist student and then became a lawyer and practiced his profession all his life.

Fr. Justin was commendable for his tenderness of love for his family of origin including the paternal aunts, and especially the brothers, Ciro and Orazio, the sisters Giuseppina and Giovanna, the cousin Achille, the nephews Ainone, Louis and Justin, and the great-nephew Nicolino, who showed signs of a vocation. It is a pity that most of the letters written almost daily to his mother during the war were lost!

Blessed Justin has taught his Vocationists to consider and love their parents as the first and most generous benefactors of the Congregation. If this is true of all parents, it is much more so of the Founder's parents, who donated three of their children to the Congregation, and made their own home available to the Society of Divine Vocations in its embryonic stage. The first Vocationist Fathers and Sisters really nurtured a filial love towards Giuseppina and Luigi, often referring to them as "the beloved grandparents". They have transmitted to us, Vocationists of the second and third generation a sense of profound veneration and esteem towards these heroic and generous parents, because without them we would not have the Society of Divine Vocations.

A person of extraordinary importance in the life of Fr. Justin and of the Congregation was aunt Michelina; she was first a confidant, messenger and faithful disciple, and later became untiring cooperator of the nephew. She was one of the first members of the Pious Union; her house was a center of meetings, conferences, readings and cenacle of prayer. Even after her death, her house continued to be an oratory, catholic circle and nursery school. Fr. Justin took advantage of her expertise to probe the vocation of his first pupils. At the time of the first attempt of community life, she joyfully exhausted all her winter provisions. She can be considered the first director, or perhaps better, manager (mother) of the Vocationary. For the first students she became a cook, wardrobe mistress, lawyer and adviser contributing considerably to create the spirit of family, which is still a feature of Vocationist Congregations.

Every morning, before beginning her service of love, she took part in the Mass and received Holy Communion with extraordinary fervor. She consumed her life for the Vocationary hiding all her physical sufferings. At her death she bequeathed the few possessions she had to the Vocationary.

Because of the austerity, or religious radicalism of the time, Fr. Justin was practicing, and later demanded of his spiritual sons and daughters a total separation from the family, prohibiting every visit or vacation with the family. The impenetrable intransigence of not allowing any visit to the family disappeared whenever a mother was manifesting some kind of suffering.

It is significant in this regard the episode narrated by Fr. De Rosa: In the first Vocationary, Fr. Justin had given strict orders that no seminarian of the Vocationary could spend the Christmas holidays with the family.

The day before Christmas eve, a mother came to the Vocationary begging that her son be allowed to go home for Christmas. Her tears were unable to move Father Rector. The poor mother could not resign herself to a Christmas without her favorite son, she managed to see Fr. Justin and he, being unable to resist the tears of a mother, granted permission.

The news spread quickly and all the mothers, one after the other, with eyes full of tears, appealed to Fr. Justin, who *always in this very exceptional case and only for this one time, granted permission.* Having seen what was going on the Rector began to give such permission to those who asked for it. Fr. Justin on the morning of the 24th called the Rector and asked: What arrangements have you made so that the children may have a happy Christmas without suffering too much the absence of their family? The Rector with brio looked tenderly at Fr. Justin and said: Father, at the moment, you, I, and the principle that no one goes away for the holidays are the only ones left in the Vocationary!

The Founder knew how to conjugate intransigency with tenderness and compassion of a caring, loving and sympathetic father not only by granting permission to visit the family, but also constantly showing keen interest in the

health and financial wellbeing of the parents of his Vocationists. He himself, in the secret of charity, used to send a monthly allowance to the parents who were really in need. A good number of parents and grandparents of the Vocationist Fathers and Sisters have been miraculously healed, thanks to Fr. Justin's intercession.

In his relationship with his family Fr. Justin was always the priest, the man of God, the man of prayer and the spiritual counselor. He never slowed down his testimony of divine things, nor did he ever get tired of exhorting and encouraging. The old prohibition of every vacation with the family is replaced by the other more ascetical and pastoral principle: "The Vocationist never goes home for the sole purpose of vacation." So he can go for the sake of charity, service, education, encouragement and apostolate! However, Fr. Justin remains firm on the principle that a religious who has renounced to the world should not worry about or get involved in material things of the family.

Mrs. Ida Russolillo continues her testimony affirming: "My husband Michele used to tell us that whenever the family was at the table and they started to talk about money or gain from their work, Justin, then only a seminarian, used to quietly get up and withdraw to his room where he lashed himself with a hair-shirt that he kept hidden; those hits grieved his parents, who conformed by avoiding any discussion of things that could disturb him."

This type of behavior of young Justin demonstrates the

strong sense of belonging to God and to the Congregation that should be interiorized by every consecrated person.

Fr. Justin was deeply disappointed and hurt when the student Luigi Cajazza, who later became an Italian Parliamentarian, wrote him a note saying: "I am son of my family before being son of the Congregation." In his reply, the man of God wrote: "Allow me to make those words of yours a theme of an exhortation to the community, but I will place a question mark after them [Am I first son of the family and then of the Congregation?] To you I simply say that before being a son of a family, we are creatures of God, who, as first cause, can dispose of us regardless of secondary causes [the family, in this case], which can act upon us only as transmitters of the values of the first cause, otherwise they cannot and should not have any influence upon us."

According to the vision and firm belief of Fr. Justin, based on the divine words: "For this a man leaves his father and mother" the family that one forms for himself, whether natural or spiritual, takes precedence of the family of origin.

A very beautiful example of filial tenderness is found in these words written to Fr. Fontana: " I would like that before Easter you send [Fr.] Palermo to see his father in the Vocationist residence Montesano, because that brave man needs to be accompanied to see his family; please, send Palermo during holy week so that he may be back in Naples for Easter.

As spiritual director of Mrs. Bonanno, who wanted to

dedicate herself totally to the apostolate in the Vocationist family, Fr. Justin did not hesitate one moment and told her with no uncertain terms to dedicate herself to the family rather than to the apostolate. He wrote to her: About the apostolate that you want to undertake, now do it in your own family. What is expected of us more than anything else is the fulfillment of the duty of our state of life. Be, then, a watchful, caring and loving mother for your children; especially for your fifteen-year-old boy. Without any restriction, lavish your most affectionate maternal cares upon him, as Saint Monica did for her Augustine.

It remains clear however, that in case the family becomes an obstacle to the fulfillment of God's will, the rights and the love of God come before the rights and love of the family. This principle clarifies for us the directives given by Fr. Justin to the Vocationist Sisters: "Receive the young lady that is fighting with her family on account of her vocation, if she comes back. Praise publicly the other that was strong enough to resist the pressures of the family and remains faithful to her vocation. But each one should do everything possible to stay healthy and thus prevent temptations. Even while sick, we should remain faithful to community life. It is much better to die in community as saints than to get physically healthy in the family as a lukewarm person. "We ought to obey, we ought not to live" used to say that saintly religious, St John Berchmans (1599-1621)".

When the mother of a Vocationist student got sick, Fr. Justin prayed intensely for her, and asked Fr. Anella, the local

superior: "Tell Di Martino not to worry about his mother's sickness. It is nothing serious. But as far as sending our students home in such cases, it is better that you decide in the local community maintaining the methodic rigor of *Firmness in the substance* (i. e. *in the observance*) and sweetness in the manner (even when denying something). Poor us, if we allow our confreres to go easily to see their families! The occasions will keep multiplying day by day. Become a Saint."

Love is a reciprocal relation. As the Congregation loves the families of its members, so the family of origin of our confreres should love, and consequently also display their gratitude to the Congregation.

To the newly ordained priest, Michelino Campanile, Fr. Justin wrote: "We thank the Lord together for your priesthood. As far as gratitude toward the Congregation from your part and from your gentle family, I would really love that it be manifested with complete fidelity to the dispositions that you have received."

The family is undoubtedly one of God's greatest gifts to each and every one of us. Love, gratitude and appreciation towards the family should constantly flood our hearts. As consecrated people we all have the duty of offering to our family the most important and precious service: Our testimony to the eternal truths and our prayers for the living and deceased members of our family. To this effect, Fr. Justin keeps reminding us through the SDV Constitutions that:

“The bonds of family and friendship that unite us on earth do not end but reach their fulfillment with death.”

From the pure and holy love for his family Blessed Justin was led to the esteem, love and union with the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The founder has taught his religious families to pray often: “Jesus, Mary and Joseph, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto yours”. Thus, he also reminds us that humility and meekness are necessary virtues to nurture peace and happiness in the family.

CHAPTER 3

A Star is Born

“To what shall we compare our human soul, while here on earth? Throughout the entire universe there is nothing so beautiful, so great and good that in comparison may outshine the human soul. All created things are immensely inferior to the human soul. To help ourselves with tangible comparison, we say, that since in the material universe everything appears spherical in its volume, and circular in its motions, so in the spiritual world, we can imagine the soul as one of those fiery stars, launched and traveling in the skies.

The soul is like a star. A great starry world, all aflame of starry fire, and emanating splendor, fragrance and harmony; a world to which God did not yet set any boundaries, because he wants the soul ever more shining with splendor and colors, songs and harmony, fragrance and perfumes, flying within an ever larger orbit, at an ever more elevated height, and in an ever more marvelous spiral. It is as if she were destined to reach the unreachable God, to embrace the limitless God, and be the star of glory of the blessedness of

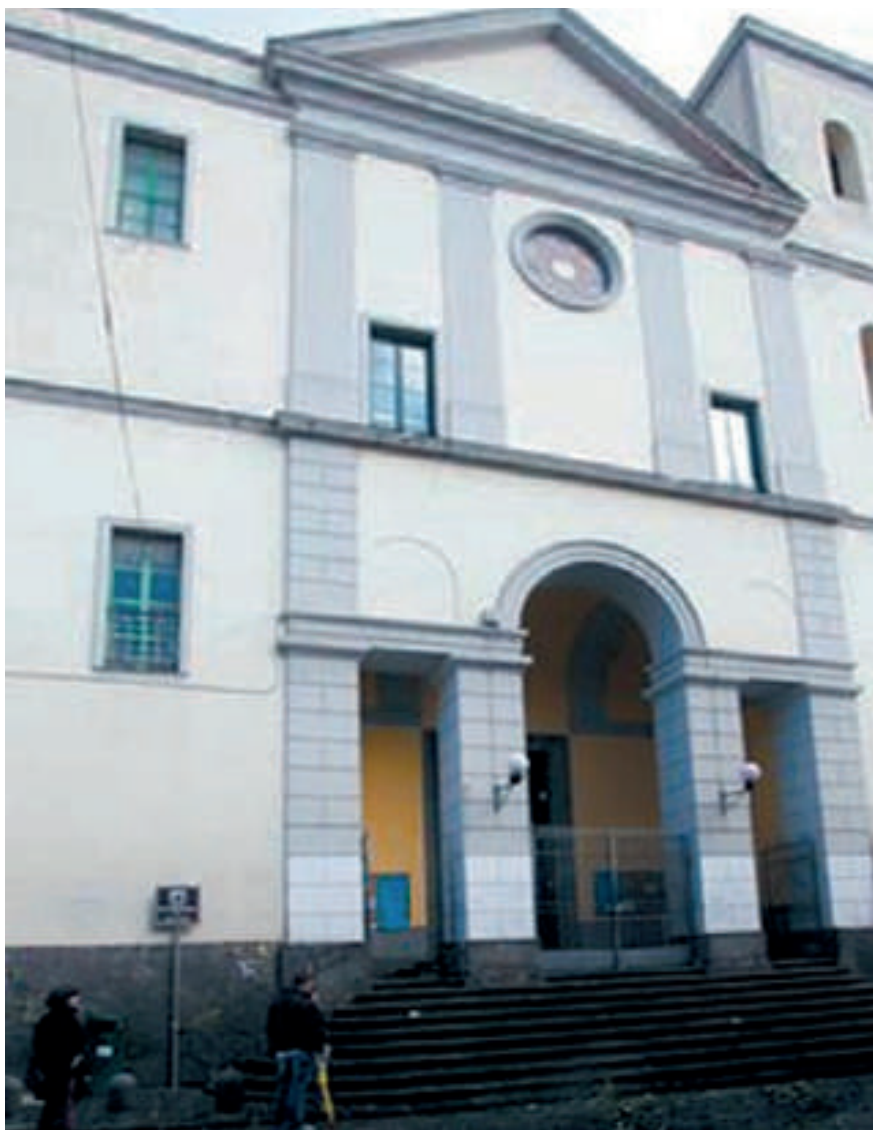
God. Indeed only God is the principle, the center and the goal of the human soul.”¹

In this paragraph of Blessed Justin, we find the paradigm and a synthesis of his life and spirituality. Today, he shines as a star in the heaven of the Society of Divine Vocations, of the Church and of the entire world.

A good morning foretells a good day. The light of dawn gives us a glimpse and anticipates the trend and the beauty of the whole day. The details narrated about the birth and the first years of Justin presage the germs of his future vocation and mission. The details that follow indicate the esteem and veneration that relatives, friends and acquaintances harbored toward Fr. Justin. In some cases it is difficult to indicate and define where the story ends, and where the interpretation of the story begins, seen from the standpoint of his admirers and devotees with the science of what happened afterward. The facts are reported as they have been seen, heard, read, referred and contemplated by his contemporaries.

Justin was born on January 18, 1891 from Luigi Russolillo and Giuseppina Simpatia; he was the third of ten children. His birth coincided with a very extraordinary snowfall as had never been seen before in the area of Naples. Some people saw in this abundance of snow an omen of the purity of life of the newborn baby. In addition to this snowfall

¹ Russolillo, *Journey toward the Espousal Union*, Vocationist Editions, 2013, p. 39.



St. George's Parish Church in Pianura



*Painting of the apparition and miraculous healing
of Fr. Salvatore Di Fusco*

another miraculous happening has been connected with his birth. In Pianura at the time the Reverend Father Salvatore Di Fusco was critically ill; relatives and friends of the dying priest, expecting his imminent departure from this life kept vigil. During the night the Blessed Mother appeared to the dying priest and reassured him saying: "Fear not, you will be cured because today is being born in Pianura a child that will be called Justin and he will be a great glory for the Catholic Church." To the astonishment and admiration of all, actually the good priest was healed.

The veracity of this event is proved by the fact that the pious priest, grateful to the Virgin, commissioned the paint-

ing of a beautiful picture depicting his vision of the Blessed Mother. A certified copy of this painting was donated to Vocationary by the heirs of Father Salvatore Fusco, at the beginning of the informative process of beatification at the ecclesiastical tribunal of Naples.

A few days after his miraculous healing Fr. Di Fusco enquired about any new births in Pianura and having heard that a new baby was born to the Russolillo family went to visit them; he congratulated the family for the new baby and the family congratulated him for the extraordinary recovery of his health. When he asked what name they had given to their third child, hearing the name Justin, he could not control his emotions and told the blessed parents the story of the apparition of the Virgin Mary. Mamma Giuseppina and papà Luigi kept absolute silence. Only the evening of May 2, 1948, at the end of a solemn and memorable day of celebration, to which most of the people of Pianura proudly participated, for the visit of Cardinal Lavitrano, Giuseppina confided to her son Fr. Ciro the secret of the apparition of the Blessed Mother and the miraculous healing of Fr. Di Fusco in connection with Justin's birth.

Notwithstanding the heavy snowfall, Luigi and Giuseppina insisted on having the child baptized the next day. It must have been a really moving scene to see the small group consisting of the godparents and the midwife carrying the baby preceded by the father shoveling the snow! Fr. Orazio Guillaro administered the sacrament of Baptism. Fr. Justin always nurtured great esteem and confidence for Fr.

Guillaro; the oldest letter of Father Justin that has been preserved is directed to him.

At the registry office of the town he was given the names Giustino, Orazio Pietro. He has always and only used the name Justin. At different times, especially in the publication of his articles in *Spiritus Domini* he used the alias: Rosalilio, Primo Sud, Little Just.

The wonderful smile radiated by the child, when the baptismal water was poured on his forehead, was interpreted as an inner joy of the newborn for the gift of baptismal grace. The midwife, who, according to the custom of the time, presented the baby to the baptismal font, reporting the incident to the lucky mother, prophesied that Justin would be a priest.

As an adult, in a prose with tone and lyrical inspiration, contemplates his vocation to life and his election as the first kiss of his creator.

*"My creation
is the first kiss you gave me,
and with it
you transfused unto me life,
soul, grace.*

*Then
you called me the first time.
Where was I then?*

*I do not know, nor can I know
since I was in the abyss of nothingness
and yet
I had to be in some way ...
somewhere.
Because you called me,
I answered
and came into your presence.*

*Where was I?
I was in you,
I was there eternally!
It is the mystery of your love!
I was in yourself,
in your thought, in your love,
when you called me.
Why did you call me
if I was already in you?
To charm me ...
to give me another form of life?*

*You called me to life, ...
to friendship and intimacy. ...
Only out of love!
I did not yet know you,
I had never told you:
I love you,
I want you, I'm yours!*

This is my amazement,

*that you love me and want me to be!
What can you love, but yourself?
Because it is not possible
for you not to love yourself!*

*I see clearly
how in me you loved yourself,
cherished yourself,
wanted yourself! ...
You loved me for yourself ..."*

Some precious details of the first infancy of the future priest have been made known by some members of his family that had the opportunity of being called as witnesses at the process of beatification. His sister Carmela made known that Justin received his first education from his mother and from his paternal aunts, Enrichetta, Michelina and Giovannina; in one of his letters Father Justin calls Giovannina "Aunt and mother."

During his childhood Justin spent a lot of his time with his aunts; this happened because he was interested in learning from them, but also because his mother with her house-keeping work and children that kept coming, did not really have too much time to dedicate to Justin. He was so attached to his aunts that in one of his letters he hints to a little jealousy of his mother. In a moment of tension in the family, one of his brothers called him "outsider".

While physically frail, Justin was very much lively and

strong-willed, and distinguished himself by his remarkable intelligence and spirit of piety. While we have no particulars of his piety and devotions of his early childhood, we know for sure that at age five he was admitted to first Holy Communion, something unheard of for that time and even for our time. His first encounter with Jesus-Eucharist must have been such a moving and transforming experience that the Eucharist became the center of his life. He had such a thirst and hunger for the Eucharist that later on as a priest he did not hesitate to write to the Congregation for the Sacraments imploring that the faithful be allowed to receive Communion more than once a day! We had to wait for Vatican II to have this privilege! Not being allowed to receive more than once a day, on the footsteps of St. Alphonsus De Liguori he used to fill his days with Spiritual Communions, which he strongly inculcated to his parishioners and members of his Institutes.

Father Mario De Rosa, S.D.V., first biographer of Blessed Justin, in *Apostolo delle Divine Vocazioni* narrates a gracious episode that may have re-occurred several times. Young Justin enjoyed playing with the ball of yarn with which the old Santina did her job of knitter and seamstress, when she would lose her patience for these pranks she used to exclaim: *My Blessed Mother, take him*, Justin copycatting her humming used to repeat: *My Blessed Mother, take her*.

At age 10, on March 17, 1901, young Justin received the Sacrament of Confirmation in his parish church. Receiving the Sanctifier Justin felt clearly his vocation to holiness and

started desiring with greater vehemence to enter the seminary to become *cooperator of the Holy Spirit in making saints*.

The consciousness of his priestly vocation kept growing with his age. His favorite recreation consisted in playing the priestly role of celebrating Mass, preaching to his classmates, organizing small processions and teaching catechism to his companions. Most of those who have personally known Father Justin are convinced that he kept his baptismal innocence. This can also be easily evinced by the fact that at age 12, during the midnight Mass of 1903 he made the vow of virginity, and at age 23, the morning of his priestly ordination he pronounced his well known vow of charity to the third degree.

Justin's parents welcomed his priestly vocation; there was however, a serious obstacle that seemed to make the realization of that aspiration impossible. The numerous offspring made the economic equilibrium of the family more difficult. Luigi and Giuseppina could not figure out how to pay the seminary monthly payments. Faced with this dilemma, Giuseppina decided to appeal for help to Baron Lorenzo Zambaglione, a wealthy landowner of Pianura, who had the reputation of being generous and sensitive to the plights of his neighbors in need. Mrs. Russolillo with her son went to the Baron and explained the reason of their visit; the Baron's response was as much unexpected as it was tough: "If you have no money to pay the seminary, let him become a shoemaker."

It is easy to imagine the shock of mother and child to see

their hopes wrecked. To the noble heart of a mother every contrariety seems solvable, when it comes to their children. Mrs. Russolillo, on the heels of many other mothers, like that of St. Augustine, St. John Bosco, Saint Leonard Murialdo, St. Pius X, who faced great difficulties and became docile and heroic instruments to make sure that God's plan would be fulfilled, without losing the spirit told Justin: "Do not be afraid, mother will make sure you go to the seminary, even at the cost of pawning her own eyes."

True, probable or well imagined, in the film *A Life for Vocations*, is the scene in which coming down the stairs of the Baron Zambaglione, little Justin stops to pray before a statue of the Virgin Mary, and prays: "My Blessed Mother, if you help me to be a priest, then I'll help many other poor children to become priests." In this prayer we see not only the deep desire to be a priest, but also a glimpse of his future work on behalf of vocations.

Once back home, Giuseppina told the family what had happened during the visit with the Baron. All were unanimous and favorable to face any sacrifice to make sure that Justin be given the opportunity to follow his vocation. The paternal aunts pledged to pay half the monthly payment.

It seems appropriate to say a word about the physical characteristics of Blessed Justin, as dashed by his attentive and faithful disciple, Fr. Salvatore Verlezza, who was close to him during the last five years of his life: "Unpretentious, here are some curiosities about Father Justin Russolillo;

crumbs, I understand, that do not presume to feed, but may not be entirely useless; they may be of interest to those who did not know ... and might not displease those who have lived with him.

Father Justin was a meter and sixty-five centimeters tall. He had light brown eyes; only a few times I was able to fix them - in five years - they were very mobile when conversing familiarly; always fixed on the ground, when he talked with women; They seemed nailed on high during meditation. He wore glasses with a simple frame.

His nose was slightly aquiline, perfect and proportionate form; only his nasal septum was slightly bent to the right. His spacious square front was marked by a series of light wrinkles; they did not offend the aesthetics. In the middle of his forehead, down to the middle of his eyebrows, there was, clearly visible, a blood vein, which swelled and became quickly delineated, when we upset that holy man!

His cheekbones were quite prominent; these contributed to giving his face that perpetually smiling aspect, which was his main feature. His smiling expression increased a slight contractility at the end of the mouth, which is now the most difficult point of his physiognomy for those who want to paint it.

His chin had a slight dimple in the center. His lips small and completely fit together; he had no natural teeth; he remedied with artificial dentures in ivory.

He did not hear well with his right ear; when conversing with someone who spoke in a low voice, he tended particularly the left ear, sometimes making a pavilion with his hand.

Father Justin walked heavily dragging his feet. He always wore lacesless shoes, perhaps to save the trouble of bending because of many ailments that afflicted him; often he used wide slippers lined with wool, because he was very sensitive to cold. He never used gloves. He never used the cloak; only overcoat was a mantel, the long mantel fully pleated with the collar lowered, proper of the Vocationists. He wore always the cassock with wide sleeves, which could be symbolic!

Many times instead of the white collar, distinctive of the clergy, he used a white handkerchief because he had chronic boils tormenting his neck. Speaking of boils I must point out that for more than one year Father Justin's body was completely covered with boils and he never complained with anyone. One day, while raising the holy Host, a tug brought down his elbows upon the altar, because the boils of the underarms had opened. He had delicate hands, but at the same time, strong and always in activity. The thumbs were a little bent backwards.

His natural color was faintly rosy, and in his last months tending to waxy. His hair that he often cut remained blackish until the end, with some silver tread; his hair was rare and in the back formed a large crown; his eyebrows were thick and of the same color.

The tone of his voice was composed and sweet; if someone upset him he would not raise his voice, but would mark more the words of reproach by articulating them. His voice was sweet and well attuned when singing."²

What will be of such an ordinary man, frail and unimposing? He will be the living image of God Trinity as he himself describes in *Faciamus Hominem* –*Let us Make Man*.

O image and likeness,
O living and personal portrait
Of the divine persons,
You welcome in yourself
A lineament of the beloved face,
A ray of infinite light,
A moment of divine eternity!
The divine personal that contemplates you,
Charms in you, feels in you
The infinite sweetness of the beloved person!
He enwraps you,
He yearns for you in the same love...

O soul,
You are so limited, inadequate,
Even for every created being
You are always deficient!
And yet

² Verlezza, *Spiritus Domini*, 1961 n. 4, p. 105.

For the divine persons you are
Something infinitely beautiful,
Infinitely sweet,
Infinitely dear.

O portrait,
Only the person that you represent,
Knows you, loves you!
O soul living and personal portrait
Of the Divine Persons³.

³ Campion, *Poesie e cantici*, Ed. Voc., Napoli 1998, p. 16.



Fr. Justin blessing the first stone of Dr. Michele Russolillo Clinic.

CHAPTER 4

Seminary Formation

It was a day like every other day... it was November 18 1901, after having participated in the Holy Mass and having received Holy Communion with his parents, at the tender age of 10, little Justin leaves his family and hometown and enters the Seminary of Pozzuoli. Many relatives, friends and neighbors came to say goodbye to Justin, who did not show any sign of sadness or homesickness; the radiating joy of his heart, the warmth and enthusiasm he showed lessened the pain of separation to his dear ones.

The day after his arrival at the seminary he had to sustain a placement test. He presented himself to the examination with extraordinary simplicity and confidence. He did so well that he was immediately admitted to the second year of high school. This first, unexpected success is a clear manifestation of his intelligence, discipline and seriousness.

Fr. Francesco Sepe, S.D.V., Justin's companion in the seminary and later first companion and cooperator in the foundation of the Society of Divine Vocations wrote of him: "He entered the Seminary of Pozzuoli at a very tender age. He

was soon appreciated for his intelligence and his memory, and even more for being an elect of the Lord. Fr. Giuseppe Panico, who was his group leader, used to tell me that when he did not remember the theme of the day's meditation, before questioning the other students, he would ask Justin, who would repeat it as he were reading it!

He impressed everyone for the prudence and determination of his behavior. I like to repeat what Father Fortunato Peluso used to say of him: only for the joy of listening to his answer, he would ask, "Justin, do you love me?" The inevitable answer was: "we have to love only Jesus." Fr. Fortunato used to smile and rejoice, every time he would repeat it.

Fr. Sepe gives us some insights of Justin's seminary days. "When I entered the seminary of Pozzuoli it was blooming with approximately seventy seminarians. Justin belonged to St. Rafael's dormitory (group), which was the closest to the chapel. One day - which one? - During the visit to the Blessed Sacrament Justin fainted. Instinctively I ran to him; took him in my arms, with his head on my left arm and the feet on my right and placed him on the bed. Believe me, when I had him in my arms, I had the feeling of carrying an angel not a human boy. Who placed in my heart this sense of veneration? I had the impression that God wanted me to know that he was his chosen one."¹

1 Spiritus Domini, Numero Commemorativo, 1956, p. 4.



*Justin Russolillo with seminarians and Staff
of the Seminary of Pozzuoli, year 1902.*

In the seminary he felt mystified by and attracted to two outstanding priests; Father Procolo Limoncelli and canon Nicola Causa; both became his spiritual guides, his confessors and friends. Both were gifted with special charisma and had a profound impact on his formation.

When Fr. Limoncelli died with a fame of saintliness, Fr. Justin wrote of him: "He was a flame of fervor in our midst with his edifying words and, most of all, with his example of living holiness. For many years he warmed up all the souls that encountered him with the interior fire of his spirit. He was the apostle of good preparation and right disposition to every apostolate." Evidently Fr. Limoncelli became a source of inspiration and motivating factor in the life of prayer, aus-

terity and laboriosity of little Justin, so much so, that what Justin wrote of Fr. Limoncelli can be said of himself.

Canon Nicola Causa (June 4, 1848-March 27, 1939) was Justin's confessor and spiritual director for many years. There was such a friendship and harmony between the two that often the professors of the seminary used to call Msgr. Causa "Justin's Granddad." In addition to being a palpitating example of prayer, mortification and preaching, he became his most valued supporter in the foundation of the Congregation. As Vicar General of the Diocese of Pozzuoli with intelligence, constancy and humility he sustained the Society of Divine Vocations in its infancy notwithstanding incomprehension and oppositions of the local bishop. We owe to him the fact that the Congregation was established and grew in the diocese of Pozzuoli.

Throughout his entire life, Fr. Justin nurtured sentiments of great esteem and veneration toward his educators; toward the end of his life he used to repeat to the new Vocationist recruits: "When you shall come to paradise I will take you to kiss the hand of Fr. Procolo, Fr. Piccirelli, Msgr. Causa, St. Theresa of Avila and Fr. Faber."

Under the spiritual guidance of Fr. Limoncelli the young seminarian Justin made the vow that became the program of his life and of his institutions: *I shall spend my life stirring and cultivating vocations to the ecclesiastical life. I will associate others who have the same ideal.* His vocation and mission was already well outlined; many years later he asserted: I can

indicate the room and the place in the seminary of Pozzuoli where I made that vow.

Is it proper to ask what caused that decision? There were many young boys, sons of ordinary people, who were longing to become priests in spite of the fact that they did not have the necessary financial resources, as it had happened to him.

Msgr. Vincent Cafaro remembers him thus: We were friends and classmates in the seminary. Academically he was one year ahead of me. Health wise he has been always frail, but he has always carried out the duties of a seminarian, being outstanding for discipline, study and piety. He had the gift of a beautiful voice and sang with exemplary composure in the choir, and for the liturgical functions in the seminary and the cathedral. He read and loved poetry; he also wrote in verses and with pleasure participated in competitions of some literary magazines. A vein of the poetry has always remained in his style and in his life. During the recreations and afternoon walks our conversations converged on topics that would later become the set of theories and norms of his Community: Most Holy Trinity, Eucharist, Mary, Pentecost, penance, fasting, abstinence, catechism, vocations, religious habit, male and women's branch, third branch for the laity and missions. At times there were very animated discussions. He became promulgator among us of the True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin of St. Louis de Monfort, where in chapter III speaks of the slaves of love to the Virgin Mary.

Msgr. Anthony Cerasuolo, another influential personality, who knew Blessed Justin first as seminary professor and later as Vicar General of the Diocese of Pozzuoli sketches his profile in an article published in *Spiritus Domini* of 1956: "He was quiet, modest, measured, even in jokes, very ready to give in to any type of competition, to step aside whenever a joke, a scuffle and the childlike joy started to go overboard. He had a soft, melodious voice especially in a solo of the *Miserere* and other chants of Holy Week." He applied himself to the studies with seriousness and diligence; he brilliantly passed all the exams. When he sustained the baccalaureate exam, administered by an anticlerical commission, he was so admired and appreciated by his examiners that they exclaimed: "What a pity that he is going to be a priest"!

While everything was going smoothly, the young seminarian faced a serious calamity that almost overwhelmed him. Suddenly his aunt Henrietta, who was paying a good portion of the seminary monthly tuition fees, died and, almost at the same time, his father fell from a scaffold while performing restoration work at City Hall of Pianura. The possibility of having to leave the seminary deeply upset little Justin, who in his grief trusted in the Lord without revealing his anxiety to anyone.

The Superiors noticed that he was spending more time in prayer not radiating his usual joy. They became aware of his internal anguish and not wanting to lose such a talented seminarian tried to find a solution. In her deposition at the

beatification process, Carmela, Justin's sister testified: "At first the family was able to pay the seminary's fees, thanks to their sacrifice and the help of our paternal aunts. In a second time, Bishop Michele Zezza of Pozzuoli intervened with Baron Zambaglione, who started to send directly to the seminary 15 lire every month."

After completing his classical and philosophical studies, he started theology studies in the seminary of Pozzuoli. In the fall of 1911 the Pontifical University of Posillipo opened, and Justin was one of the first students. Since the building was not totally completed, the first students had the opportunity of living with the Jesuit community, where Justin got a deeper understanding of community life.

In the new seminary Justin distinguished himself for piety and discipline. Having been appointed first prefect [class leader] he harmonized the virtue of firmness with sweetness and deserved the benevolence and esteem of his superiors and his companions as well. Fr. Joseph Piccirelli S.J., passionate lover of the mystery of the Trinity, became his spiritual director and had great influence on the spirituality of the future priest.

In consideration of his poor health the superiors gave him a private room in lieu of the common dormitory. The private room offered him the possibility of prolonged dialogues and meditations with the Lord, and the opportunity for more strenuous penances, away from the curiosity of his companions.

Msgr. Nicola Esposito wrote of Justin during his stay at the Major Seminary: "He was not sleeping in the dormitory, but in a private room overlooking the major corridor. That little room remained lit even after the silence; often we watched him through the keyhole; he was kneeling before a crucifix hanging from the wall. To some it seemed that he was raised a little from the floor; some were of the opinion that the light coming from the room was not the light of electric lamp. Were these auto-suggestions of ours? Maybe, but they indicate the esteem in which we held Father Justin."

Fr. Joseph Manzo, S.J., classmate of Justin at the Seminary of Posillipo and later Pontifical Assistant for the Society of Divine Vocations wrote: "Seeing him quiet and pious on school benches and finding him peaceful and devoted in our contacts that occasionally occur between students who do not live together, the impression of a soul set out on a fervent ascetic



Seminarian Justin Russolillo, year 1906

life ceased to be a first impression, and became an accurate judgment of the singular value of a man, that with the passing of time kept being always more exceptional. A man born

to be ascetic and with firm determination to fulfill what divine Providence had planned for him."

In the seminary Justin learned that his soul was good and beautiful. In an ecstasy of love with abundance of poetic images and thoughts, he expresses his gratitude recognizing himself as *the little world, the little all* of God Trinity.

*You invite and take me
To see the beauties created for me.
While I remain enchanted
You whisper: I did it for you.
You have given them to me
And ever more you want to give
To my soul
To make her beautiful, great and good.*

*My soul
Your Cathedral
In which you are adored,
Your royal palace
In which you are courted.*

*My soul
Your sea in which you sail
Your gulf where you anchor
The Capital where you reside.*

*Your spring in which you blossom,
Your paradise*

*Where you stroll,
Your little world
Your little all.²*

After having completed the third year of theology, having received a silver medal for his outstanding achievements he was ordained sub-deacon in the Church of Gesù Nuovo on July 28 1912. On March 22, 1913 Bishop Zezza ordained him a deacon in the chapel of the seminary of Pozzuoli.

² Campion, Ibid. p. 24.

CHAPTER 5

Priest

The years of academic and spiritual formation kept passing, and the longed for day of his priestly ordination kept getting ever closer. His yearning to be ordained was so intense that the last months seemed interminable, especially after the ordination of his classmates. As soon as he obtained the dispensation of sixteen months that were missing to the required canonical age, he was ordained a priest in the Cathedral of Pozzuoli on September 20, 1913.

We can easily imagine his feelings at the moment of his priestly ordination by reading one of his touching poems that creates an ensemble of priest, poet, mystic and theologian.

*We ascend to the altar of God...
The teacher is there,
He calls and expects us on the mountains
Of the divine perfections,
The Altar.
He calls and expects you to be transfigured in him,
With him to be immolated,*

*For the ascensions to the mountains
Of the divine perfections.*

*The Father's voice enwraps the altar
"This is my Son, the elected one
In him my delight I find.
"Listen to Him".*

*From the altar vibrate flames
Of the Holy Spirit
And they search for hearts
To make of them Seraphs and Apostles
To set afire with them the world.*

*Fear not!
There, every pardon you receive,
The promise of paradise,
As brother
The chosen disciple,
As Mother, Mary most holy
And the ardor of God's glory.
Trust!
There begins, grows
and is fulfilled your redemption,
Your sanctification, your renovation.¹*

At the moment of his ordination deacon Justin did not express his feelings, did not say any words for the occasion,

¹ Campion, Ibid. p. 78.

and as far as we know, no picture was taken of the event! To the contrary there was a lot of preparation for the vow of charity to the third level that he pronounced the morning of his ordination with the approval of Fr. Piccirelli, his spiritual director.

“This vow was pronounced explicitly as the beginning and foundation of the Congregation of the Servants of the Saints that later was named Society of Divine Vocations.” With this vow deacon Justin obligated himself before God to do always, everywhere and in everything whatever he knew to be of greater glory for the Lord, binding himself to do any thing, to suffer any thing even death in order to avoid any voluntary imperfection.

An event, maybe unique in Catholic hagiography, very exceptional is the fact that during the singing of the Litanies of the Saints, while prostrated on the cold marble of the presbytery of the cathedral of Pozzuoli, deacon Justin renewed the vow, previously pronounced in the diocesan seminary with the permission of Fr. Procolo: “I shall spend my life stirring and cultivating Vocations to the priesthood and religious life.” Because of the renewal of this vow and the vow of charity emitted the morning of the ordination, for many years the Society of Divine Vocation has celebrated September 20 as its birthday and the anniversary of ordination of the Founder.

At the end of the liturgy of Ordination, Fr. Justin’s parents felt the need to thank Bishop Zezza who throughout all

the years of seminary formation showed so much benevolence for their son. While saying goodbye to the bishop Mrs. Russolillo said: "Your excellency, we hope to come back in the non distant future also for the ordination of our son Michele," at the time a seminarian. The Bishop simply replied: Michele is not Justin!

In preparation to his priestly ordination Justin wrote in the book of the soul: "The Lord creates me directly and totally for himself... He wants me for himself as if he could not live without me. As a matter of fact, without the priest he could not live in the Eucharist. He willed it so, and he willed me too! If it is true that he finds his delight in being with men, it is also true that more than anybody else he wants the priest close to him. If he has to immolate himself he wants the priest as his sacrificer; if he wants to communicate with the souls, he wants the priest as his mediator; if he wants to stay with men, he wants the priest as his inseparable companion. Only into his hands he abandons himself with a confidence that drives one crazy. One thing, one name, one mission, one only life, that of Jesus and of the priest! Jesus and I! What does all the rest matter?"

The spirit with which the newly ordained approached the altar to celebrate his first Mass transpires clearly from the letter he wrote on September 3, 1913 to his aunt Michelina, who was his closest collaborator in his ministry for vocations.

"Dear Aunt Michelina, you and the boys must prepare



Fr. Justin blesses his niece before her wedding, year 1954



*Fr. Justin with Fr. Giuseppe Di Fusco and Fr. Frank Torromacco,
year 1949*

a very special feast for me. You and the boys must beg all the good ladies that teach catechism, and if possible, all the grammar school teachers, to bring all the boys and girls to Holy Communion during my first Mass. This would be a great consolation for everybody, but especially for Jesus and for the Blessed Mother... This is the very best feast that you could organize for me. All the rest is nothing! Also, let the people know that I do not intend to sing my first Mass, and yet it will be a long Mass for the Communions that I expect in great numbers. Invite also the Sisters, the orphans and the old people to whom after the Mass could be given a small donation."

The newly ordained, crowning so many sacrifices and renunciation, did not worry at all about external festivities. His attention focused only on glorifying the Lord and the Blessed Mother thinking of the Eucharistic ministry, nutritious sustainment for his spirit, to which he would dedicate all his energies. The only gift he really wanted and appreciated was having all the children receiving Communion at his first Mass.

The expectation for his first Mass on the part of the family and of the faithful of Pianura was great! The parish Church of St. George could not accommodate all the people that were trying to get in. A large crowd of people waited for him at the entrance into the town and escorted him to the Church in a jubilation of applauses, flowers and songs.

Meaningful, symbolic and providential was the fact that

while the procession that escorted the newly ordained was entering the church for the celebration of his first Mass, there was a big commotion of people running towards Via Napoli: the first fountain of Pianura emitted its first flow of running water! The people immediately interpreted the event as an omen of the living water that would spring up from the burning heart and ministry of the new priest.

Many years later, with visible joy, Fr. Justin told a group of Vocationist students that the only congratulatory wish he enjoyed and appreciated on the day of his first mass, was that pronounced by a little old lady that with the heart more than with her lips kept repeating: Saint Alphonsus, Amen! On that day, as he would do for the rest of his life, Blessed Justin paid great attention to the children and the poor.



Fr. Justin, painting of Aldo Corrado, 2011

CHAPTER 6

Military Service

At age twenty, the Seminarian Justin Russolillo, like all the young men, had to register for the military draft, according to the law of the time and had to present himself for a medical check-up. He was declared unfit for military service because of excessive frailty. The following year he had to go again for his military fitness check-up, and once again he was declared unfit to serve on account of his poor health. With the beginning of World War I things changed; all those who had been rejected because of poor health were mobilized on March 14, 1916. As all the others, Fr. Justin had to go through a third check-up. The military doctor that visited him went berserk saying: To how many months of starvation have you submitted yourself to get in this condition? Fr. Justin ignored the poisonous remark, but the other young men from Pianura protested vehemently, knowing his moral integrity and the ascetic life that he led. On March 13, 1918 Fr. Justin was drafted into the army along with others rejected, born in 1891, and after a short period of training was assigned to the military hospital, near the army base Salvatore Rosa in Naples. The army uniform they gave him was so big that he could have been swimming in it! One of his army fellows said: It looked like a sack!

During the time he was in Naples, often his boys went to the army base to participate in his Holy Mass at the Conservatory of the Daughters of the Notai. Many times his Fedelissimi went to the Church of St. Gennariello, where they received classes of asceticism and Latin from Fr. John Varriale. Even the group of the young ladies desirous of perfection many times reached Fr. Justin at Vomero (a section of Naples) to participate in his Mass at the Chapel of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. The future founder kept inflaming them always more to the ideal of searching and cultivating vocations to the priesthood and to consecrated life.

On his part Fr. Justin continued to assist the young ladies through his short notes, as the one he sent to Rachel Marone and to the other catechists on the second day of lent in which he exhorted to “form groups of young ladies willing to learn more about God and their own soul, and about the knowledge and practice of Christian life... this for now. Later the Lord will make you know better what needs to be done. Now there is very little you can do personally, but indirectly through prayer and sufferings there is a lot to be done, do it generously.”

Fr. De Rosa wrote: “The news of the defeat of Caporetto arrived while he was at home; returning to the barracks he was given five days of confinement.” The Italian troops were tried and decimated; there was an urgent need for reinforcement, that’s why Father Justin and his fellow soldiers had to leave immediately for the front. It was the end of April of 1918.

The health of Fr. Justin could not hold up to the rigors of military life. The day of his departure for the front, the commander of his unit, fearing that the soldier Russolillo would collapse under the weight of the backpack he had to carry on his back marching from the barracks to the Central Railway Station of Naples, hired a young man who was happy to march alongside Father Justin carrying his backpack. Most of his comrades approved of this exception. One of his companions said: If I were ever to decide to go to confession, I would confess only to him.



Fr. Justin soldier, year 1918

With the departure of Fr. Justin for the war front serious fears arose for the continuity of the vocation apostolate that had been started with a lot of enthusiasm and dedication, both on the part of Fr. Justin and of the young men. The war and the subsequent enlistment caused fear of the total collapse of every good work started with the best intention. Convinced that the will of God was calling him to be the servant of the divine vocations, also as soldier, he continued to take constant and thorough care of the aspirants to religious life, both men, and women. Although faraway physically, he remained spiritually close to them and wrote frequent letters to his young disciples encouraging and following their progress.

In a letter written from the war zone hospital soon after

his arrival: "I'm here serving as a nurse. So I need some of the spirit of Saint Camillus and St. John of God. Now that you know my address, you can communicate to me your news, exactly, faithfully and meticulously; each of you separately writes what he wants and believes appropriate to write. I recommend that you take good, fraternal care of Horace and Nicolino, tolerating and helping them. Love the small aspirants to the priesthood; arouse the enthusiasm of daily communicants. Take good care of yourselves becoming saints. Try to please Jesus especially in the person of the pastor to whom I entrust you. With all my heart I hug you one by one and I bless you."

Undoubtedly Fr. Justin loved his country, but he did not go to war happily. He did everything he knew to be exempted. On August 15, 1918 he wrote to his boys: "Oh, how I nurture the sweet hope of coming back permanently to my ministry and my beautiful school, integral part of my priestly ministry. Blessed be God for ever!"

At the beginning of his service in the war zone he had as his companion Fr. Ziccardi, S.J., who seeing him so frail kept insisting that he should report being sick and ask for a medical checkup. Fearing the medical officer would go berserk, as had happened before, Fr. Justin was not willing to listen to his friend's recommendations. Fr. Ziccardi patiently kept repeating to him that bad actions and sins are imputable only to those who commit them and reassuring Justin that in no way he could be held accountable for the outburst of that crazy doctor. In spirit of obedience and humility he

accepted to undergo another medical checkup. When the doctor saw him naked he started cursing the one who had drafted that living skeleton. Without any sign of civilized humanity, Justin was sent back to his superiors with the recommendation to dismiss him from the army; the superiors, however, did not discharge him.



Passport picture, year 1932

Fr. Henry Verdolotti, another comrade of Fr. Justin, left this testimony about the military service: "Is it possible? Fr. Justin, soldier? ... He is there in the Barracks of Naples with the uniform of the Tenth Health Unit, and he knows that he is not alone. I remember him as guardian of his army dormitory, because he was physically unable to sustain the marches. He was impeccable to duty, respectful, prayerful, sure of himself; he implored victory for our army, while yearning for perfect peace ... Justin, the priest-soldier was all occupied in spiritual things, always longing for the realization of his project. I gladly entertained myself with him walking on the porch, almost oblivious to military life."

During a lesson on asceticism, the founder narrated this episode. In the busiest time, when there were more wounded soldiers to be attended, he received a letter from Pianura

that his mother was grievously ill. He was given a five-day leave, plus two travel days. His mother was perfectly fine. Having satisfied his mother's heart, he immediately returned to his post. The commander, seeing him before the expected time, was surprised and asked: How was your mother? What sickness did she have? The soldier simply explained: Well, all mothers have heartaches!

Not only Giuseppina missed her son, Justin also strongly felt the absence of his mother. From the front he wrote to his Sister, the future Mother Giovanna, asking for a picture of his mother; in that occasion he wrote: I have never said I want, and this time I say it. To convince his mother to pose before a camera, he sent her his own photo in a military uniform.

It seems that only a few times, during his military service, Justin was really overburdened with excessive work. He dedicated a lot of his time to prayer, contemplation and writing. He kept writing to his family, his *fedelissimi* (the group of his most faithful), his aunts and the pious souls directed by him, to Fr. Piccirelli, his spiritual director, and to his Bishop.

During his military service Fr. Justin was inspired to found the Congregation of the Sisters of Divine Vocations. He had always thought and planned to found the Vocationist Fathers, but not the Vocationist Sisters; he had expressly renounced to such an idea. This is how Fr. De Rosa explains the metamorphosis: The pious virgins were expected to

sustain the work of the divine vocations without becoming religious. When his friend, Bishop Farina of Troy, founder of the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart, visited him in Pianura, addressed him jokingly: "Who perverted you to found the Sisters?" Bishop Farina and Fr. Justin had several times talked about religious congregations of Sisters, and Justin, on the example of St. Ignatius, had never shown interest in founding a religious congregation of Sisters.

In Mestre he had often observed the Sisters of Saint Bartolomea Capitanio work hard in the hospital and was convinced that to solve the logistical problems that would have entangled the male branch, a women's branch was needed. Mary and Joseph are needed to grow the little Jesus that lives in those called to the priesthood.

Fr. Piccirelli, made aware of this inspiration through one of his letters, exhorted the future founder: "Talk to the Bishop about the foundation of the Sisters Servants of the Saints." Fr. Justin had been thinking and talking of the future Congregation as the "Congregation of the Servants of the Saints" and consequently also the women's branch was designated as "Sisters Servants of the Saints".

From Florence he wrote to the Ferraro sisters: "I have been thinking of you for a project of good works that we want to realize together in order to please God". At the same time, he said to his sister Giovanna: If God wants to utilize me for a religious Congregation of Sisters (as I have in mind) you could be the first, or one of the first".

The worst anguish of Fr. Justin was caused by the environment of the army barracks, by the vulgar language of the soldiers, by the irreverence for the Lord and by the impossibility to celebrate Holy Mass every day. During his military service he was stationed in the following places, Loreo and the military hospital of Zappi in the province of Rovigo, Monselice in the province of Padua, Mestre, Florence and a short rest period in the plains of Adice near Tornola in the province of Parma.

From a letter of Fr. Justin to his father, Luigi, it appears, that, all considered, the military experience was positive for the soul and for the body. He found the military rigor satisfactory, to the point of wanting to maintain it till death, especially with regard to food and bed.

His thoughts and prayers were especially for the souls that sought his spiritual guidance; he was solicitous to find time to respond promptly to letters he received daily. Fortunately his military service came to an end, when he was called for an ulterior medical checkup in Florence and was discharged from the army.

The news of his dismissal from the army was indeed a welcome, happy news for his family, and even more for the large group of young men who kept waiting and imploring from the Lord the return of their spiritual father in order to continue their journey toward religious life, in the hope of soon starting community life.

Military service, even though positive in many ways, was really a hard and challenging experience; a note in his spiritual diary, written on September 30, 1954, sums up his feelings: "Anniversary of my liberation from military service!"



Fr. Justin with the members of the General Chapter of 1947

CHAPTER 7

All life is Vocation

“O my God and my all, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, behold, here I am since you have called me! I adore the divine, eternal vocations through which you attract all souls and mine to you.

Not once, but perpetually, you have been calling me from nothingness to life, from among the living to faith, from among the Christians to a religious state of ever higher holiness.

I see your calling as a proof of adorable predilection, a proof of ineffable esteem that you have for me, among all the possible ones, the living and the Christians, O my Lord.

What do you want me to do? Behold, here I am, since you have called me! Speak, Lord, your servant is listening. Oh, that I may recognize, be aware of and follow your call with ever greater docility, fidelity and generosity.

Your vocation requires that I direct myself to you and fol-

low you, while detaching myself from creatures, in order to get closer to you and be united with you for ever.”¹

It is impossible to understand the life and the work of Fr. Justin without first understanding his concept of vocation. From the word *vocation* (from the Latin *vocare* and *vocatio* = *to call and calling*) he formed the new words that indicate his main work, the *Vocationary*, his religious families, *Vocationist Fathers*, *Vocationist Sisters*, *Vocationist Apostles of Universal Sanctification* and *Vocationistality*.

Considering life as a vocation, Fr. Justin believes that only the person who discovers and follows his calling can fully develop his own self. The person, who discovers his vocation, discovers the project of God for him, and conforms his will to God’s will. God’s calling is from all eternity and forever, even before our birth. Our “yes” to God’s calling is the beginning of a life of intimacy with the one who calls; it is the beginning of a journey that places us on the pathway of God’s will and consequently of his holiness.

Fr. Oreste Anella, SDV, biographer and postulator of the cause of Beatification of Fr. Justin, has synthesized all his life in the title he gave to the last biography he published: *Chiamato per Chiamare – Called to Call*.

Father Justin classifies vocations as: *General Vocations*,

¹ Russolillo, *Spirit of Prayer*, Vocationist Editions, Florham Park NJ 1996, p. 198.



Fr. Justin with vocationaries

those directed to each and every human being, *Vocation to life, to faith and to Holiness. Vocations of Special Consecration are the Vocations to the priesthood and to religious life. Particular Vocations are the personal callings to marriage, to celibacy in the world and to every form of service.*

What we do to earn an honest living through an occupation, employment, profession or a carrier is a job, an activity. True benefactors of humanity and of religion are only those who know how to transform their activities or their professions in a true and real vocation or mission. This happens when the main motive of our actions is the good of others, the will to help and serve others; the remuneration that one receives remains an item of relative and marginal importance.

Vocation is a calling from one who loves. Fr. Justin often repeated as a mantra: *Chi ama, Chiama - He who loves, calls*. Every vocation comes from the eternal and infinite love of God for a human being. The Justinian axiom: *He who loves, calls*, is really true! God is love and consequently of necessity he must call; from this follows the other logical conclusion of Blessed Justin: Vocations are not lacking, what is lacking are the cultivators and educators of vocations! With the Vocationist Fathers and Sisters, Fr. Justin wants to form an army of promoters and mentors of vocations.

Every vocation comes from God and aims to serve others, however, each vocation is also unique, exclusive, unrepeatable and precious. To make sure that no vocation might remain unanswered, to make impossible such a disastrous possibility, Justin dedicated all his life and that of his religious families to searching and cultivating vocations.

The main and primary objective of his life is to guide all souls to holiness, to the most intimate union with God Father, God Son and God Holy Spirit. All his talents, all his time and resources are directed to promote, encourage and assist vocations to the priesthood and to religious life, because these in turn help all souls on the pathway of holiness. Priestly and religious vocations are seen as indispensable means for the sanctification of the souls.

This is how Fr. Justin expresses this fundamental connection between Universal Sanctification and Vocations to the priesthood and to Consecrated life:

“The ‘good Religious’ and ‘the holy priests’ are the greatest need of the souls, and, at the same time, the greatest gift they may be given. Thus the primary and focal work of the Servant of the Saints [the Vocationist], his devotion and apostolate is always the searching for and nurturing of divine vocations to the priesthood and to religious life.”²

The young seminarian Russolillo, during his vacation periods, dedicated himself to teaching catechism with intelligence and zeal. Amongst his pupils he favored those who showed signs of ecclesiastical vocation. From among his group of the Voluntaries of Jesus, he chose those who seemed to be inclined to the priesthood and formed a second group called *I Fedelissimi* - *the most faithful*.

While continuing his apostolate of catechesis and oratory with the whole group, he started to teach the first elements of Latin to the Fedelissimi. These *fedelissimi* became his *pars electa* - *his chosen portion*, and they began to visit him first at the seminary of Pozzuoli and later at the Major Seminary of Posillipo in order to receive his instructions.

The first Vocationist Fathers, Frs. Salvatore Polverino, Giorgio Mele, Giuseppe Di Fusco, Basilio Polverino, Giorgio Saggiomo and Salvatore Vivencio were all members of the Fedelissimi.

² Russolillo, Ascension, Vocationist Editions, Florham Park, 1997 art. 749.

Throughout the centuries the Lord has always chosen a good part of his priests from among the poor, and continues to show his predilection amongst them. So that poverty may no longer be an obstacle to accepting and following one's vocation to the priesthood, Fr. Justin undertook in person to paying all expenses for seminary fees, books and uniforms of the young men of Pianura who wanted to enter the seminary to become priests. The young ladies of the Pious Union first and the Vocationist Sisters later became the channel of divine providence to provide for the needs of the seminarians.

After the foundation of the Vocationist Sisters, in order to increment the funding for seminarians, Fr. Justin instituted the Organization of the Tribute, through which hundreds upon hundreds of ordinary people became Vocationist Co-operators. These cooperators offered every month a prayer and a mite for vocations, personally collected by the Vocationist Sisters designated to this ministry. These cooperators became also the propagators of the Vocationary, making it known and directing to it several youngsters who showed signs of vocations and did not have enough financial means.

The reading of the biography of Daniele Comboni, bishop, missionary, founder, and now saint, was one of the tools used by divine providence to increase in Blessed Justin the passion for vocations. Justin himself wrote: "The Lord himself has granted you the opportunity to read the heroic life of Daniele Comboni. As he made the leitmotif of his life: Africa or Death, so you must fight and inflame everyone

for vocations! So many of them go lost, while so many are needed for the salvation of the souls". How beautiful this slogan-program: Vocations or death!

Maybe only in heaven we will know how many priests would not have made it to the priesthood without his financial, moral and spiritual support. From the writer of these pages to the first Vocationists, we have all gone to the Vocationary because we did not have sufficient financial resources to be accepted in the seminary. He never said "no" to anyone who knocked at his door!

Fr. Ugo Fraraccio often repeated this episode, which happened to him while he was Rector of the Vocationary of Pinarura. Unexpectedly and unannounced an aspirant came to the Vocationary, accompanied by his mother, asking to be admitted to the Vocationary then and there. Patiently and sweetly Fr. Ugo kept trying to convince the poor aspirant that there was no room, not one empty bed, and that he should go back home, and he would be called as soon as a place became available. The young boy and his mother kept insisting with tears in their eyes that he be allowed to stay, even if he had to sleep on the floor. Fr. Justin happened to be passing by and seeing more than hearing what was going on, intervened saying:

"Ugo, look well, another bed will be found!"

But, Fr. Justin, where would this other bed come from?

"Look well, Ugo, there are at least two more beds available, mine and yours!"

Fr. Justin is deeply convinced that a vocation is a gift of God, and once given, it remains forever. *Dona Dei sine poenitentia*, the Lord never regrets having given us a gift and never takes it back. We may lose interest in it, we may become unworthy of it, we may no longer feel the attraction or the joy of following our vocation, but the vocation remains, it is there! A former Vocationist novice, Vincent Modugno, who entered the Vocationary in 1946, confirms this. On Easter Sunday, overcome by homesickness together with his companion Hector Bavarella, decided to leave the Vocationary. Fr. Justin forgave him. In the heart of Vincent, the inner struggle kept intensifying; he tried to convince Fr. Justin that he had no vocation, he explained the doubts that were troubling him and that he had decided to go back home. The founder answered: *whoever has been called continues to have the vocation, because the Lord does not take back his gifts; instead of talking of not having or having lost the vocation, we must have the courage of talking of our inconstancy and infidelity.*

A unique, particular aspect in the life of Fr. Justin is his ministry, his commitment in assisting crumbling or betrayed vocations. Fr. Justin rehabilitated over one hundred priests who had left the priesthood; at least double that number of former seminarians or religious restarted their vocational journey.

While the Founder with immense charity welcomed, consoled and gave peace to so many who had betrayed or not properly corresponded to their vocation, some bishops and others in positions of authority at the time did not appreci-

ate or look kindly upon such a ministry. A person that in one way or another brought dishonor upon the priesthood or the seminary had to be ostracized or kept at a distance! To get an idea of the way ex-priests were treated, it might be enough to know that, by law, a former priest could not be employed in any public office or function; they could not teach in a public school, could not be employed in a post office or bank; they were to be isolated like the lepers of old!

To those in position of authority within the Church, who used to criticize this 'good Samaritan' or 'going after the lost sheep' ministry, Fr. Justin with simplicity and truthfulness defended his work stating: "The truth is that we profess a true devotion to the divine vocations, and that is why we have accepted some people, who, finding themselves out of some ecclesiastical institutions, do not intend to return to the world, and remain with us for the time needed to find another honest way of life; while we, on our part, do the best we can to give peace to their troubled spirit, and dispose them to see and follow with humility the divine will."³

The prevailing current of thought of the time permeated by Jansenistic attitude, the bad example of some converts (not deeply converted), the jealousy of some who could not be helped, prompted some to write slanderous letters of protest against the Vocationary and the work of Blessed Justin.

³ Russolillo, Works, Vocationist Editions, Vol. XVIII p. 55.

Two well known, clamorous cases, that of Father Petruzzelli and of Professor X, Fray Ciaolino (the first canonically rehabilitated and admitted in the SDV, and the second, reconciled with God died saintly in our community of Gorga), and some serious accusations against professor Luigi Pirelli (lay cooperator of Fr. Justin), precipitated upon the Congregation the suspension of the faculty to admit anyone to the novitiate, profession or ordination from 1934 to 1941. Many in the Congregation knew well the resentment of Ermenegildo Pasetto, Secretary of the Congregation for the Religious, because of the rehabilitation of Fr. Petruzzelli and the charitable assistance to Professor X, both his former confreres. This was undoubtedly the darkest period in the life of Fr. Justin and of the Society of Divine Vocations.

With profound resignation and humility, in spirit of obedience, the Founder accepted the sanctions emanated by the Congregation for the Religious, and took advantage of them for his purification and that of the Congregation. Several Vocationists saw only the vindictive spirit of Msgr. Pasetto, and others saw the position of Bishop Castaldo, who was convinced that the Society of Divine Vocations was not a true and canonical Religious Order, and kept trying his very best to make sure that it would not be recognized as such. At any cost, Bishop Castaldo wanted the Society of Divine Vocations to remain a diocesan congregation of oblates at the exclusive service of the Diocese of Pozzuoli. Many young Vocationists, totally demotivated and discouraged because they did not see any future for the Congregation, left the institute. Many others, who were pleading

for assistance in order to save their vocation, could not be helped.

Here is a *verbatim* report of a vocation saved by Fr. Justin: “During the school year 1932-1933 I was a philosophy student at the seminary of Benevento. My father found himself in such a catastrophic financial condition that he could not pay my seminary tuition, and the following year I remained at home! A priest suggested that I go to Fr. Justin. I presented all the required documents; I was missing only the ‘nihil obstat’ of the Congregation for the seminaries that the bishop refused to ask on account of some baseless accusations. My longing for priesthood seemed to have vanished! Unexpectedly I received a post card from Fr. Justin telling me to go to the Vocationary of Pianura. I thought that the ‘nihil obstat’ had arrived and I experienced an indescribable joy.

Fr. Justin was not at the Vocationary, when I arrived. Fr. De Felice welcomed me with exquisite charity; that first night, he sacrificed himself sleeping on a chair letting me use his bed. In the morning hell broke loose! Since the “nihil obstat” had not arrived, Fr. Vaccaro, superior of the house, demanded that I leave immediately. I burst into tears and asked to speak with Fr. Justin. At this request Fr. Vaccaro exclaimed: Eh, Fr. Justin! He makes a mess, and we get in trouble! Young man, you have to leave. Do you understand?

Fr. Justin welcomed me into his room with a sweet smile and I, in tears opened to him my soul. After having listened to me attentively he said: If God wants you to be a priest,

he will open a door for you. For the time being, remain here with us and we will see how things go.

O happy encounter that I will never forget and that I will bless for all eternity. From it came the salvation of my vocation. I owe my priesthood to the charity of Fr. Justin, to whom I will be eternally grateful.

Before Christmas of 1935 I received the news that the bishop, having verified my innocence consented to my re-entry to the seminary, but the Rector could not accept me because the academic year was already well advanced. Fr. Justin gladly offered me hospitality in the house of Altavilla Silentina. On June 9, 1936 I went home for some vacation and then went back to the seminary. I am a diocesan priest, ordained on August 30, 1942 and presently Pastor at San Giorgio degli Schiavoni in the province of Campobasso."⁴

Fr. Vincent Traglia left us this testimony: *I have admired Fr. Justin as the good father, who never spared anything for the salvation of vocations.*

Fr. Joseph Barra, a diocesan priest, wrote: *We remember and love Fr. Justin as the father and maker of our vocation. Many of us would never have been priests if the Vocationary had not been there for us.*

⁴ Martino, Fatti Santo, Voc. Ed. p. 73.

I am deeply touched as more and more I immerse myself in Fr. Justin's charisma and I am heartened to continue the vocation ministry every time I read the following words of the beloved founder:

"Behold, every time that one knocks at the door of our spiritual family, I feel a knock at my heart, and the heart opens up to the newcomer well before the door does.

The newcomer becomes mine and is all mine, more than a brother and a friend, flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones, and I am unable to separate myself from him without a physical and moral torment, the most cruel of all.

I cry, my Lord, because I would like to be for them a living proof and symbol of your love and relationship with them. Oh! how, I would like to be for them an effective, irresistible stimulus to unite them to you, but I do not succeed!

But they do not know, do not understand, and with the poison of sin they separate themselves from your soul and from your heart and mine, O Jesus-love, trampling over us, after having cut us to pieces.

These tears I am shedding, my Lord, seem to be of blood! And those who could wipe them away have gone far away into abysses, those who cause them, are not here any more."⁵

⁵ Russolillo, *Spirit of Prayer*, Voc. Ed. p. 225.

*Reconstruction
of the pagliarella (hut),
where Fr. Justin used to
meet the boys
to teach catechism.*

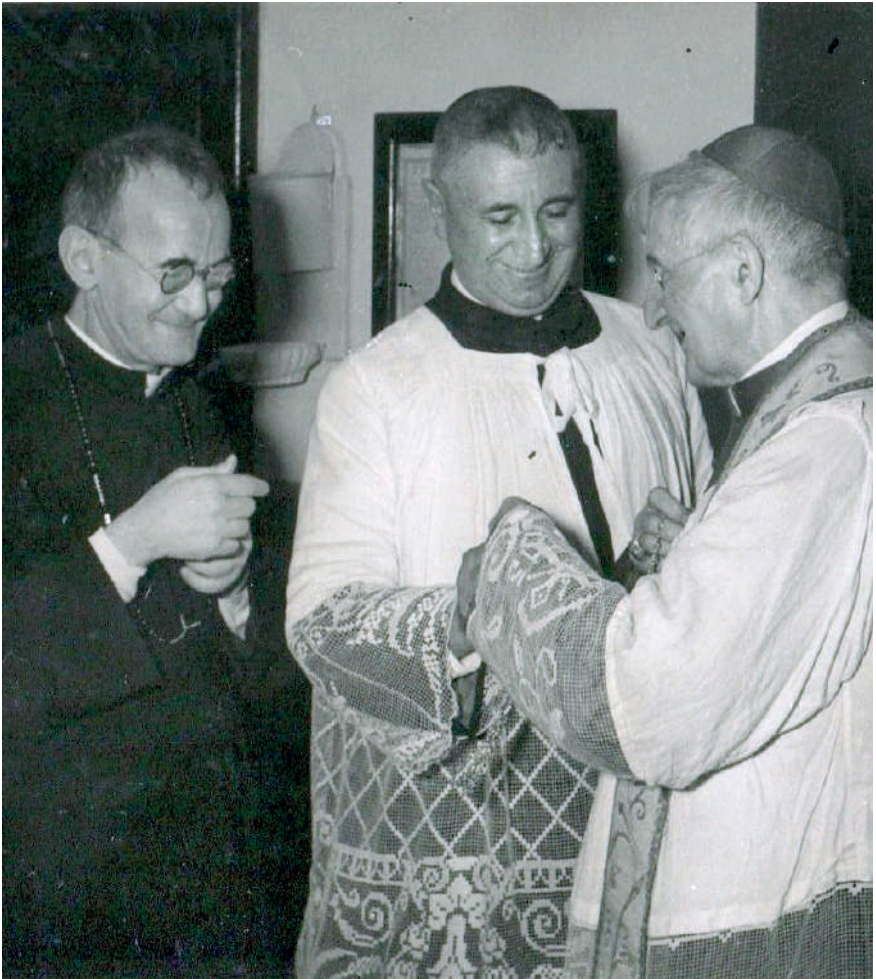


In the above verses we see and feel all his love for vocations and his closeness with God and with every one who was called to be part of his life. The aspirants, the novices, the professed brothers were not numbers, nor guests, but more than brothers and friends, they became one with him and with Jesus. Fr. Justin lived and felt with his boys the same union he lived and felt with Jesus. This explains why no work was too much, no sacrifice too hard, and why he was always willing and happy to forgive and to excuse without ever condemning.

His zeal for vocations, his passion for vocations has been the driving force of his entire life, All the abandonments, the betrayals, the ingratitude of hundreds upon hundreds of seminarians and confreres could not extinguish the fire of his love for vocations.

I cannot find more appropriate words to close this chapter of a life consumed for vocations other than his consecration of sacrifice to the Divine Trinity in the elect of the divine vocations. " With you, for you and in you, O Jesus, I embrace this cross of fire, which is the work of the divine vocations, with all the struggles of hardships for the detachment from the world and families, with all the bitterness of misunderstanding and misjudgments of those who should uphold it, with the agonies of the infidelities and betrayals of the very chosen ones of the divine vocations. ... O my Jesus living by divine mercy even in this poor soul of mine, with you, in you and for you I embrace this cross of fire, I offer myself on this cross of fire to the divine Trinity as a sacrifice of love waiting for and calling on the divine fire of the pure love, the Holy Spirit to bless and sanctify them."⁶

⁶ Russolillo, *Devotional, Voc. Ed.* p. 223-224.



*Fr. Justin with the Apostolic Visitor, Fr. Paolo Poli,
and Bishop Russo of Bovino.*

CHAPTER 8

Society of Divine Vocations

The Society of Divine Vocation is a family of families; it embraces the Vocationist Fathers, the Vocationist Sisters, the Vocationist Apostles of Universal Sanctification, the Pious Sodality of the Divine Union, willed and founded by Blessed Justin. To these have been added the following branches sprout from the spirit of Fr. Justin after his death: The Servants of Christ Alive, the Sons of light, the Voluntary Sisters of Christ the King, the Vocationist Fraternity, the Friends of Fr. Justin, Vocationist Missionary Cooperators, the Fr. Justin's Prayer Groups, the Volunteers of the Vocationary and the Shepherds of Youth.

God intervenes in our history when he wills and where he wills, without need of witnesses or of protocols. It was difficult for Fr. Justin and it is difficult for us to establish a date of birth of the Society of Divine Vocations. In one occasion Fr. Justin said: *The Congregation was born with me*; on another occasion he said: *The Congregation was born from a seminarian on vacation*. We have already indicated that he had bound himself by vow to found the Congregation while he was still a seminarian in Pozzuoli, and that he renewed this vow during his priestly ordination.

The first experiment of community life dates back to April 30, 1914. Community life officially started on October 18, 1920. The first Canonical diocesan approval was given on May 26, 1927. Fr. Justin explains that theologically and spiritually the Congregation is the fruit of his soul's union with God Trinity. The founder identifies himself with the Congregation and becomes one with his religious family.

As an avid reader and connoisseur of the lives of the saints, Fr. Justin knew that founding a religious order meant to face enormous difficulties, crosses, challenges and struggles without end; perhaps, this awareness prompted him to commit himself by vow, not once but twice, to carry on this foundation that for him was: the work of works!

The determination, the constancy, the unwavering faith of Fr. Justin in the foundation of the Congregation can only signify the profound and certain conviction that it is a work of God and not his. God wills it and every obstacle, every trial will only purify and invigorate it. The founder expresses this inner certainty in his spiritual diary on March 14, 1934: "O my God, the foundation is yours! I am glad that in this trial all that in the foundation is mine should be destroyed, lost, deleted, and that remains only your idea, your action, your gift!"¹ Six months later, again he enters in his spiritual diary this inspiration: "Fear not! The Congregation belongs to God, it is his work, God wants it. Likewise the soul of

¹ Russolillo, *Opere* XI, p. 22



Picture of Fr. Justin

the entire Church wants it throughout the whole world; he wants it throughout all centuries and beyond. Fear not."² This inspiration helps us understand why Fr. Justin would not give in to the pressure of bishop Castaldo to limit the Congregation to exist as a diocesan institution and serve only the diocese of Pozzuoli.

Fr. Justin started the first tentative of community life with his young aspirants in his parents' house on April 30, 1914. This experiment lasted only 15 days, because bishop Zezza of Pozzuoli, made aware of this incipient reality, ordered Fr. Justin to send the boys back to their families. We do not know why the bishop took this action. It is evident, however, that Fr. Justin continued the formation of these youngsters through the oratory consisting in a life of prayer, study, catechesis, spiritual direction, recreation and excursions.

On the eve of the first experiment of community life, April 29, 1914, the young lady, Rachel Marrone (later Sister Maria Rachele Marrone) sent a message to Fr. Justin asking him to do something for her formation and that of the girls of the embroidery's laboratory, directed by her. Fr. Justin gladly accepted the spiritual formation of this group that became the founding nucleus of the future Vocationist Sisters, even though at the time, Fr. Justin was not thinking of founding a Congregation of Sisters.

² Ibid. p. 37.

To the formation of the boys, Fr. Justin added the formation of the girls, at different times and places. After a serious preparation, in the month of August, twelve girls consecrated themselves as slaves of Mary before the statue of Our Lady of La Salette, in a small chapel, built halfway on the hill of Camaldoli of Naples.³ In a letter of March 12, 1915,⁴ Fr. Justin mentions two girls that he was guiding spiritually, who were not from Pianura, inviting them to join the group of Pianura that was getting ready to consecrate themselves as Slaves of Mary.

A short note of Fr. Joseph Piccirelli, S.J. spiritual director, dated October 24, 1914 indicates that the bishop called Justin to go back to help with the Seminary formation; he suggested that Fr. Justin write a letter to the bishop and open himself with humility and truthfulness. Fr. Piccirelli in the same note assured Fr. Justin that his vocation was from God and that he should ask the bishop's permission to follow it.⁵ Unfortunately we do not have Fr. Justin's letter, nor the bishop's reply. The fact that Justin remained in Pianura seems to indicate that there had been some kind of understanding between the two.

Since Justin did not succeed in obtaining the bishop's permission to go ahead with the foundation, on July 16, 1915,

³ Cf. Position II, p. 896-97.

⁴ Cf. Opere XV, n. 1288.

⁵ Cf. Positio II, p. 898.

he wrote a letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Religious presenting the project of the foundation and asking enlightenment and blessings. In this communication⁶ the founder presents his project to found a Religious Congregation to help poor vocations. At the time, Fr. Justin was thinking of calling the future Congregation “Servants of the Saints”. Since he did not get any answer, on March 12, 1917, he addressed the same request to Pope Benedict XV, humbly mentioning the opposition of his bishop to the project and the silence of the Congregation for the Religious.⁷

The summary of the project of the “Society of the Servants of the Saints”, attached to the appeal made to Benedict XV, contains in essence the spirit and the apostolate of the Society of Divine Vocations; a religious congregation of pontifical right, with religious vows, dedicated to the service of vocations, especially amongst the poor, to the rehabilitation of betrayed vocations, to the assistance of elderly priests, open to serve in parishes and in foreign missions, all for the sanctification of the families and of the nations.

As it will become clear through future events, the silence of Rome was due to the fact that the project seemed too ambitious, too vast and vague. According to the norms and standards of the time a religious congregation could be dedicated to one charisma, to one specific ministry and it was deemed impossible to be dedicated at the same time

⁶ Cf. *Opere* XVIII, n. 2456.

⁷ *Ibid.* n. 2451.

to the research and culture of vocations and to the service to parishes, schools and foreign missions, to the administration and spiritual direction of seminaries, nursing homes for retired priests, and rehabilitation houses for priests with difficulties.

Fr. Justin from his part was convinced that in order to search for vocations and to accompany them adequately it was necessary to be present in the places and ministries where ordinarily vocations spring up; these places are primarily the families, parishes, schools and missions. The diversification of ministries for him was necessary in view of the discernment and accompaniment of the various vocations. The project was vast, but farsighted, timely and suited to the needs of all times.

Vocations are not ends in themselves; they are instruments or means of God for the universal sanctification. In the first issue of *Spiritus Domini*, Fr. Justin writes: The work of God is Universal Sanctification. Priests are needed for the sanctification. We cannot have priests without vocations! Vocations need seminaries, and at the service of all and in everything there is the minimum Society of Divine Vocations and its Vocationaries.⁸

Convinced that his vocation to spend his life for the service of vocations was coming from God, Fr. Justin could not

⁸*Spiritus Domini*, year 1927, n. 1, p. 3.

resign himself to renounce to it. He intensified ever more the work of formation of his aspirants and during the war he also matured the clear inspiration about the foundation of the Vocationist Sisters; so no longer talks and projects of Pious Union, but of a true religious congregation.

After the military experience, once back home, Fr. Justin contacted again Bishop Fortunato Farina of Troia, who re-affirmed his willingness to accept and welcome him with his foundations in his diocese. Simultaneously Fr. Justin kept in touch with his friend and spiritual director, Msgr. Causa, Vicar General of the diocese of Pozzuoli, who kept exhorting him to be patient, convinced that he should do in his native diocese what he was going to do in the Diocese of Troia. Before the last details of the passage of Fr. Justin to the new diocese were completed, two things happened almost simultaneously, bishop Zezza, always contrary to the foundation was transferred to the archdiocese of Naples, and Fr. Scotto di Cesare, pastor of Pianura died suddenly.

Bishop Pasquale Ragosta of Ischia was appointed Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Pozzuoli. Msgr. Causa intervened in favor of Fr. Justin with Bishop Ragosta, asking him to do whatever he could in order not to lose this extraordinary priest and his foundations that could certainly greatly benefit the diocese. Bishop Ragosta gave Fr. Justin permission to establish his foundations in Pianura and appointed him Pastor of St. George Parish. On September 20, 1920, seventh anniversary of his ordination, Fr. Justin was installed as pastor of his native parish.

With the permission of the Bishop and the support of the Vicar General on October 18, 1920 Fr. Justin welcomed to community life his first 13 candidates in the Parish house. The Congregation celebrates September 20, 1913 as the birth of the Congregation before God and October 18, 1920 as its birth on earth. The first 13 occupants of the Vocationary were Antonio Palmieri, Ettore Bova, Basilio Polverino, Filippo Varchetta, Francesco Torromacco, Antonio Reale, Gino Baiano, Amedeo Patane, Scarincia Cacciapuoti, Simeone Francesco, Giuseppe Cacciapuoti, Giorgio Fontana and Salvatore Bergantino. Six of these became Vocationist priests. Salvatore Polverino, Giorgio Mele and Giuseppe Di Fusco were already in the seminary as candidates for the Society of Divine Vocations. Soon Fr. Francesco Sepe and Fr. Lindolfo Annichino joined Fr. Justin in the service for vocations, taking care of the discipline of the house and giving lessons to the students.

Blessed Bartolo Longo, the Servant of God Msgr. Farina and Msgr. Gioacchino Brandi, friend and cooperator of Fr. Justin were among the first that sent candidates to the Vocationary. During his military experience, Fr. Justin matured the idea that in order to raise the little Jesus in the elects of the divine vocations, the work of the Fathers and Sisters was necessary to continue the work of Joseph and Mary.

The group of young girls guided by Rachele Marrone and spiritually formed by Fr. Justin became members of the Pious Union; they were very active teaching catechism, cooperating in social activities of the parish, and most of all,

cooperating with their work to sustain the first seminarians and the first Vocationary. The community life of the boys inflamed them with enthusiasm and generosity for the sustainment of the Vocationary.

With the authorization of the diocesan bishop, Fr. Justin rented an apartment in Villa Caleo, near the parish, in the Palace of the Baron Zambaglione, which later was purchased by Fr. Justin and became the Motherhouse of the Vocationist Sisters. There, on the evening of October 1, 1921, the first six aspirant Sisters began their community life.

Msgr. Giuseppe Petrone was appointed Bishop of Pozzuoli and consecrated on October 28, 1921. From the beginning, he showed great benevolence toward Fr. Justin and his works. Knowing that the new bishop was a dear friend of Bishop Farina, Fr. Justin asked him to intervene in favor of the Vocationist institutes with the new Ordinary of the diocese.

On November 1, 1921 Bishop Farina assured Fr. Justin that the new bishop had great esteem for him and was happy to have him as a member of his presbyterate, adding that while he appreciated the foundations of Fr. Justin, he did not seem favorable to founding a "religious Congregation". He encouraged Fr. Justin to go ahead and not to fear anything reassuring him that in case of difficulties the diocese of Troia was always open to him and his foundations.

Shortly after his installation Bishop Petrone paid a visit to

Fr. Justin in Pianura and was very well impressed with the apartment of Villa Caleo and with fatherly spirit encouraged and blessed the aspirant Sisters and their religious work.

On November 1, 1924 the new Founder sent Giovanna Russolillo (his sister), Rosa Vassallo, Vincenza Fontana and Eva Fontana, four young ladies of the Pious Union to Marcianise in the province of Caserta to study and obtain a diploma as primary education teachers. Since they did not have a house, they stayed with the Sisters of St. Anna that had a residence near the school.

On Pentecost Sunday of 1923, bishop Petrone approved experimentally the first bylaws of the Society of Divine Vocations. This approval raised a new wave of enthusiasm and fervor in both branches of the new religious family. Congratulations and blessings came from Cardinal Mercier, from the Archbishop of Reims, from the bishops of Recanati, Campagna and Palma, from Saint Guido Conforti and from the Superior General of the discalced Augustinians and Fatebenefratelli.

One of the first Sisters, Sr. Clara Loffredo sold all she had inherited from her family and donated the proceeds to Fr. Justin; with that money the founder bought a piece of land in the locality 'Camporotondo' at the outskirt of Pianura and on the 10th of December 1923 Fr. Justin surrounded by a large group of candidates and faithful admirers blessed the fist stone of the Vocationary Deus Caritas, future Mother-house of the Vocationist Fathers. The vocationary was never

officially inaugurated because as soon as a new space was completed, it was immediately occupied by new arrivals.

This Vocationary, recently completely restructured and expanded, in addition to a group of Vocationist students and the local Religious Community, welcomes numerous pilgrims that every day come to visit the tomb of Blessed Justin and many priests, sisters, consecrated persons, and lay people for spiritual retreats. It is a center of Vocationist spirituality.

Notwithstanding, the inevitable difficulties of the beginning, with lack of specialized personnel, insufficient spaces and means, the number of aspirants kept growing everyday, even though the two congregations did not have a canonical status. In 1926 Fr. Justin, seven priests cooperators, and five Vocationist brothers implored from the bishop the canonical diocesan approval of the two congregations. The Bishop accepted their request and with his favorable recommendations asked the Congregation for the Religious' license for the canonical approval of the Congregations in the diocese. On June 28 1926 the Sacred Congregation responded that, all considered, the Society of Divine Vocations should continue to exist as a Pious Association and that the two branches, separate and distinct could live in a community according to the Constitutions and profess their vows in private.

On May 27, 1927, without the nihil obstat from Rome, Bishop Petrone approved the Constitutions and issued the



Mother Giovanna Russolillo

decree of canonical approval of the Congregation and appointed Fr. Justin Superior of the community. The bishop authorized the use of a religious habit for the first religious as of Pentecost or Holy Trinity Sunday. He also asked that the new religious participate in the solemn procession of Corpus Christi, for the first official appearance of the new Congregation of diocesan right.

On June 5, 1927, Pentecost Sunday, at 9:00 a.m. in the parish Church of St. George the first 12 Vocationists received their religious habit surrounded by the jubilation of five other aspirants and a huge crowd of faithful.

As in ecstasy of love, in *Velame*, the founder synthesizes the story of the canonical approval in mystical and poetic imagery: "The seed had been sowed, it blossomed and grew. Now, the new plant takes shape, form, nature and efflorescence. All the great plants in the immense Garden of Holy Church had a thrill of joy in their blossoming peaks in heaven, seeing in the Lord the life of the new little plant. It is like a new oriental tropical liana - climbing from trees but not a parasite - that goes, goes and keeps going from one tree to another tying them all in a large festoon and to each

one brings a little of its vital juice, and everyone accepts it humbly as a mother accepts the gift of her child, as the landlord accepts the gift of his faithful servant, while their roots transmit to those of the new liana all their best juices. For this the liana is loaded with flowers and flowers of every gentle color as if in each shone a rainbow.”⁹

The diocesan approval generated an invigoration of energy and enthusiasm. Fr. Justin admitted to the first vows those who had shown solid qualities and attitudes for religious life. Fr. Justin opened the novitiate in the parish premises and started the expansion in other dioceses.

The first Vocationist residence outside of Pianura was that of Baronissi in province of Salerno and precisely the family house of Bishop Farina. This first religious house was opened on February 2, 1928, with the permission and blessing of the archbishop of Salerno, Msgr. Gregorio Grasso, who in addition to authorizing the opening of the religious house, also asked that our Fr. Nicola Verde be the Spiritual Director of the Regional Seminary of Salerno. The same year, Fr. Giuseppe Di Fusco was ordained and in a short period of time, the communities of Cava dei Tirreni, Napoli, Fratte di Salerno, Altavilla Silentina, Bovino, Mercato Cilento, Perdifumo e Gorga were opened.

In the same period of time the Vocationists Sisters’ com-

⁹Cf. Opere, Vol. VIII, p. 287-294.

munities of Rivello, Marcianise, Santa Anastasia, Pozzuoli (Seminary), Altavilla Silentina, Sessa Cilento, Faeto, Agnano, S. Valentino Torio, Cava dei Tirreni e Cuccaro Vetere were opened.

The rapid expansion of the Congregation outside the diocese of Pozzuoli caused disappointment and displeasure to Bishop Petrone, who notwithstanding the fact of having approved the Congregation and appointed Fr. Justin as its superior, he would not recognize to the founder the right to appoint, outside of his diocese, priests that he himself had ordained. In various discussions about this situation it was discovered the fact that bishop Petrone had approved the congregation without previous license from Rome; therefore, the Society of Divine Vocations was approved with a defect of form, which made the approval valid but illicit.

The Bishop of Pozzuoli, who was the ordinary of the Congregation, suggested to Fr. Justin to find another benevolent bishop who would accept the Congregation in his diocese. Counseled by bishop Farina, Fr. Justin humbly asked Cardinal Ascalesi, archbishop of Naples to accept him and the Congregation and be the new Ordinary of the Congregation. He kindly accepted. Unexpectedly, on December 2, 1928, the cardinal called Fr. Justin and asked him to find another bishop! Coming out of his meeting with the Cardinal, Fr. Justin was in a state of confusion and shock; God came to his help letting him meet, (by pure chance it seemed!) Msgr. Francesco Cammarota, Bishop of Capaccio-Vallo-Policastro, who happily welcomed him and the entire Congregation in

his diocese. On January 18, 1929, in the chapel of the Seminary of Vallo della Lucania, Fr. Justin professed the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the hands of bishop Cammarota.

The following two years were extremely difficult for the new Congregation and its founder; while Fr. Justin was assigning the Vocationists to different posts, the bishop on his part continued to dispose of the same priests, as he deemed most convenient. Bishops Farina, Cesarano, Cammarota and Caiazzo, Msgrs. Brandi and Cafaro and Abbot Fausto Mezza. O.S.B. failed to convince bishop Petrone that his decree of erection of the Vocationist Congregation, notwithstanding the defect of form, was valid and that the founder had the right to assign the members of his institute. After excruciating sufferings, bitterness, malevolent interpretations, and bitter tears, on June 19, 1931 from Rome arrived the decree, which ratified the canonical erection of the Congregation, and specified the name for the two branches as *Societas Divinarum Vocationum* – *Society of Divine Vocations* - for the men, and *Sorores Divinarum Vocationum* – *Sisters of Divine Vocations*.

The hurricane seemed to be over! Bishop Petrone welcomed back the Congregation in his diocese of Pozzuoli and prepared the documents needed to obtain the *Decretum Laudis*, the approval from Rome that would elevate the Congregation from being of Diocesan Right [under the authority of the bishop of the diocese of its origin] to being of Pontifical Right [under the direct authority of the Holy Father], when

he suddenly died. Msgr. Anthony Cerasuolo, great friend and admirer of Fr. Justin, was elected Capitulary Vicar and as such administered the diocese till the appointment of the new bishop. Very expeditiously and gladly Msgr. Cerasuolo completed the paper work needed for the approval and mailed it to Rome including his letter, the letter written by bishop Petrone and twenty other letters of recommendation written by diocesan bishops.

Laudatory letters of 21 bishops requesting the approval of the Society of Divine Vocations were definitely a convincing argument in favor of the Congregation. The small number of professed priests, only twenty-one, convinced the Congregation for the Religious to wait.

While the Founder, the members of the Vocationist Fathers and Sisters kept praying and waiting the longed for approval, on August 3, 1934 the Roman Congregation informed the newly appointed bishop of Pozzuoli, Alfonso Castaldo, that the petition of the founder of the Society of Divine Vocations had not been approved.

With the appointment of Castaldo as bishop of Pozzuoli started another very long critical period for the Congregation. It appears from the report of Castaldo to the Congregation for the Religious, written only four months after his arrival in the diocese, that he had mental reservation or prejudices against the Congregation. From his arrival in the diocese, bishop Castaldo kept aiming at transforming the Society of Divine Vocations from a religious congrega-

tion to a pious union of oblates at the exclusive service of the diocese of Pozzuoli. This vision of the bishop certainly poisoned his relationship with Fr. Justin and the entire Congregation.

In his report to the Congregation for the Religious, bishop Castaldo contradicted what had been written only a few months earlier by 20 diocesan bishops, by his predecessor and his Vicar General, making reference to “people worthy of faith”. He said that the founder, in order to defend his inspiration, did not always exhibit an attitude inspired by perfect docility and obedience. After having made a gratuitous and superficial irony about the variety and expansion of the Congregation, he concluded by accusing Fr. Justin of subtracting candidates from the diocesan seminary.

What the bishop stated about the lack of financial means and sufficient, well-trained subjects might be correct. What he said against the Vocationary and the accusation of not helping the bishops is exactly the opposite of the thought and nature of Fr. Justin and of the Vocationary. It would have been enough to see or read the joy expressed by Fr. Justin for having sent over fifty students to various seminaries and other religious orders! The Vocationary did not accept aspirants to the local diocese without the written nihil obstat of the Ordinary.

The negative report of Castaldo threw a veil of darkness, doubts and suspicions over the Congregations; in this climate, canon Umberto Zuppante, resenting the fact that a

Vocationist had been appointed rector of the seminary of Sezze in his place, wrote a poisonous tirade to the Congregation for the religious against the Vocationists; some former religious also sent accusatory letters lamenting the bad example of some non-Vocationist priests accepted in community to be rehabilitated. All this negativity influenced the ecclesiastical authority to the point of issuing a decree, on December 1, 1934. This action taken by Rome seemed to be a slow-death sentence. There was absolute prohibition to accept any new postulants or novices; to admit anyone to religious professions; and no one could be admitted to ordination without previous, explicit consent from the Congregation of Seminaries.

Fr. Justin accepted with serenity this condemnation in silence and in spirit of obedience to the will of the superiors for his purification; his nature, however resented it gravely and he shed many tears. It is impossible for us to describe his interior agony and sufferings; he however, gives us a glimpse of his feelings and of how the Lord consoles him.

“Oh! How alone, how deeply alone I am in my mission of establishing the Society of Divine Vocations for the divine union! But it has been always so, and yet, something has been accomplished!

I had opposition from my first Ordinary [diocesan bishop]. Thanks to you, Lord, they have been overcome and ended!

I had opposition from my second Ordinary. Thanks to you, Lord, they have been overcome and ended!

Now preventions [prejudices] from my third Ordinary.

This is all happening because the Lord wants me to know and understand that he is the one who wants and does! "The Lord was its only leader". Whom would you like to depend upon? God alone willed and made the Society of Divine Vocations for the divine union of heaven with earth, of humanity with the Trinity.

The Lord alone, because the one and those who were meant to be secondary causes, with their lack of correspondence and their miseries have ruined and wasted everything.

The above outpouring of Fr. Justin's inner lamentation and profound conviction that the Congregation is the exclusive work of God, takes the form of a more explicit dialogue between his soul and God in the following lines:

"My Soul, what are you afraid of?

Do you believe that Jesus is the head of the Church?

If so, why do you fear?

Do you believe that the Holy Spirit inspires and directs the Church?

Sure, I believe it!

If so, why do you fear?

The will of God shall be fulfilled. Divine love will triumph. The divine glory shall shine... The Society of Divine Vocations for the divine union will subsist and fill up the universe with the glory of God and happiness for mankind.

*Amen. Alleluia."*¹⁰

¹⁰ Russolillo, Word, Vol. 11, p. 40-41.

After many years was confirmed the wide spread rumor that Castaldo had been appointed as secret Apostolic Visitor of the Congregation. This fact explains, and maybe, somehow, justifies some interferences and apparent abuses of bishop Castaldo toward the Congregation.

In a letter to the Congregation for the Religious, previously submitted to bishop Castaldo for corrections and approval, on March 24, 1935, Fr. Justin wrote to the Sacred Congregation declaring to accept in spirit of obedience of mind and heart the measures adopted by the ecclesiastical authority. He asks forgiveness for having been an involuntary cause of displeasure and categorically affirms that he had always diligently obeyed to every disposition and desire of the superiors. Consequently, he cannot but presume that the accusations of disobedience are unfounded; he proceeds to explain that some people, who had come in view of a possible rehabilitation, were accepted and housed as guests and not as members of the Congregation; at the same condition, some former seminarians and religious had been accepted in the house, out of charity, to help them to a dignified reintegration into the world. He also explains the status of professor Pirelli as a lay cooperator and the services he rendered to the Congregation. He submits to the competent authority the methods and program of formation for our students both in the Vocationaries and houses of formation. He concluded his letter reassuring his total cooperation and submission to the local Ordinaries.

Notwithstanding the unfair measures taken against his

Institute, Fr. Justin continued his parish ministry and his role of superior of the Congregation, always submitting everything to bishop Castaldo for counsel, approval, permission and blessing. Several petitions of Fr. Justin and various diocesan bishops requesting the uplifting of the sanctions remained unanswered. Given the status of disorientation and uncertainty, seeing no future for the Congregation, several priests took refuge with bishop Castaldo or other bishops; several young professed brothers were discouraged and abandoned their vocations, especially among those who were forced by Castaldo to attend the episcopal lyceum of Pozzuoli; they had to walk seven miles or go by bike every day. Poor saintly Fr. Justin suffered in silence finding strength and consolation only in the Lord.

Divine providence intervened in favor of Fr. Justin through Fr. Michele Mazzei of the Redemptorists, his spiritual director and counselor. Fr. Mazzei being well aware of the status of the Congregation, and convinced that the main obstacle was bishop Castaldo, first personally verified everything and then pleaded with several ecclesiastics of the Roman Congregations on behalf of the Society of Divine Vocations. He also suggested to Fr. Justin to implore the direct help of the Holy Father. Fr. Mazzei read, corrected and approved Fr. Justin's supplication, and delivered it personally in the hands of the Supreme Pontiff. The following year, Fr. Mazzei suggested to Fr. Justin to write another letter to the new Prefect of the Congregation for the Religious, Cardinal Vincent La Puma. The answer arrived in 1941 with the appointment of Fr. Raffaele Baldini of the Servants of Mary,

and on November 21, with the longed for revocation of the sanctions against the Society of Divine Vocations! In one of his notes Fr. Justin wrote: "November 21, rebirth of the Congregation"!

Fr. Baldini was really a God-sent for the Society of Divine Vocations; he understood and appreciated the spirit of the founder, he called all the students in formation to the Vocationary of Pianura; reorganized the houses of study of philosophy and theology in the residences of Anagni and Posillipo; reduced the numbers of Vocationaries, and called back to the community life those priests that had been assigned to serve in various parishes to help the bishops in need, but lived outside the religious community. He also reorganized the administration of the general government and of the individual communities. Everything seemed to proceed marvelously well with the assistance of Fr. Baldini.

The devil could not stand idly at this rebirth of the Congregation. At the Congregation for the religious in Rome, news and rumors started arriving that contrasted the official reports of the Apostolic Visitor. Fr. Baldini started hearing rumors requesting the removal of Fr. Justin from the government of the Congregation. At this point the Apostolic Visitor openly and explicitly reported and documented that the main obstacle to the growth of the Congregation had been and was bishop Castaldo. With the same clarity and courage he kept reassuring the Sacred Congregation in Rome that Fr. Justin was the best qualified to govern the Congregation.

With a never-before heard act, upon insistence of Bishop Pasetto of the Capuchins, then secretary of the Congregation for the religious, with the approval of the Holy Father, on April 23, 1945, Rev. Fr. Serafino Cuomo, ofm, was appointed Superior General of the Vocationist Fathers and Vocationist Sisters! Naturally, a stormy period of discontent followed among the Vocationists.

In this ordeal, as in the preceding and the following, Fr. Justin obeyed and took refuge in the divine spouse, convinced as ever that the work was of God, and as such could not fail. Once again there was a precious intervention of Fr. Mazzei of the Redemptorists, who, through the then Msgr. Montini, presented to Pope Pious XII his personal plea and a letter of the marquise Laura Rossi of Naples. Msgr. Montini wrote to the Secretary of the Congregation for the Religious informing him of the insistence of Fr. Mazzei about the precarious situation of the Vocationists, and upon the explicit request of the Holy Father sent a copy of the letter of Madame Rossi begging him to examine the situation and see what kind of attention it might be warranted.

Fr. Cuomo prepared two positive reports to the Holy See evidencing once again, as Fr. Baldini had previously stated, that the main obstacle for the Vocationists was bishop Castaldo and that it was necessary to give back the government of their Congregation to the Vocationists; he, however, was discouraging the re-integration of Fr. Justin in the government of the Institute. After revoking the mandate given to Fr. Cuomo, the Congregation for the Religious appointed

as Mother General, Very Rev. Mother Giovanna Russolillo, and Father General of the Vocationist Fathers, Rev. Fr. Giorgio Saggiomo, SDV until the next General Chapter. At the conclusion of the General Chapter, on April 10, 1947, Cardinal Luigi Lavitrano, Prefect of the Congregation for the Religious, in the Vocationist residence of Posillipo, Naples, published and confirmed the election of Fr. Justin as Superior General.

It may be appropriate to look back and revisit a prophetic dream in the light of the events that took place. In 1939 Fr. Justin shared with Fr. Saggiomo, his faithful cooperator and devout son a dream. The two of them were caught in a sudden, tremendous turbine of rain and wind. Unexpectedly a frightening vortex was formed before them and it was covering and dragging them down. An unknown priest pulled them out of danger and took them to safety. Strangeness of dreams? They had the impression that it was a Cardinal who presented them to the Holy Father. Father Saggiomo wanted other members of the Congregation to know of the dream and he recounted the story to various confreres.

In 1945 Cardinal Luigi Lavitrano was appointed Prefect of the Congregation for Religious. Fr. Justin with several Vocationists paid him a visit in his native island of Ischia. On the way back from Ischia, in the presence of the confreres to whom he had revealed the dream, Fr. Saggiomo asked Fr. Justin if Lavitrano was the priest of the dream. Promptly, without hesitation, Fr. Justin answered: *Yes, he is the one!*

With the protection and benevolence of Cardinal Lavitrano, on May 24, 1947 for the Sisters, and on January 3, 1948 for the Fathers, the Vocationists received the first pontifical approval. So the Society of Divine Vocations became a religious Congregation of pontifical right, and obtained the revision and approval of the Constitutions. With this first pontifical approval, which was not the definitive one, the patrimony of the Congregation was assured and, at the same time, the Society of Divine Vocations was subtracted to the direct control of bishop Castaldo.

The two Vocationist Congregations exulted, grew and opened their first foreign mission in Brazil. Both Fathers and Sisters started looking for a house in Rome; unfortunately they fell into the hands of self-proclaimed benefactors, real swindlers and criminals. In 1953 the superiors started to get the first alarming signs of a financial collapse. While Fr. Justin had categorically forbidden making any debts, the Apostolic Visitor approved and multiplied them.

In the General Chapter of the Congregation in 1954, Fr. Justin was unanimously elected Superior General. The Congregation for the Religious deemed it convenient to let Fr. Justin have the title of Superior General, but with a special decree granted all the rights and duties of the Superior General to Fr. Ugo Fraraccio, SDV, thus creating a certain dualism in the government of the Congregation separating the children from the father, and the father from the children.

When the doctors were trying to understand the reasons

of the physical deterioration of Fr. Justin's health, he confided to his secretary: *The doctors will never be able to understand and cure my sickness!* During the last year of his life our Blessed could have said with the psalmist: *"My tears are my bread, day and night"*.

The Congregation was in a deep, frightening financial crisis! The founder suffered terribly with both his religious families. This financial crisis, in spite of its disastrous aspect, produced the effect of binding more intimately the Vocationists to their founder and amongst themselves.

An oral tradition hands down that at the peak of the crisis, Msgr. Montini, who had previously intervened in favor of the Vocationists, as pro-secretary of State prepared a decree of dissolution of the Congregation and presented it to the Pope for his signature. Pius XII, looked, read, reflected and then said: *"Prune if you want, but do not cut to the roots a religious congregation that has saved so many vocations."*

The irony of God willed that the same Montini, with the name of Paul VI should sign and promulgate the *Decretum Laudis* - the final pontifical approval of the Society of Divine Vocations, on January 18, 1966!

Fr. Justin, once again deprived of the office of Superior General, died with the desire to see the Congregation out of danger from the financial crack. Once again the Congregation was saved thanks to a direct intervention of Pius XII, who appointed a pontifical commission to solve the financial problems of the Society of Divine Vocations.

Thanks to the holiness of their founder, the two distinct religious congregations have maintained intact their identity, their spirituality and charisma, which fascinates all those who get to know it, and remains relevant today, as yesterday and more than yesterday.

The Society of Divine Vocations today counts approximately 500 members and the Sisters about 600. The Vocationists are present and work in Italy, Brazil, France, United States, Argentina, Nigeria, India, Philippines, Madagascar, Colombia, Ecuador, Indonesia, United Kingdom and Chile.

Faithful to the Charisma inspired to the founder the two Congregations dedicate themselves to promoting and cultivating vocations, not only for themselves, but also for the dioceses and for all religious orders. The fidelity to the charisma led the Congregation to work in many nations financially poor and rich in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life.

The Vocationists promote vocations to life, faith and holiness. Vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life are seen and cultivated in view, and at the service of the universal vocation to holiness. Fr. Justin dedicated his last years of earthly life in a special way to organize and to develop the Apostolate for Universal Sanctification.

According to the founding inspiration the Vocationist Fathers and Sisters work in three fields of apostolate: Parishes, Schools and Missions. The Vocationists focus their attention

and energies in the service of vocations, and in view of these they pay special attention and interest in youth ministry, family apostolate and catechesis. The famous three hours of the Vocationists, strongly and repeatedly recommended by the founder, the daily hour of meditation, of religious study and of ministry of the word are geared to be the soul of this ministry.

The Vocationist spirituality is a synthesis of the major, approved schools of spirituality and it is thus synthetized: "The holy Church, the holy Family and the Blessed Trinity are the unique triple center and axis of the Society of Divine Vocations. The Vocationist works in the Church, with the Church and for the Church, and imitates the holy family in the relationships of soul-daughter, soul-mother, soul-spouse of the Trinity."¹¹

The ultimate goal of the Society of Divine Vocations: "Is to direct and lead all its members, and through them, all people to perfect union with the divine persons, through communion with the Sacred Heart of Jesus."¹² To realize this goal, Fathers and Sisters are not enough; we need to sanctify the political world, the world of work, of industry, of school, of family and of every possible segment of society. With the Sodality of Divine Union, Fr. Justin wanted to satisfy this need; realizing that this would not be sufficient to

¹¹ SDV Constitutions, art. 8.

¹² Ibid. art. 2

fully satisfy his zeal and thirst for Universal Sanctification, he conceived the third branch of the Vocationist Family: The Vocationist Apostles of Universal Sanctification.

While the Fathers and Sisters were born and grew almost simultaneously, experiencing the same joys and sufferings, the same ups and downs and the same expansion in the world, the Apostles, sprung from his great heart, came into existence as a Secular Institute of Consecrated persons in the World, after the death of the Founder.

The Supreme Pontiff, Pius XII, instituted the Secular Institutes of Consecrated Life in 1947 with the publication of the encyclical letter *Provida Mater*. The day in which Fr. Justin read this encyclical on the Osservatore Romano, as out of himself for the joy, rang the community Bell of the Vocationary's community, and with immense joy and zeal, waving the copy of the official newspaper of the Holy See, to the fathers and students who responded to the unscheduled ringing of the bell, he exclaimed: *Behold, finally we have what we have been awaiting for!*

About a month after the publication of the *Provida Mater*, Fr. Justin addressed a Letter to the Sacred Congregation for the Religious asking authorization to establish the Secular Institute of the Apostles of the Universal Sanctification. Only in 1965 (10 years after his death) a letter arrived addressed to Fr. Justin asking whether the group still existed and whether he was still interested in the secular institute. Fr. Galasso, SDV, then Superior General of the Congregation



*Fr. Vaccaro, Fr. Galasso, Fr. Adinolfi, Fr. Impagliazzo, Fr. Justin,
Fr. Castiglione, Fr. Alfieri, Fr. Saggiomo*

answered that the group existed and that there was plenty of interest in organizing the group according to the new directives of the Holy See.

In 1927 Fr. Justin wrote: "Our Congregation is the Society of Divine Vocations for Universal Sanctification, for the ascension of every soul to the divine union with the Most Holy Trinity. Having formed the center for the consecrated members in Pianura of Naples, now the Congregation starts working to irradiate throughout the entire world many spheres of elect, aspirants to holiness for divine union. In each one of our residences and in those who associate themselves with us, a center must be established for this work of universal sanctification".

Fr. Galasso, well aware of the mentality of Fr. Justin and of the booklet, *Apostles of Universal Sanctification*, decided to call the Secular institute, *Apostles of Universal Sanctification*. On April 7, 1977 Cardinal Corrado Ursi, Archbishop of Naples, approved the *Apostles of Universal Sanctification*, erecting them to Secular Institute of diocesan right. On May 26, 2003, Cardinal Michele Giordano, Archbishop of Naples, approved the revision of the constitutions and the new denomination of the institute as Vocationist Apostles of Universal Sanctification.

As usual Fr. Justin used to plan, ask permission and then kept working without stopping. Fr. Justin started to form the young lady Consiglia Perfetto for the mission of forming the lay institute. She was faithful to the spiritual direction

with Fr. Justin and manifested the firmest determination to become a saint, while burning with zeal for the sanctification of others, but she knew that she was not called to the convent. One day Fr. Justin wrote her a very short note saying: "It is the will of the Lord that you prepare for him the external religious of consecrated persons in the world. This message filled Consiglia with serenity and peace; she was filled with new vigor that never decreased, not even after Fr. Justin's death. The majority of the first Apostles of Universal sanctification were formed, guided and accompanied in the spiritual growth and apostolate by this exceptional soul bursting with serenity and joy from every pore.

Another *Apostle*, still alive, Concettina de Santis from Campobasso, related to this writer her first miraculous encounter with Blessed Justin. While trying to discern what to do with her life, she was counseled to talk with Fr. Justin. While she was in Benevento she saw Fr. Justin in a dream and he told her: *come to see me tomorrow at the seminary of Benevento*. The following morning, she got up and after having done her usual devotions, at a convenient hour went to the seminary and asked to see Fr. Justin. The receptionist informed Fr. Justin's secretary that there was a lady seeking to see Fr. Justin. The secretary came and determinedly and dryly said: Sorry, young lady, but when Fr. Justin is preaching a spiritual retreat he does not see anybody. Even with more determination and conviction Concettina insisted saying: I am here because he asked me to come! At this point the secretary gave in and informed Fr. Justin, who without saying a word went to see the young lady and conversed

at length with her. She opened her heart to him and confided her burning desire to consecrate herself to God, but candidly affirming that she did not intend to lock herself in a convent!

When Concettina finished talking, she heard Fr. Justin saying: *This is exactly what I have been waiting for. We will make you a flying consecrated person, a messenger bird!* From that day Concettina became truly the messenger of Fr. Justin going from one Vocationist house to another, recruiting vocations and providing for the sustenance of various vocationaries. After Fr. Justin's death she continued to be directed by Fr. Galasso. Her house and her town San Martino in Pensilis became real centers of the Vocationist mission and spirituality.

The secular institute today counts approximately 150 professed members and is present in Italy, Brazil, Argentina and USA. Its members live the Vocationist spirituality, promote universal sanctification by working silently and with great zeal in their respective parishes at the dependence of their parish priests. The Apostles profess poverty, chastity and obedience and are divided in three categories of congregated, aggregated or sympathizers (these can be also married people, and in this case they profess conjugal chastity) and promoters (people who do not take vows, but are in love with the spirituality of the institute and cooperate with the *Apostles*).

We cannot think of Blessed Justin without simultane-

ously thinking of Vocationist Fathers, Sisters and Apostles. When Fr. Justin was re-integrated in the government of the Congregation he expressed in his spiritual diary his sentiments of esteem and of indissoluble unity with his religious family: "Now I carry and am always before the Lord with all my integral being, with this mystical body of the Congregation, as one body, spirit, mind and heart, as a unique moral person, not only jointly liable and responsible, nor in substitution or in representation, but in a reality of superior unity, in the image and likeness of Jesus-Church, of Jesus-Eucharist, with the consciousness that the Congregation must embrace, in some respect, the whole humanity, the entire universe. So the soul-spouse of God Trinity¹³ is in the image and likeness of Jesus spouse-God, even in his being head of Mystical Body. Et erunt duo in carne una - and the two will become one. Alleluia!"¹⁴

The present blossoming and ramification of the Society of Divine Vocations is only the beginning of the fulfillment of what was prophesized by Blessed Justin: "The Lord does not want to make us a Congregation, but through it he wants to make us a super-nation of most holy peoples"¹⁵

The Vocationist Congregations have been an integral part of the earthly life of Blessed Justin; for them he spent all his

¹³ The soul spouse of the Trinity here refers to Fr. Justin himself.

¹⁴ Opere, Vol. XII, p. 44-45.

¹⁵ Opere, vol. XI, p. 259.

energies and offered all his sufferings. Keeping faith with his principle that the bonds that unite us on earth do not end with our death, he will continue to be for the constellation of the Vocationist families and their branches, father, teacher, and protector.

The greatness of the heart and universality of the founder are clearly reflected in its foundations: "The Society of Divine Union, which embraces the whole world, with its center and epicenter, with its spheres and constellations, is our work, field and action. The person that does not have mind and heart big enough to embrace the whole world with the divine union and become a lever to lift up the entire world to divine union is not a Vocationist."¹⁶



*Fr. Justin with
Cardinal
Dom Augusto da
Silva and a group
of students, 1949.*

¹⁶ Opere, vol. X, p. 254.

CHAPTER 9

Catechetic Apostolate

Announcing the Word of God in different ways, the parish realizes the project of the Father, which is a project of salvation for all men. This takes place principally through preaching, catechesis and homily. Listening to the Word of God the community remembers the great events accomplished by him in the history of men, the teachings of Jesus Christ, the testimony of the prophets and of the apostles.

It is not only a remembrance of the past in the present. The Word of God is a living word, powerful and efficacious because it realizes what it says. When God talks, what he says always happens. That's why when we really listen to his Word, our life changes. Through his Word God talks with man, communicates to him his very life and waits for his responses which can be either welcoming (like Mary) or rejection. That's why the catechism is important for all, boys, youths, adults, and elderly people. The Catechism does not serve only as preparation to receive a sacrament. Listening to the Word of God during a catechesis or a homily, inspires in Christians the message proper of the life of prayer, of reflections, of actions and practical choices.

These teachings of the Catechism of the Catholic Church have not only characterized the service of Blessed Justin, but his whole life. He has been always in love with the word of God; studied, contemplated and preached it every day of his life. Fr. Justin could correctly be called the Apostle of the Word of God and the Apostle of the Catechism; for him the catechism was the continuation of the ministry of the Word.

As master of synthesis, in one of his “one to one” with the Lord, Fr. Justin outlines the pastoral, the way he has seen and lived it: “He wants all to become saints, all without exception. He wants all his friends, disciples and sons to be sanctifiers of our neighbor. We need to conquer all the souls one by one to the Gospel, to Jesus, to the divine union! In order to conquer them, we need to approach them and talk to them.”

Preaching and catechism nurture and increment each other; more than two distinct activities they can be considered as two faces of the same coin. The two apostolic activities walk hand in hand. It is really difficult, if not impossible, that, where there is optimum preaching, there is no excellent catechesis. It is necessary to have close cooperation between the ministry of preaching and that of catechesis. Any discordance between these vital ministries, generates always emptiness, distrust and confusion.

The evangelization is none other than preaching and catechesis corroborated by the example of the authentic and coherent Christian life on the part of the various ministers of these two forms of apostolate. That’s why catechesis and



Family catechesis

preaching are the two powerful pillars of the life and apostolate of the Blessed Justin.

Fr. Justin, as a good teacher, through these passages makes us understand the importance of catechesis: we cannot love a person we do not know; the more we know a person, the more we love her; the more we love a person, the more we want to be with her, and the more we want to serve her. A practical consequence: A good and deep catechesis helps efficaciously to discover priestly and religious vocations.

As to confirm this teaching, he said that famous sentence: *"The congregation was born from a seminarian, who used to teach catechism every day and often all the day long"*. Aren't the numerous vocations raised in Pianura, around the founder, eloquent proofs of this practice?

Bishop Castaldo of Pozzuoli, aware of the zeal, commitment and expertise of the Pastor of Pianura, did not hesitate to ask him to write out the Statute for the Confraternity of the Christian Doctrine for the whole diocese. He was the examiner of the catechism classes in the whole diocese till his death.

In the Constitutions of the Society of the Divine Vocations Fr. Justin articulated that the Congregation considers the parish as *center of permanent catechesis*. Canon Law prescribes: *There is a proper and serious duty, especially on the part of pastors of souls to provide for the catechesis of the Christian people, so that the faith of the faithful becomes living, explicit and productive through formation in doctrine and the experience of Christian living.*¹ Not only catechesis to the children, or sacramental catechesis, but catechesis for life and that lasts the whole life. That's why catechesis must be permanent.

"The confraternity of the Christian Doctrine, the perpetual catechistic schools, the annual catechistic mission and all the present and future forms of the catechistic apostolate for every class of faithful, not only for children; they are always recommended to the seventy two external religious ministrants."²

Fr. Justin dedicates an entire chapter of the Rules and

¹ Canon 773.

² Russolillo, Society of the Divine Union, 1951, art.123.

Constitutions to the catechistic teaching; he offers a true mine of pedagogical and theological principles, pastoral directives and norms of prudence, fruit of long personal and parochial experience.³

Art. 802. "The duty of daily preaching and of perpetual research and formation of vocations, especially among the sons of the people, must direct and bind the Vocationist to teaching catechism, in a form and at a level always more perfect and integral.



Fr. Justin distributing candies to nursery children.

Art. 803. In our houses, Vocationaries and institutes, the first benefit that must be offered to those who dwell there, is the catechistic instruction adequate and corresponding to their level of education, so that, even if they do not persevere, they will bring back sufficient culture and religious formation.

Art. 804 Every religious, priest and brother, teacher and worker, must be formed and trained to be a perfect catechist, have his own school or group of catechism where he can carry on his vocation to be missionary of asceticism, servant of the Church, inspirer and educator of saints and priests.

³ Opere XXII, Chapter 75.

Art. 805 The Vocationist of the parish religious community, as well as those of any other residence must take serious interest in the religious education of the people that surround them, and care for it with great zeal and abnegation, even if already overburdened with other work.

Art. 806 Every Vocationist residence, not only the parish, must be a center of perpetual catechetical mission, of Confraternity of Christian Doctrine and of any other association with catechetical aim, spirit and work, and of school of higher education of religious education for the local catechists.

Art. 807 The catechetical apostolate of the Vocationists must be integral: a) in the aim of forming religious of God in the world according to Jesus Christ; b) in the methodology of harmonizing all natural and supernatural means; c) in its frequency must be daily in order to achieve a great and effective formation and transformation.

Art. 808 In the weekly conference of religious study, of the chapter of faults, of retreat and spiritual exercises, in every reunion of the community, even only partial, there must always be a catechetical note, as a report or program, method, exhortation etc.

Art. 809 The Vocationist must use and perfect the form of dialogued catechesis from the simple to the more complex, from the known to the unknown; this dialogued form must be extended as much as possible in all ministry of the word, both to the people and to the religious community, being the most effective and accessible to every intelligence.

Art. 810 Every Vocationist will find and form on his own a school and audience, among the people in whose midst will exercise his catechetical ministry, preferably among the children and the poor; he will entrust the catechetical instruction of the girls to the Sisters and other pious souls, well formed as catechists.

In these teachings, we see the desire of the Founder that his children, following his example, live the centrality and connection among catechism, evangelization and vocation apostolate. This explains why he insists that every Vocationist residence must be a school of catechism and every Vocationist must have his own school of catechism. He suggests the inductive dialogued method and insists that in order to be really effective and transforming the catechesis must be imparted every day.

Fr. Justin would never accept invitation for one single sermon. He insisted that every ministry of the word should last at least three days to constitute a short course of ascetical formation. An isolated sermon may create some enthusiasm, but does not have the possibility of letting the roots sink deeply in the soil. The questions that Fr. Justin often asked his listeners – to which he usually did not expect answers – and the queries that he used to present to us, boys, - to which he expected an answer in writing, - were nothing more than a combination of preaching and catechesis.

As a son of his time, but much more as a man with deep knowledge of the human spirit, Fr. Justin taught catechism with the questions and answers method, because this tends

to synthesize the concept or truth that one teaches, and makes easier the concentration and the learning. He taught this method to his parishioners and his students. A direct and pressing inspiration of the Holy Spirit - as it is the case for all the inspirations reported between quotation marks, enjoined him: "Extend also to the Vocationist Sisters this method of ministering the word of God with questions and short answers; explain this method in the guidelines for the students."

When Fr. Justin talks about the requisites to be a Vocationist, he states that to be accepted in the Congregation one must be able at least to be a good catechist; thus stressing that our vocation cannot be separated from the catechism. Permanent catechesis remains an obligation for all members of the Vocationist family (priests, sisters, brothers, students, apostles, oblates, friends, members of the Sodality of Divine Union, cooperators etc.).

In the *Apostolo delle Divine Vocazioni*, Fr. De Rosa reports a strange episode. One-day bread dough did not rise and the Sisters complained to Fr. Justin. He replied: Fill the kitchen with children, teach them catechism and their heat will leaven the mass. And so it happened.

Fr. Justin did not limit himself to organize or teach catechism to the children. He made of his life an ongoing catechesis, not only preparing the catechetical program, but also transforming St. George's Parish into a permanent school of catechesis in which all were at the same time catechists

and catechism learners. While he had to delegate to others many parish activities, he never delegated to others the coordination, supervision and operability of catechesis.

The last image of the apostolicity of Fr. Justin, is that of a tired man, exhausted by diseases, who during the spring of 1955 drags himself from courtyard to courtyard distributing catechisms and urging the study of the same.

Fr. Justin has left us many precious pearls of profound and practical teachings. One of the most precious Justinian pearls is his conference on Catechetical Missions. This conference reveals his thoughts, his teachings and the secret of the efficacy of his apostolate.

From 17 to 20 April 1928 in Naples, the Catechetical Congress of the region of Campania was celebrated in order to offer religious instruction to God's people according to the catechetical method that Fr. Justin had placed at the center of his apostolate. He was invited to present the topic: *The Catechetical Missions*. No one could have presented this theme in a more penetrating and convincing way.

Starting with the principle that faith comes through hearing, Fr. Justin affirms that: *the instrument of the word needs a minister, or interpreter, an apostle who speaks or an evangelist who writes*. For this is an unavoidable duty of the priest to administer the word of God every day; the Catechetical Mission is a favorable moment in announcing the word.

The Catechetical Mission is a special period of time, in

which the missionaries, having received an explicit mandate from the local bishop to evangelize a parish community with catechetical instructions and liturgical celebrations, address the people of God involving the various social classes and different age groups. Expected fruits of the Catechetical Missions are: *a vigorous awakening of souls from the dangerous slumber of sin, and the sanctification of the local clergy from whose work, example and teaching depends everything*. The mission will have also the mandate to educate local catechists and to form a permanent school of catechesis that, at the end of the mission, remains at the service of the parish.

To transmit to the faithful the religious instruction, the missionary will use the treasure of the experiences of many apostles of the past, and thus arouse everyone's enthusiasm for the catechetical apostolate. Evangelization will thus be an activity of the entire community and the parish will be in a state of permanent mission.

Fr. Justin concludes his lecture with concrete examples of catechetical missions preached in the United Kingdom, in France and in Italy by evangelizing saints, like St John Eudes, Vincent De Paul, Paul of the Cross and others.⁴

During his years of philosophical and theological studies, the seminarian Justin Russolillo took advantage of his vacations from the seminary to teach catechism to the children

⁴ The entire lecture can be found in *Opere* Vol. VIII, p. 41-57.

of Pianura, gathering as many as he could under the *pagliarella* (straw-hut) built for this purpose in the garden of his parents' house; from there he would take them to the parish church for confessions and Holy Mass, he organized long outings and picnics improvising authentic and true Oratories, following the example and style used by St. Philip Neri to educate the children of Rome, and by St. John Bosco to educate those of Turin. They prayed, played, sang and were enthused with the stories of the lives of the saints. With the help of aunt Michelina he was also able to provide something to eat like grapes, figs, nuts and chestnuts. He took advantage of these moments not to talk only about catechism but also discover and point out the first signs of vocations.

While people and clergy were lamenting the first crisis of priestly vocations, Fr. Justin kept convincing himself ever more that vocations were plenty but there was a shortage of researchers, cultivators and supporters of vocations. The young seminarian saw the catechetical teaching as the most practical and effective method of vocational animation. In his vision he saw and believed that it is impossible to fall in love with God without knowing him. It follows that the better we know him, the more we love him and the more we want to follow him. On the other hand, how can we consecrate our life to someone of whom we only have a vague idea?

As pastor and founder, Fr. Justin's priority was always the teaching of catechism. He prepared his first disciples, the girls of the Pious Union and later the first Sisters to teach

catechism, and then to be coordinators of catechists and catechetical programs. Every courtyard of Pianura had its catechist; from Pianura he extended this catechetical ministry to the nearby town of Soccavo.

During the worst crisis of the Congregation (1934-1941) Fr. Mario Giannone caught Fr. Justin in a moment of discouragement and asked: *Father, I seem to see you down, what is happening?* He got his answer: *Listen, Giannone, even if they were to suppress the congregation, one day would be enough to bring me up again, as long as I can teach catechism for one hour.*⁵

⁵ Martino, Fatti Santo, Vocationist Ed. p. 49.

CHAPTER 10

Pastor

Fr. Justin served as pastor of St. George's parish in Pianura from 1920 to his death, August 2, 1955. During his seminary time and during the first years of priesthood, he had never thought nor desired to be pastor. He had always dreamed and desired to dedicate his entire life to the service of vocations. Since Bishop Zezza persisted in his opposition to the idea of the foundation, Fr. Justin turned to his friend Bishop Farina, who was willing and ready to accept him in the diocese of Troia, with the permission to establish his foundation.

As previously mentioned, Bishop Zezza was transferred to the archdiocese of Naples and the pastor of Pianura died almost simultaneously. Msgr. Causa Vicar General of the diocese, pleaded with Bishop Ragosta who had been appointed Apostolic Administrator of the diocese, not to lose this precious priest. Bishop Ragosta called Fr. Justin and offered him the parish with permission to start the community life with his disciples.

Fr. Justin had already matured the principle that later he

would express in the booklet *Toward the Ultimate Goal: "Whatever happens to me, against my will, or without the cooperation of my will, is God's will for me."*

He tells us how he lived this experience of finding himself unexpectedly immersed in the parish ministry, when up to that moment he was sure that God expected him to dedicate all his life to the service of vocation: "O Lord, do I love you more than so many hearts that you constitute me as their pastor? Certainly from now on I must love you more than all of them! Maybe, I would still love too little because they all love you too little.

Grant me, Lord, that I may love you more than all of them, in a superior level, even if all were to love you, as you want to be loved by every one of them! Why? Because they must be fed with charity, since charity is the only life of the souls, that is you, divine charity!

On that day through the angel of the church of Pozzuoli you will give me the ring of your love, of your nuptials with my soul! You have prepared it with the oblations of so many souls, your daughters and my parishioners. Well let it be truly, finally our nuptials, O love, the yearned for nuptials. Than I shall start my public life, in my thirtieth year of my life! Only in this like yours! Forgiveness and indulgence, O Lord! Then I shall be more yours, and you shall be more mine. It is a heavy cross that the angels and the souls are presenting to me. I cannot refuse it: You make me embrace it smilingly, willingly, goodbye remains of freedom! It will be



A tribute to the victims of World War II

for my wellbeing, may it be also for the wellbeing of many others. My hands are shaking beneath the nails, and my head is shaking under the thorns.”¹

On September 20, 1920, seventh anniversary of his priestly ordination, he was installed as pastor. In his homily he delineated his pastoral program commenting Jesus’ words: *The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve.*

He started his pastoral work immediately continuing the services and activities that were being offered and added new ones. He perfected and expanded the catechetical program that he was directing already in the parish for several years. He intensified the ministry of the Word of God preaching everyday, morning and evening. He introduced the apostleship of prayer and most effectively inculcated daily communion. For the major celebrations of the liturgical year and for the annual parish mission, he always invited missionaries of various religious orders. Whenever other priests or missionaries were preaching in the parish, he was always present with the people and attentive listener. The parish mission of 1926 was preached by the Redemptorists; Fr. Michael Panades, the director of the mission, became his spiritual director, counselor and friend until death.

Fr. Justin started the apostolate of the families; sanctified and blessed many marriages of couples that during the

¹ Opere, Vol. X p. 59.

war and in the immediate after war were living together without being married. He understood well that the family is the first and most effective cell of society and of the Church. Solidarity and stability of the family are the thermometer of social and religious life.



Procession of St. George

The parish ministry did not distract him from his boys and from the foundation. The parish became the springboard for the Vocationary; it opened its doors right in the parish house on October 18, 1920, after less than a month from his installation as pastor. Fr. Justin created between the parish and Vocationary such a symbiosis that the two entities always cultivated a relationship of mutual nourishment and growth, not subtracting from each other, but complementing each other.

The aspirants of the Vocationary soon became the Levites of the sanctuary, the animators of the liturgies, the catechists and faithful messengers of the pastor-founder. Also the diocesan priests that joined Fr. Justin for the work of the Vocationary became collaborators, always available for confessions, celebration of the sacraments, preaching the word of God and visiting the sick.

The fervor that permeated the Vocationary soon spread throughout the entire parish. Since the occupants of the Vocationary used to get up at 4:00 a.m. every morning, Fr. Justin introduced in the parish the celebration of the Holy Mass at 4:30 a.m., so that the farmers and those who were working in Naples had the opportunity of participating in the Mass and receiving Jesus-Eucharist before going to work. To get an idea of the fervor that reigned in the parish it is sufficient to think that in a town like Pianura, which at the time counted seven thousand people, at least one thousand of them were daily communicants. Every morning a priest brought Holy Communion to the sick through the entire town. Once a month Holy Communion was brought to the sick solemnly in form of procession.

Fr. Justin restructured and had re-painted the sanctuary and the main nave of the Church embellishing the church with the beautiful paintings that still adorn it today. He also had restructured the statue of St. George, very dear to him and to all the faithful. Intensified the assistance to the poor, often taking food from the Vocationary to feed needy parishioners.

Preoccupied with not being able to dedicate to the faithful all the time and assistance needed to accompany them on the journey to holiness, at least five times, Fr. Justin pleaded with Bishop Castaldo to accept his resignations. His resignations were never accepted. The pastoral assistance to the faithful, the celebration of the sacraments and the administration of the parish were delegated to parochial vicars.

Fr. Justin celebrated the Sunday Mass and preached morning and evenings during Advent and Christmas time, Lent and Easter time, as well as during the months of May, June and October. He never missed the feast of the patron saint, St. George, and the solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ that he always wanted more solemn than that of the patron saint. Even though from 1942 until his death he resided in the Vocationary, he was always available for his parishioners that turned to him for spiritual guidance, counseling or for a variety of other needs.

He knew one by one his parishioners and their families. In addition to being confidant and spiritual director for many of them, often through acquaintances, friends and benefactors succeeded in finding work and housing, medical and legal assistance for the needy. Every parishioner felt that he or she was the favorite, or the beloved of the pastor. Even today, those who remember him personally, and



*Fr. Justin Distributing
Holy Communion*

the many who have known him only through their families, brag about a special rapport with Blessed Justin. This closeness of the parishioners with their pastor was manifested especially in case of serious illness in the family; everyone wanted him at the bed of the sick relative. Only God knows how many hundreds or thousands were miraculously healed, thanks to the prayers and intercession of the pastor. Many still today declare of having been treated princely by priests, doctors, lawyers, politicians and office workers when they presented themselves as acquaintances, friends or parishioners of Fr. Justin.

The people of Pianura expressed its collective closeness to Fr. Justin on April 14, feast – at the time - of his patron saint, St. Justin, apologist, philosopher and Martyr. The feast day of the pastor became a popular feast. The night before, there was a long vigil for the confessions of men; most of them knew that their going to confession and receiving communion was the only and most expected gift they could offer to Fr. Justin. In the morning there was the solemn celebration of the Mass and in the evening the people escorted him in a procession like parade from the Vocationary to the parish church, where he would greet and bless the people.

As pastor, Fr. Justin always made sure to have an abundance and variety of confessors available for his parishioners; this preoccupation appears clearly from the many letters to the Bishop and Vicar General. Since he used to go to confession every day, and for a while even twice a day, he never ceased to urge and recommend frequent confession

not only to the members of his religious family, but also to all his parishioners. He believed and taught that the sacrament of reconciliation not only obtains the forgiveness of sins and the increase of grace, but also that *"To each sacramental absolution is infallibly connected an increase of faith."*

More than ever, the people of Pianura expressed its veneration and love for the saintly pastor in occasion of his death and funerals. The people insisted to have his body exposed for three days in the parish church and it was an uninterrupted procession of people who wanted to see and touch for the last time their beloved shepherd.

His funerals with the clamor of the people became spontaneously a triumphant and touching procession for all the streets of Pianura; the people spontaneously adorned their balconies and windows with their best tapestry, embroideries and blankets, as they used to do for the procession of Corpus Christi. As the body was passing by, flowers, like a heavy rain were flowing down from all the balconies and windows as thousands of faithful that followed the body mixed their prayers with their tears.

A similar manifestation of love and veneration was repeated on April 14, 1956, when his body was translated from the cemetery of Pianura to the Chapel of the Vocationary, where it rested until his beatification. His duty as pastor kept him always bound to the diocese of Pozzuoli and most of all to his Pianura where he spent all his life, except the seminary years, the military service, and the period he

stayed in Mercato Cilento during the heavy bombardment over Naples during World War II. During the war, while in Mercato Cilento he took care of the formation of the Vocationist students, wrote the two big volumes of *Rules and Constitutions, Let us Make Man* and completed the two big volumes of the *Devotional*.

CHAPTER 11

Physical and Moral Sufferings

It is common belief that sickness, tribulations and persecutions are the seal and proof of all virtues. Blessed Justin's life has been a continuous and abundant flood of physical sickness, humiliations, tribulations, oppositions and persecutions.

In the first part of Justin's life there were only physical sufferings, in the second part of his life overabounded moral sufferings. Poor physical condition has been a lifelong companion of his earthly existence and certainly hastened his death. At birth he was so small and frail that family and friends doubted his survival.

We find a vision, or a theology of sufferings, in Fr. Justin's *Book of the Soul*: "Suffering in life is any temporal or partial privation of God; it is the immediate effect of any estrangement, deviation, separation of the soul from the Lord. The soul departs and detaches herself from God. God gets away and detaches himself from me: This is the offense of God, and my suffering.

Pain compels the soul to cry out to him, to turn to him, to

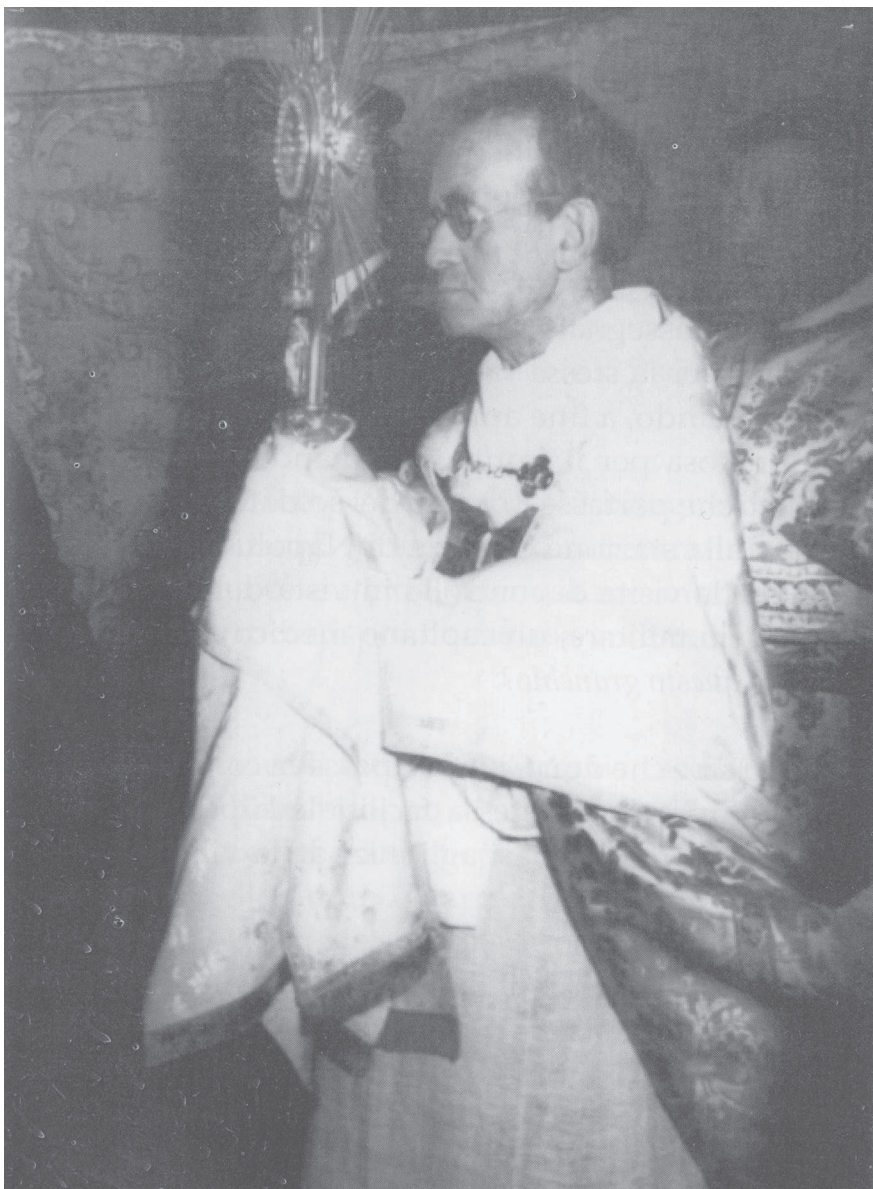
get closer to him, to want him. He immediately occurs, all merciful. You know what I want from you - he tells me in the psalm – call me when you are in pain – I will heal you, and you will be grateful in love.”¹

When Justin was only three months old he had an allergic reaction to his mother’s milk, and from then on he never drank milk nor ate any milk derivate. His physical constitution was always frail and weak. When Mrs. Russolillo asked Baron Zambaglione for financial help to pay the seminary tuition, and as a convincing argument she added that on account of his poor health Justin couldn’t possibly work in construction, like his father, she got this answer: *If he cannot be a bricklayer, let him be a shoemaker!*

Even in the seminary of Pozzuoli he had health problems. Father Sepe left us his testimony of a fainting spell of the little Justin during his first year in the seminary. At the end of his first seminary year, he went back home sick; aunt Michelina often accompanied him to the outskirts of the town so that he could breath cleaner and healthier air. During one of these outings they met a Franciscan Fray, who prophesized: You will suffer a lot up to age fifty-five, but you will do great things for the Church. Aunt Michelina shared the memory of this episode with the first aspirants of the Vocationary.

When a seminarian, he got sick of bronchitis and pneumonia, and it was feared that it was tuberculosis, the su-

¹ *Opere*, Vol. XII, p. 351.



Procession of Corpus Christi, June 6, 1955

periors rather than sending him home, exceptionally, assigned him a private room. On account of his poor health, as a newly ordained priest, the bishop sent him back home from the seminary where he had been assigned to serve as prefect. He was declared unable to serve in the army on account of his excessive frailty.

After having been drafted during World War I and assigned to serve in the health care department, he was dismissed for the same reason. He was so weak and sickly that, when at the end of April 1918 he departed from the barracks of Naples for the front, his commander paid a street boy to carry his backpack from the barracks to the train station. When he went for the medical check-up in view of the dismissal from military service, a medical captain exclaimed: *Who drafted this crab?*

We can say that Fr. Justin's life was a continuous and easy going back and forth from one health crisis to another. During the 1922 winter he had an acute crisis. One evening, after night prayer, while the students were going to sleep, Fr. Justin felt sick and withdrew to his room. Two of the aspirants that were sleeping in the next room, heard some loud lamentations; alarmed they ran to his door, called and not getting any answer forced the door and found him fainted on the floor. Michele Fontana, a fourteen-year-old boy, lifted him in his arms as if it were a feather, placed him on the bed and woke up the community.

Fr. Sepe invited the boys to pray that the Lord would not

leave them orphaned and started the Litany of the Saints. They called his mother; she came running and soon became aware of what had happened and whispered: My son, you must eat, you need to nurture yourself, dear son! The crisis had been caused by excessive fasting and over work.

As time went by, he did not need more this form of physical mortifications; they came freely and abundantly through bitter disillusion and pains caused by poisonous complaints, incomprehension and lack of correspondence to vocation on the part of his aspirants.

Another serious crisis caused by cardiac arrhythmia showed up in 1931. He was forced by the doctors to stay for a while in the shore town of Baia, and remained there, as guest of Vocationist Sisters for several months. The thoughtful care of the Sisters and the sea air helped his recovery. Every crisis caused consternation and panic in the Congregation, in the family and among the faithful of Pianura, even though he had several times suggested not to be alarmed, because he would not die before the congregation would be well established.

One night Brother Salvatore Ricciardi was awakened by the smoke and an acrid smell of burning. He got up quickly to inspect the house and immediately understood that the smoke was coming from the room of the founder. He forced the door and saw the bed on fire and the founder sleeping on it. The fire had burned the mattress, blankets, sheets and also part of his pajamas, but his body had not been touched!

The bad smell of burned mattress infested the house for several days.

A malfunctioning electric heater caused the fire. Confused and mortified for what had happened, Fr. Justin only murmured: Lord, have mercy! How much damage I have caused! Alarmed by the fire and smoke someone ran to ring the parish bell, as it was usually done to call for help in case of fire - needless to say - at the time there were no firemen. At the toll of the bells many people came to help and remained for a Mass of thanksgiving. The Vocationist Sisters jealously conserved the remains of the burned mattress and personal clothing, and throughout the years they became precious relics for the devotees that kept asking for them to obtain graces, miracles and protection in time of need.

In 1936 he had the worst crisis of his entire life; he received the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and the solemn Viaticum. Several hints indicate that Fr. Justin had the exchange of heart with Jesus on Christmas day of 1936. Even this crisis was overcome, and during the first Mass he celebrated for the community after his recuperation, he started the homily recalling the example of king Hezekiah, who on his deathbed with sighs and tears obtained a twenty year extension of his life. All thought it was a mistake (Hezekiah obtained an extension of fifteen years of life), but the facts have proved Fr. Justin correct, who prophetically had announced his death, which occurred exactly twenty years later.

While facing one sickness after another, he never gave

up; kept constant his pace of work, prayer and penance, taking the natural remedies that seemed more effective. As a young priest he was invited to take part in a funeral procession (at his time the number of priests or seminarists that participated at a funeral was considered a sign of the socio-economic status of the deceased) most politely he declined the invitation because he was not feeling well. A few minutes later he was called to assist a dying person. Without hesitating one moment, immediately he went to the house of the dying person. He did not pay attention to his mother's protestations: *My son, you have just refused to go to a funeral and now you run to the house of a dying person!* With his usual calm and without wasting any time he said: *Mother, here is not question of earning a couple of coins; here is question of saving a soul!*



Picture of Fr. Justin affected by furunculosis

During the last years of his life he was afflicted by many attacks of heart problems and by the aggravation of an annoying furunculosis, which lasted over two years. He always asked the Lord to let him do his purgatory here on earth; the Lord granted his request by blessing him what in Naples was commonly known and called *the fire of Saint Anthony*, i.e., Herpes Zoster; this, for the inadequate hygiene, for the dust of Pianura and continuous sweat caused by the summer heat, haunted him for a couple of years, until the end. This sickness in the last couple of years, made it impossible for him to wear the white roman collar, which was replaced by a white handkerchief. Only, at the end of his life, a galloping leukemia was able to keep him in bed for five days before his holy death.

The spirit dominated his flesh that could not resist to the power of his will. For himself and for the members of his Congregation he set these norms: Every sick member of our community must consider himself and be considered by the others as a truly brother-treasure ... treasure for the entire community, treasure for the people in whose midst we live... treasure for the apostleship of suffering in union with Jesus Crucified. In this sense (and not only in this sense) Fr. Justin has truly been a brother-treasure.

Physical sickness weakened his body and his health for sixty-four years, but did not prostrate him, nor did it halt his ascension to holiness. His attitude and feelings about sickness are well expressed in a letter he wrote to his aunt Joann: "Your interior status is very apt to the purification of

the past, to the sanctification of the present and to the glory of eternity. If you find yourself on the cross do not try to come down from it before death and resurrection.”²

Fr. Justin lived all his life on the cross and his agonies used to last seven years. Physical sickness would not have consumed his life so fast without moral sufferings. When physical and moral sufferings affected only his person he tolerated them and easily overcame them too. When they affected the Congregation he sighed and groaned: *my life is sorrowful even unto death!*

In a memorandum directed to the Congregation for the Religious he expressed his interior agony saying: *All we, Vocationists live in the most grievous affliction... in a continuous agony...* As Jesus sweated blood in the Garden of Olives seeing the sins of all humanity, of all centuries, maybe, Fr. Justin suffered seeing all the crosses, humiliations, pruning and persecutions of his Congregation. Only so, we can understand and explain what he wrote in Spirit of Prayer in 1931 before the real big trials.

“O my God and my all, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, before you, at your knees which I embrace, in your hands which I kiss, I feel like crying, while internally I consume myself.

I am afraid, I understand, that they are not tears for supernatural reasons; I do not believe that you despise me, since I am your creature, and, if I cry, it only means that I am in dire need.

² Opere, vol. XIX, p. 211.

Now I cry, you know it, because I feel so lonely in this world, without having anyone totally for me, without being myself totally for anyone, and a cold, like that of death, closes my heart to its life: to love.

If this displeases you, my Lord, grant that I may feel you present in my entire being, and, that I may sense that you are the grand-all for me, as I am the small-all for you! You have made me what I am for you alone!

Now, I cry, you know it, because I feel so poor in any way, full of obligations, common needs, and I cannot find any resources, I feel weak, and the pressure is mounting on every side.

If this displeases you, my Lord, grant that I may find strength in the infinite resources of your infinite strength; grant that I may attain infinite wealth from your divine providence, internally in faith, externally in charity.

Now, I cry, you know it, because I feel tired, so tired, and I see before my eyes all my burdensome duties and my serious responsibilities, and one labor follows another, one war follows another war.

Now, I cry, you know it, because I feel without protection, without guarantee of success, under the apprehension of imminent disaster, under the cloud of total failure.

Now I cry, you know it, 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.”³

³ Russolillo, *Spirit of Prayer*, Voc. Editions, Newark, NJ 1996, p. 223-4.

Is it the dark night, a profound spiritual dryness or a true vision of future evils? When these words were written, the difficulties with the bishop of Pozzuoli concerning the disposability of the Vocationist priests, the removal from the diocese and the peregrination through the dioceses of Naples and of Vallo della Lucania were heading toward a happy ending.

When in 1934 the Congregation of the religious emanated the slow death sentence for the Vocationist Fathers with the prohibition to admit any candidate to postulancy, novitiate and profession, Fr. Justin suffered the agony of a father that sees his children condemned to die without being able to do anything to help them.

When his young philosophy students were forced to attend the episcopal lyceum of Pozzuoli, he suffered the agony of a father that sees his children condemned to dispersion. When he was deprived of his authority in the Congregation and his creature entrusted to an Apostolic Visitor that did not know nor understand anything of his spirit and charisma he felt like Daniel in the lions' den. When the Congregation at the edge of the precipice for the economic collapse, and he again ousted from the government of the Congregation for the mistakes of others he must have felt smashed and thrown away.

Every pain was considered a gift of God and an opportunity to unite himself more closely to God. "In the suffering I feel myself pushed to the Father: Father, My Father! God of

every consolation! So I experience him. He denies nothing. Why fear? The Father will be displeased if you are saddened by misunderstandings, ingratitude, financial hardships, betrayals and so on..."⁴

While his nature moaned and cried, the spirit continued to ascend always-higher finding refuge in the bosom of the Father, in the heart of the Son and in the embrace of the Holy Spirit.

"Every physical or moral pain is a tearing apart and expanding of the boundaries of the present capacity for a greater capacity to receive from the Father."⁵

He was tried as gold in the furnace, and his spirit came out more resplendent and glorious. If in the midst of so many trials his weak heart did not stop, if his crushed spirit did not revolt, it was a miracle of divine grace. He kept immutable his inner peace, accepted all the trials as God's will; in the midst of so many adversities kept growing admirably in holiness and dedicating himself with more stamina to the work of apostolate.

Teresa Musco (1943-1976) virgin, mystic, stigmatized and contemporary of Fr. Justin, confided to Fr. Michele Colaguo-ri, SDV that our Blessed had the inner stigmata, i.e. inter-

⁴ Martino, *Fatti Santo*, Edizioni Vocazioniste, Napoli 1982, p. 48.

⁵ *Opere*, Vol. XI, p. 148.

nal and not visible. This might help us understand some of the atrocious pains referred in his writings, especially in the *Book of the Soul*. Reading the *Book of the Soul* we see that every year his health used to deteriorate more during Lent and Holy week; more than once he says that he feels the passion of Christ in his flesh. Fr. Justin himself may have confirmed this internal phenomenon, when answering a personal question asked by Fr. Francesco Sepe, said: *If you want to know my life, read the life of Catherine Emmerick. She is my sister; my life is a replica of hers.*

Even in *Let Us Make Man*, Blessed Catherine Emmerick is praised and thanked as his sister: “Oh! May be eternally



*Painting of Fr. Justin at the Shrine of O. L. of Divine Vocations
in Florham Park, NJ.*

blessed the moment in which I believed in the love of God! Blessed forever you, servants of God, who brought to me the good news of the love of God and induced me to accept it. O my good father Frederick William Faber, O my good mother Theresa of Avila, O my good sister Catherine Emmerick!”⁶

These words of Fr. Justin seem to give credit to the statement of Teresa Musco and re-state that fact that he has truly lived in his life all the passion and death of Christ in a mystical form.



Emblem of the Society of Divine Vocations

⁶ Russolillo, *Let Us Make Man*, Voc. Ed. Florham Park, 2016, n. 772

CHAPTER 12

Spirituality

What most distinguishes or differentiates one religious order from another are the charisma and the spirituality. Charisma and spirituality go hand in hand; they must enrich and complete each other. The Justinian spirituality is essentially an ascensional spirituality. I like to synthesize his spirituality in four little words that can be easily memorized: *Always more, always better, always forward, always upward.*

Principle, beginning, basis and goal of the Vocationist spirituality are the creating words of God: *Let us make man in our own image and likeness.* “O divine creating word, you are my starting point, you will also be ultimate destination”.¹

These words express the greatness and dignity of the human being, his elevation to God, at the very moment of his creation, and his ultimate goal. All my ascetical effort consists in joining God and with him work at making myself an image always more perfect, always more like God Trinity. The ascetical effort of transforming my own “I” in an ever-

¹ Russolillo, *Let us Make Man*, Voc. Ed. Florham Park, 2016, p. 44.

more perfect and detailed image of God Trinity becomes a synonym of ascensional journey on the footsteps of Christ. This journey is constantly made easier and more pleasant by the vision and foretaste of the goal.

Saint John of the Cross guides the soul to ascend Mount Carmel, the saints have always invited us to the mountains of the divine perfections: Blessed Justin invites us to follow Jesus to the mountain of the ascension to the Father, to his Father and our Father, and to enjoy divine union.

In the formula of the consecration for the eighth day of the Epiphany indicates the full meaning of this journey to the mountain of the ascension:

- a) Pastoral mission of the Church;
- b) Re-assurance of Christ's continued presence in our midst, in an ever greater intimacy, in an ever-higher reality;
- c) Our mission as continuers of Jesus' mission, with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, without discouragement and presumption;
- d) Continuous formation for an ever-more intimate union.

"Come! Let us ascend to the mountain of the Lord! He will teach us his ways and we shall walk on his pathways! Amongst the mountains of the Lord, I see in a special way the mountain of the ascension. From there I see marvelously shine my Lord, the mission he entrusts to me, the model he points out for me, the itinerary that he delineates, the



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program he grants me to accomplish and the means of my sanctification.

Come! Let us climb to the mountain of the ascension of the Lord and he will teach us his ways. He will give us and communicate to us his powers, he will entrust to us his work, he will enrapture us in his glory-ascension."²

Fr. Justin did not want to create a new spirituality. Freely and generously he takes from the various fonts of spirituality recognized and approved by the Church throughout the centuries. In the Vocationist spirituality we can easily identify elements of the asceticism of St. Basil, St. Augustine, St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic of Guzman, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Theresa of Jesus, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis of Sales, St. Louis Grignon de Montfort, St. Alphonsus De Liguori, St. John Bosco, Fr. William F. Faber and many others.

Fr. Justin's genius consists most of all in the fact that he was able to take the cream of the teachings of the masters of spirituality, to make marvelous synthesis of them, and then use them as precious mosaic tiles to build his spirituality. Fr. Justin condensed the essential elements of his spirituality in the book *Ascension*. The principles that he has experienced and lived and found effective are the ones he has handed down to his religious families and to all those who want to reach the highest peaks of holiness.

²Russolillo, *Ascension*, art. 497.

The starting point of the Justinian asceticism is: *Let us make man*. This for Fr. Justin means: let us make him a relation of love because we are a relation of love. To be the image and likeness of God means to be a relation of love because the Trinity is a relation of love. So he concludes: *"I exist only to be a relation of love with the Trinity. No one else is nor can ever be this relationship of love that I am. I am unique; I am the only one in my gender."*³

As image and likeness of God man is intrinsically worthy of esteem and love; in as much as he is image of God, man must be saint and perfect in the likeness of the Blessed Trinity. In force of his very creation man is called to holiness. Personal holiness and universal sanctification is the ultimate goal of Fr. Justin's spirituality. In that "Let us make", Fr. Justin sees an invitation from God Trinity to every human being to enter in that "*divine plural*" and consequently cooperate in the work of universal sanctification. Our ascetical journey consists in our cooperation to the creating and sanctifying work of God in us.

As in the work of creation, so also in the work of sanctification God always takes the initiative and asks for our cooperation. Since man was incapable to cooperate in the work of sanctification, the Father sent his Son as unique mediator, who first teaches us the way and after personally accompanies us and prepares us for the coming of the Spirit.

³ Russolillo, *Io sono la Vite e voi I Tralci*, Ed. Ancora, 1969, p. 126.

Fr. Justin affirms that: "In dividing up, so to speak, of the divine good of the mysteries, states and acts of our Lord Jesus Christ, among all persons and religious families, pleasant and delightful places have been given to me. Indeed precious for me is my inheritance ... for me and for us, he is all this in the mystery of the hypostatic union of the human with the divine nature in the person of the Word"⁴ While this mystery is uniquely and exclusively reserved to the person of Jesus, we see in it the great and immense desire of God to be permanently united with man. It expresses the most intimate and the highest form of union of the divine with the human.

Because God wills to be united to the human being, the ultimate goal of Fr. Justin and of the Society of Divine Vocations "is to bring all its members, and through them all souls, to the perfect union with the divine persons."⁵

In order not to lose the vision of this reality to which he was called, playing on similarity of the letter *v* and *u* in the Latin language, after his name he used to add the initials "S.U.D." signifying both *Society of Divine Union* and *Society of Divine Vocations*. Naturally this divine union starts and grows here on earth, and finds its complete enjoyment and fulfillment in heaven.

The union with God consists in our relation of love with

⁴Ascension, art. 5.

⁵ Constitutions art. 2.

him. Since we, human beings are capable of establishing and cultivating only personal relationships (between one person and another), Fr. Justin insists on a personal relation with each divine person, that is, with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For this very reason, the almost totality of his prayers are addressed to: *Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, or, *O my God and my All, Father, Son and Holy Spirit*.

Each one of us must cultivate this relationship *directly, intensely, expressly* ... *"I exist only to be a relation of love with the Trinity. No one else is nor can ever be this relationship of love that I am. I am unique; I am the only one in my gender."* No other consecrated person, no other priest, no other man can be the relation that I am called to be. We say: *Unus Pater, non tres Patres, unus Filius, non tres Filii, unus Spiritus Sanctus, non tres Spiritus Sancti* – One Father, not three Fathers, one Son, not three Sons, one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits; likewise we can also say: *Unus Iustinus, non alii Iustini* – one Justin, not other Justins."⁶

In addition to being personal and exclusive, our relationship with the divine persons must be always progressive, always more intimate. We can relate to God with a relationship of creature, subject, servant, disciple, soldier, friend, brother etc. Fr. Justin, however prefers, encourages and compels us to establish with the Blessed Trinity the relation of soul-daughter, soul-mother and soul-spouse.

⁶ Russolillo, *Io sono la Vite e voi i Tralci*, Ed. Ancora, 1969, p. 126.

The fact that the first books and booklets published by Fr. Justin are all part of a series called *Sponsa Trinitatis – Spouse of the Trinity*, is very meaningful. In the light of his teaching we cannot be satisfied with *the good, the beautiful, the saint*, but we must always tend to *the maximum, to the best, to the highest holiness*. Jesus inviting us to perfection says: *Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*.

The humanity of Christ makes visible the invisible God and helps us to see the image of God in us. Jesus remains the only mediator, the only ring of connection, the only door between God and us. We cannot ascend to the Father, but in Christ and through Christ. We cannot receive the Holy Spirit, but in Christ and through Christ.

Fr. Justin follows the spirituality of St. Theresa that sees and appreciates the humanity of Christ as the link of our union with God, however he prefers to see and talk of it as the “Eucharistic Heart of Jesus”.

Jesus has manifested himself in the human nature, which unfortunately attracts us to what is earthly. Human nature, which makes us limited and successive, must be elevated, spiritualized, sanctified. Human nature (our body) must be transformed in the most powerful ally of the soul in perfecting ever more the image of God in us through the sacraments, the observance of ascetical practices and the acquisition of holy virtues in an ever-more heroic level.

The detailed written spiritual programs for every month

of the year, and spiritual direction have a special importance in this laborious ascension. Fr. Justin presents a great variety of formulas, practices, suggestions and recommendations; from among them everyone can choose the ones that best fit one's needs, so as to keep the eternal newness of the spirit and to prevent monotony and weariness in spiritual matters.

The perfection practiced and achieved by Fr. Justin consists in the imitation of Jesus, which leads to the transformation in Jesus, and to becoming another Jesus. In this process we start with the principle of St. John the Baptist: *He must increase, I must decrease.*

Fr. Justin makes his the principle of the prophet Samuel: *Speak Lord, your servant is listening!* With humble and generous acceptance of God's will, according to the example of the Blessed Mother, he dedicates himself to the service of others, confident that *"I can do all things in him who strengthens me!"* and *"I became all things to all people in order to bring all to the Lord."*

As servants elevated to the status of children and lords of our Lord, we want to be always ready to carry on any mission entrusted to us: *Here I am, Lord, send me,* so that I may be able to say with St. Paul: *I live but it is no longer I, it is Christ who lives in me.*

For Fr. Justin, Jesus is the Emmanuel, the God-with-us. He was born, died, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, and yet remains always with us as Jesus-Church,

Jesus-Gospel, Jesus-Eucharist. That is why we live in the Church, with the Church and for the Church seeing her as the extension of Jesus and his mystical body.

The second person of the Trinity is called Word, because he is the eternal word of the Father's love. This Word is life and generates life, and because of this, we want to read, study and meditate it everyday and memorize it, so as to make our memory the treasure chest of divine words.

Jesus-Eucharist wants to be the real center of our life. Fr. Justin lived on the Eucharist, for the Eucharist and always oriented toward the Eucharist.

We know well that we are the temples of the Holy Spirit. We recognize that the most precious gift is the indwelling of the Most Holy Trinity in us. Yet, in our ascensional journey we always see God the Father with his outstretched hands ahead of us as the goal to which we tend; the Son at our side as teacher and guide that shows us the way, and the Holy Spirit within us as the source of energy that pushes us and gives us the strength to reach the goal. Our life is totally immersed in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit as our Sanctifier. Our relation of cooperation with the Holy Spirit consists most of all in our *docility, fidelity and obedience of love to the divine inspirations*.

The divine inspiration must always be the main object of

our spiritual directions. Blessed Justin made for himself and for his disciples an obligation to register everyday the divine inspirations received. This act was considered an act of mental prayer; because the inspirations are for us the manifestation of divine will, every hour and every moment of our life.

The veneration for the divine inspirations leads us to the veneration and to the service of the divine vocations, because they are the fruits and end-result of divine predilection that invites us to enter in that divine plural, *let us make man in our image and likeness*, and to be cooperators of the Holy Spirit in the work of universal sanctification. Without inspirations there are no vocations; without vocations there are no saints.

Blessed Justin lived, taught and encouraged everyone to live the spousal relationship with the Trinity. He sees this relationship not as a privilege of a few saints, but as the universal vocation, as the highest expression of total, exclusive and perennial love, as the most practical way to live the union with the divine persons. The specificity of Fr. Justin's spirituality must be seen in this espousal relation with the Trinity not only as something possible, but a must for every soul. God's love is by necessity a spousal love, in the sense that it is unique, exclusive, total, unlimited and forever. Consequently the only love that can adequately correspond to the love of God is the spousal love.

All the saints had a special devotion to the Blessed Moth-

er. Fr. Justin joins this chorus and fits in harmoniously. He invokes the Blessed Mother with a variety of titles: *Queen of all saints, mediatrix of all grace, mother of divine love, and Our Lady of Divine Vocations*. He often unites himself to Mary in her *Perpetual Visitation* to the souls and intimately lives the exclusive, Justinian devotion, *Divine Union with Mary*.

Fr. Justin always carried the Rosary Beads visibly, pending from his neck; whenever he was walking, with his right hand, he was either following the decades of the Rosary or holding tightly the Miraculous Medal pending from the rosary beads in lieu of the crucifix.

His devotion or relation with the Lord was lived and visibly expressed in the celebration of the Eucharist, in the sacred hour of meditation (for a long period of time he had a second hour of meditation in the evening), the reading of the Martirology, the community prayers of the Offertory of the Most Precious Blood, the prayers for the Agony of the Lord, Rosary and Eucharistic Benediction, examination of conscience and night prayers with the community and the private prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours.

His days were full of very frequent, private visits and spiritual communions with Jesus Eucharist. He never left the house and never returned to his room without first paying a short visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Every visit was a very intense act of love and union with Jesus; I have personally witnessed it, also Fr. Nicola Martino, Fr. Salvatore Verlezza and many others affirmed the same; these visits took

place often also during the night. The life of communion with the Lord continued in his preaching, every morning and evening, in his spiritual reading and the daily sacramental absolution. It is not surprising that living such an intense spiritual life, from time to time, he would levitate, remaining for a while suspended in mid air, as it has been testified by many of his first followers.

Considering this life of total immersion in the love of God, now I understand the answer he gave me in the evening of November 4, 1954, when timidly I asked him: What sins did these saints, like St. Charles, commit, that they needed to confess every day? *Caputo, Caputo, if one day you will grow, you will understand that even passing five minutes without thinking of the Lord, is sufficient reason to ask for forgiveness!*



Sketch of Fr. Justin in contemplation

CHAPTER 13

The Mystic

In the preceding chapter we have seen and followed Fr. Justin in his ascetical journey. He teaches us that holiness is attained through the ascetical effort of those who really want to achieve that goal, and not through mysticism.

When a person reaches certain ascetical heights, abandoning himself completely to the Lord, he may easily experience mystical episodes. The person who experiences mystical phenomena is called a mystic. Mystical experiences are those occasions, acts or events in which the Lord takes the initiative and intervenes over the creatures and the persons abandon themselves to God's action. I think that it is important to understand that holiness does not consist in these mystical phenomena, but that they usually reveal the sanctity of a person.

After praising the Lord for the mystical favors granted to St. Philip Neri (the dilation of the heart), to St. Francis of Assisi (the Stigmata), to St. Theresa of Avila (the transverberation or wound of love to the heart), to St. Anthony Claret (whose heart became a Eucharistic tabernacle), Fr. Justin pours out his heart to the Lord saying:

"Let no one tell me that I cannot desire or ask for these things, because you have made them known to me as very good and being done by you; you allow me to desire them, certainly not to make me unhappy with a desire that cannot be satisfied.

Give me one of your signs; impress upon me all your signs of love, for my good, so that the infernal enemies may be aware of it and confused by it, seeing that I have found favor with you.

Grant, O Lord, that no one else may ever be aware of it, neither before nor after my death. I am happy if this can be kept secret even in heaven, you can do it in such a way that only you and I know it.

Even better, grant that not even I myself may be aware of it, neither in time nor in eternity, as long as you grant it to me, and I am a greater glory for you. Truly I want to honor you, and I will make every effort to please you! ..."¹

In this dialogue with the Lord it appears clearly that our Blessed did not want to appear or be recognized as a favorite of the Lord, but that he wanted to be one and he wanted all the signs of love. Considering this desire of his that no one may ever know of his mystical experiences, and considering his devotion to the hidden saints that he practiced

¹ Russolillo, *Spirit of Prayer*, Voc. Ed. Newark, 1996, p. 83-4.

and inculcated, many of his friends and devotees have believed that he wanted to be a hidden saint.

Some of the mystical phenomena noticed in his life are:

Introspection of the hearts;

Interior locutions;

Ecstasy;

Clairvoyance;

Visions;

Prophecies;

Healings;

Exchange of the heart.

In the mystical events of his life, Fr. Justin, succeeded in not creating commotion, in not arousing curiosity, and in not drawing much attention.

Introspection of the hearts. Fr. Justin used to see and read the hearts. One day, Fr. Sepe asked him: *Justin I would like to know the essence of a saint, what he really is.* Justin tries to answer and halts, saying: *It is not possible; I do not find adequate words.* Then tell me something else: *I have the impression that you read the hearts. This is true,* he answered. *At times a light beam strikes the person, and in that light I see.*

One day Father Justin was preaching in the Vocational to a group of students, he entered the church, stopped on the altar's step and said: *Should I talk or should I remain silent? Certain things are too sensitive for me and for you.* He decided

and talked: *I want you to know that entering the church, I saw three snakes snarled around the neck of one of you!*²

Interior locutions – in ordinary form these happen through the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, and in extraordinary form through interior locutions; in these interior locutions, Fr. Justin heard the voice loud and clear not through the ears but through his all being. We should consider as interior locutions all those teachings or inspirations registered in quotation marks in his Book of the Soul.

“Then, O my God, were your locutions the ones so many times I rejected, contradicted and attributed to the devil. Forgive me. I thank you eternally for all these words of yours; please, continue to address them to me, O my sweet Lord, O my beloved. Now I understand why you have placed in me so much esteem and love for your words, O divine Word! Please, I beg you, free me from any repugnance and rebellion to your divine guidance. Grant that I may live in the most perfect submission to your authority, to your perennial direction, O my Sweetness!”³

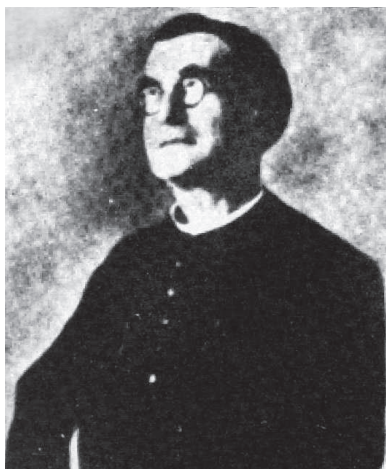
These interior locutions were so clear and so frequent that they became a true spiritual direction, God himself being the spiritual director. This experience of being guided and directed by God never withheld him from consulting one of

² Sepe, *Omaggio all’Amico e Padre, Spiritus Domini*, volume commemorativo, 1956, p. 5-6

³ *Opere*, vol. X, p. 57.

the twelve spiritual directors he had throughout his life.

The visions that Blessed Justin had about the conditions of the soldiers during the war were his most evident miraculous activity (and is the one that created a lot of popularity). Mothers, wives, fathers of families, desperate because they had no news about their dear ones began to consult Fr. Justin about



*Picture of Fr. Justin
in contemplation*

their whereabouts. The stories of these consultations and his answers are numbered in hundreds. On April 28, 1945, he submitted this activity to the discernment of his spiritual Director, Fr. Michele Mazzei of the Redemptorists:

“And now, I have another kind of trouble. Several afflicted people come to ask prayers and consolation etc. I have sensed for several years some internal impulse to give comforting answers, with great confidence, even concerning things far away in space and time, occult, depending on the free will of others.

Many have found exactly what they had heard etc. ... Now, too often people come to make inquiries, consultations etc. with much loss of time, and with frequent doubt on this course of action. It seems to me that the Lord wants this charitable service; but every time I am called I feel a painful

bump, irritation and rebellion of the nerves. Nature would like to be freed from this slavery. The spirit, however, leads me to consider it a spiritual service to souls, and an opportunity for ministry. I simply say '*est, est, no, no – yes, yes, no no*' I never allude to superior enlightenment or gifts, or favors or prayers. For example, '*this military shall return*'. A mother brings me the telegram that her son is dead. I say '*he will return*'; a few days later the mother receives a letter from her son, he is a prisoner and the Red Cross denies his death. Your obedience in the negative would be a relief for me."⁴

Unfortunately, I was not able to locate the answer of Fr. Mazzei; who did not prohibit, but encouraged him to continue this activity; the number of people appealing to him for consolation increased considerably. In the Book of the Soul, on May 19, 1945 Fr. Justin wrote: "Fr. Mazzei approves that service of charity to my neighbor, so I will continue to respond for their consolation, according to my internal impulse."⁵

Fr. Justin was an ecstatic saint. We have the accounts of at least four specific episodes of levitation.

The first young followers of Fr. Justin saw him in ecstasy in the church of St. George of Pianura, while kneeling in prayer on the first step of the main altar. All at once the boys saw him suspend in mid air, between the floor and the

⁴ Opere, Vol. XVIII, p.135.

⁵ Opere, Vol. XI, p. 289.

ceiling of the church. The great excitement of the boys and their noisy exclamation of surprise attracted the attention of Fr. Salvatore Di Fusco (the priest miraculously healed at the birth of Fr. Justin and who later became his confirmation's Godfather), enjoined the boys to be silent and escorted them out of the church. One of those witnesses was George Baiano, who later became Fr. Justin's brother in law marrying Giuseppina Russolillo; in his old age, every time I visited him in Asbury Park, New Jersey, he loved to repeat the story with deep emotion and tears.

As previously mentioned, Msgr. Orlandi left his testimony of having seen the seminarian Justin in ecstasy in his room, while an extraordinary light radiated from the crucifix, at whose feet he was praying. This became known to many seminarians, who often spied on him from the keyhole of the door, hoping to see him levitating. Many Vocationist students affirmed of having seen him ecstatic in his room, and Fr. Salvatore Verlezza testified in the process of beatification of having assisted at some of his ecstasies during his private celebration of the Mass, when on account of his sickness could not celebrate in the parish or with the community. Only God knows how many times such a phenomenon has been repeated in his "one on one" with the Lord.

Fr. Justin had the gift of clairvoyance. Mr. Joseph Simeoli, former seminarian and an old friend of Fr. Justin one day went to see him at the Vocationary. He met Fr. George Lanzaro, who abruptly and impetuously stopped him saying: Oh! Thank God, divine providence is sending you; I

need immediately one hundred fifty thousand lire... it is a question of a few days, let us go quickly to get this money. Mr. Simeoli was confused and embarrassed and protested: I came to see Fr. Justin, and I am not going anywhere unless I see him.

Fr. George escorted him to Fr. Justin and started: *Fr. Justin, I have asked Mr. ... You are wrong* – interrupted Fr. Justin – *If Joe had what you asked, he would have already given it to you.* Mr. Simeoli was thunderstruck by that intuition, and was consoled for that manifestation of esteem.

Mrs. Medea Dell’Ormo, as many other mothers, kept approaching Fr. Justin and asking news of her son Hannibal, an Italian soldier drafted in World War II. Every time she asked, Fr. Justin would answer: “Have no fear, your son will return.” Hannibal did return home in good health and his mother, to show her gratitude to Fr. Justin, was inspired to organize a popular feast to honor the saintly pastor on his feast day, April 14, 1946. This popular feast continued until the year 1956, when his body was transferred from the cemetery of Pianura to the chapel of the Vocationary.

Fr. Francesco Sepe, an old seminary companion and friend, very first priest that joined the Society of Divine Vocations, narrates this story. He got news that his sister had passed away, and immediately went to inform the founder, who at that moment was busy with other people, so he could not give him much attention, but he paused recollected for a few seconds and said: No, don’t worry, it is nothing.

If you want to go home, go, but it is nothing." Fr. Sepe went home and he found his sister alive and well.

Something similar to introspection of heart and clairvoyance is called hierognosis. This is defined as the ability to recognize immediately holiness or evil in any person, place, or thing. This phenomenon transcends the natural order and cannot be explained by natural causes. Blessed Catherine Emmerich, St. Catherine of Siena and St. Frances of Rome had this gift. Fr. Musella and Sr. Woods in *Apostle of Vocations* imply that since Catherine Emmerick, Fr. Justin's twin-soul had it, our Blessed might have had it too. They connect it with Fr. Justin's insistence on sacramentalizing everything, which consists in elevating everything to the realm of sacredness and consequently making it an instrument of sanctification. They quote from *Ascension*:

*"Develop the habit of sacramentalizing everything, lifting them up, through pious symbolism, to supernatural levels, and blessing everything with the sign of the cross, sanctifying them in the name of the Trinity or Holy Family."*⁶

Fr. Justin had visions. A vision well known to all Vocationists is the vision that he had on the mount of the Camaldoli of Naples. One afternoon, accompanied by Fr. Antonio Palmieri, after having completed his prayers and spiritual direction, Fr. Justin was enjoying the stupendous panorama of the gulf of Naples; at certain point while looking toward

⁶ Cf. Musella, S. & Woods A. in *Apostle of Vocations*, Voc. Ed., 2011, Holywell, UK.

Pianura, all excited he kept saying to Fr. Palmieri: Look, see that huge Vocationary, look at all those priests praying the Breviary! Poor Fr. Palmieri did not see anything, A few years later the majestic Vocationary, the Motherhouse of the Vocationist Fathers was built exactly in the area that Fr. Justin was indicating in his vision.

A couple of years before Fr. Justin's death the two old friends were together in the courtyard of the Vocationary and Fr. Sepe asked: *Justin, do you remember the vision of the Vocationary you had from the Camaldoli? No – answered Justin – but I remember the vision I had in Altavilla, from the window of the room they say is mine. I saw the entire plain below full of souls and devils fighting like two armies, one against the other.*

This vision is narrated by Fr. Justin in *Let Us Make Man* in these words:

“Without the eyes of the body, that far away day, (was it on the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi?) you saw from the convent of Altavilla Silentina all mankind and all hell fight an unending battle in the plain of Persano and Paestum⁷...

⁷The convent of St. Francis in Altavilla Silentina, presently novitiate house for the Vocationist Fathers, is situated on the hill of Altavilla that dominates the planes of the ancient Greek colony of Paestum and Persano and golf of Salerno. This vision that may have happened on October 4, 1932, induced Fr. Justin to accept the very difficult pastoral care of those planes: Matinella, Persano, Paestum, Cafasso, Licinella, Cerrelli and Albanella: Many good Vocationists dedicated their lives to evangelize and sanctify the poor peasants living in that area, at the time, infested by malaria.

You saw, under the impetus and the cunning of countless unrestrained demons, souls falling by the thousands, succumbing to tens of thousands, so miserably, so terribly ... you felt, and after so many years you still feel horror and sadness in your lower nature."

After this vision the founder accepted the pastoral care of all the plain of Persano and Paestum, Albanella, Cerrelli and Matinelle, a vast area sparsely populated and infested by malaria at the time. Remembering this vision, Fr. Justin said to Fr. Alberto De Fusco, the first Vocationist assigned to work in the parish of Paestum: *You must pray, pray and the Immaculate will triumph.*

Fr. Justin was doubly a prophet. He is a prophet in the sense that has always unequivocally proclaimed the will of God making it known to his listeners and continues to do so through his writings, He is a prophet also in the sense that he knew and foretold things before they happened.

In one of his visits to Licusati in the province of Salerno the mayor presented his son Aldo to Fr. Justin saying: Fr. Justin this son of mine says that he wants to be a priest. What do you think? Our Blessed looked at him for a moment, placed his hand on the boy's head and said: He will study with us, but he will become a good doctor. So it happened and the young boy became Dr. Aldo Galata.

Ettore Bova testified at the cognitive process that his father, Achille Bova, city clerk of Pianura was suspended from

his job for the disappearance of some money from his office, and he was suspected of having stolen it. Shocked, confused and desperate over this, Mr. Bova and his wife went to see Fr. Justin who sympathetically listened to their story. He reassured them saying: "Don't worry, you will score a smashing victory and you will return to Pianura and to your job on a feast day of the Blessed Mother". There was a trial and my father was found not guilty and re-integrated in his position. From San Marcellino, their native town, they returned to Pianura while the procession of the Blessed Mother was going on, and my father turned to my mother and said: "Look, Josephine! Exactly as Fr. Justin told us."⁸

Msgr. Dario Di Ciesco writes: "At the end of the school year of 1942-43, Domenico Pilla and I went from Mercato Cilento to Pianura to sustain the state exams in Pozzuoli. Fr. Justin welcomed us with joy and affability. At the end of the visit he dismissed us and said to Pilla: *after the exams you will return to your house.*

Pilla protested saying: *Fr. I will be a Vocationist.* And to me said: *Dario, instead will be canon in Venosa*". Dario became a priest and persevered in the Congregation for 10 years. In 1953 he returned from Brazil and joined his diocese of origin and was appointed canon of the Cathedral of Venosa, where he remained until his retirement. Just as Fr. Justin had prophesized.⁹

⁸ Cf. Positio, p. 357.

⁹ Spiritus Domini, Nov. 2016, p. 27.

At the beginning of 1955 Fr. Anella visited Fr. Justin and updated him on the progress of negotiation for the settlement of the financial collapse of the Congregation. Both of them felt deep pain in having to abandon the property in Rome in Viale Cortina D'Ampezzo. After a moment of silence, Fr. Justin raised his head and said: *Don't worry, the Vocationists will return to Rome, and at Cortina D'Ampezzo.* That property today houses the general government of the Society of Divine Vocations, the international house of study and St. Gabriel's Parish.

He had the gift of healing. Fr. Justin was a miracle-worker during his life and after his death; we wonder why they did not cause more commotion among the people. Every person that in one-way or the other directly remembers Fr. Justin is connected with a miracle either received by the person or by a close relative or friend. It is a fact that Fr. Justin worked and continues to work miracles quietly. Visiting the sick, he would enter the house, greet kindly everyone, ask about the condition of the sick person, and then take the hand of the ill person, place his hand on the head of the patient, pray silently, absolve, give communion, anoint, bless and depart. Soon after the sick gets better! There were many cases in the community that students would get sick and Fr. Justin used to visit them, bless them and on his way out he would simply say: *and now get up.* Those who obeyed got better. On one occasion he said: *Many would get better if they would only obey.*

Silvia Russolillo, daughter of Dr. Michael Russolillo, at age

three went into a coma for eight days. The mother informed her brother in law, Fr. Justin, of the situation and asked him to visit her. Justin arrived, greeted the family and concentrated in prayer over the girl; he asked the babe to hold tight in her hand the Miraculous Medal of his rosary beads; the little girl obeyed the command; Fr. Justin blessed her and on his way out asked his sister in law to give her something to eat. As he left the house the little girl sat on her bed and asked for something to eat.

From Fr. Luigi Diodato I heard the story that later was written by Fr. Sepe.¹⁰ An aspirant of the Vocationary of St. George's church, by the name Ceccarelli, desired to go to the terrace of the church; he placed a table and a ladder on the top of the table to get there. The ladder skidded and the poor boy fell down hitting his head to the ground, in the space in front of the bathrooms. The first one to see him was Fr. Diodato, at the time still a student; he informed Fr. Sepe and when Fr. Sepe saw the situation called Fr. Justin and accompanied him to the place of the accident. Without any commotion our Blessed Father goes, sees, kneels down, prays, makes a sign of the cross on the boy and says to him: Come on, say the Hail Mary; and he returned to his room. Soon after, the boy wakes up, as from a deep sleep, in perfect shape. The following day Fr. Sepe says to Fr. Justin: *to me the boy seemed dead*. He simply replied: *In this case, the grace is greater*.

¹⁰ See, Omaggio all'Amico e Padre, Spitus Domini, volume commemorative, 1956, p. 7

Mr. Ettore Bova also testified at the process of beatification that accompanying Fr. Justin, for the blessings of the houses, in a dilapidated farmhouse in the location of Pisani, they found an elderly man who on account of an infection had a festering sore at his knee; it was sickening just to look at it! Fr. Justin knelt down kissed the sore and the man was healed.

Saint Catherine of Siena received the very special privilege of exchanging her heart with the heart of Jesus, in such a way that her heart passed in the bosom of Jesus, and Jesus' heart in hers. This is a sign of love ardently desired, because Fr. Justin wanted to love the Blessed Trinity with the very heart of Jesus. Did he attain it? I am convinced that he did obtain it; this phenomenon happened on Christmas day of 1936. Let us listen to his words.

"Show me your face, let me hear your voice, unveil to me your heart, give me your heart!"¹¹

*Ask and you shall obtain his spirit and his heart for each and everyone. Before an inner current took you to the full abnegation of the personality ... later (last year) to the full possession of the personality in its biggest prerogative, compelling you to ask and want the heart of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in a mystical reality seraphic-apostolic. The next day: Do not fear! To live of that heart, of that spirit we need the temper of that humanity (Jesus)"*¹².

¹¹ Opere, Vol. XI p. 92.

¹² Ibid. p. 95.

As evidence of this exchange of hearts, we can see that during the first months of 1937, in the Book of the Soul, there is a much greater concentration on love and on the person of Jesus. Notwithstanding the continuous increase of atrocious pains of the cross and agony, it becomes evident that in him there is much more peace and serenity with total absence of nightmares and fears. This might be the time of the interior stigmata, because from Lent of 1937 to the end of his life we see that every year these pains become more acute during the Lenten period and reach their peak during Holy week. In this light it is easier to understand his prayer:

“It is your will that I always keep present in my mind the reality of your love with its signs and words, gift and proofs, in order to rekindle and develop its flame in me and in everyone!

In a special way you want me to keep in mind your passion and death, and to live in this permanent reality! The stigmata and the Eucharist constantly remind me of your passion and death.”¹³

¹³ English Devotional, Voc. Ed. 2009, p. 92.

CHAPTER 14

Vow of Charity

Blessed Fr. Justin harmonized and concretized in the virtue of charity the two great yearnings of his life: Love and universal Sanctification. "Holiness is essentially love, that is, being loved by God and loving God. Therefore to become a saint is to love God. To sanctify others is to make others love God. So he who loves the neighbor sanctifies him from the part of God, because to become a saint it is necessary first to be loved by God (personally or through his servants or representatives); and secondly because it helps us to love, since there is no other stimulus to love than the very love we receive."¹

This principle, lived by him, helps us to understand why his vow of charity may be considered the most important driving force of his life and of his ascensional journey to the divine union with the three divine persons.

The priestly ordination of our saint coincided with another event that characterized his entire life; the same day,

¹ Opere, Vol. XII, p. 345.

September 20, 1913 emitted the vow of charity in the third level. Often in his spiritual diary he refers to this vow and every year celebrates its anniversary. This vow acquires a special significance because it was pronounced not only on a personal level, but also as a founding act of the Society of Divine Vocations and as a general program of life for every Vocationist.

On December 19, 1943 the Spirit says to Justin: "I have consecrated you as a personal relation of love with the three divine persons." Later, that same day during the Mass he hears the Lord saying: "I love you, Justin. Justin, I love you!" This tenderness of love from the Father leads him to a deeper understanding that like each divine person is essentially relation, so the human person is also an essential relation.

Nineteen years after he had taken the vow of Charity, Fr. Justin wrote in the Book of the Soul, with an abundance of details about the content, time, place, people and motivation of it. All the particulars that he lists indicate the importance of the act. Here is the entire account as he handwrites it in his spiritual diary:

"I transcribe some spiritual notes to make sure that they do not get lost; I think that they may be very useful.

First formula of the vow of charity emitted September 20, 1913, the morning of my priestly ordination, in the last hall of the first floor, to the right looking at the façade, but to the left if entering the corridor, the hall at North-East where I



Fr. Justin with the first group of students leaving for Brazil



Fr. Justin with Cardinal Lavitrano

was doing my spiritual retreat – I mean the Regional Seminary of Campania – opened only two years before. My Spiritual Director was Fr. Piccirelli, S.J., who examined and approved my vow. This vow was explicitly emitted to start and found the Religious Congregation that then I called *the Servants of the Saints*, and now it is called *of the Divine Vocations*. It was emitted as the first vow of the first member of the Congregation.

J. M. J.

Domine Iesu Christe, Deus meus et Omnia, per Virginem Matrem Tuam et Dominam Pulcrae Dilectionis, in the presence of the Holy Angels Assistants at your Throne, of St. John the Baptist, of St. Joseph, of the Holy Founders and of Fr. Faber, I vow to the most Sacred Heart: To love you with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength.

I intend to bind myself for those divine intentions and with those divine dispositions with which you live as victim in the most Blessed Sacrament, to live:

1. In perfect obliviousness of myself.
2. Totally committed to avoid even the smallest offense against you.
3. In everything doing, praying and suffering whatever I know, moment by moment, to please you the most.
4. Spending all my free time with you in the Blessed Sacrament.
5. Seeing in everyone your adorable person and dealing with them accordingly, as servant of all for your sake.

For the infinite love with which you have willed me all for yourself in the priesthood, and have become all for me, all in me even in this life, as I hope that you will be for me in the other eternally. Amen.

Deacon Justin M. Russolillo

I intended to bind myself under pain of mortal sin in serious matter, and as serious matter, I intended an entire day of voluntary transgressions of all five points of the vow. After a few years, with the permission and consent of my Spiritual Director, Fr. Piccirelli, I unified it reducing it only to the third point that is the maximum level of humility and charity.

Years later, at the Abby of Cava dei Tirreni, where I was for my spiritual exercises, precisely during the Mass of All Saints day, in the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, I renewed my vow of charity. I wrote the following document that now I transcribe here. With my sevenfold vow of charity, I bound myself to do and to suffer, every moment, what I know to be of greater glory for the Blessed Trinity. This vow embraces the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, prayer and mortification, servitude and laboriousness.

The vow of charity was the object of his spiritual direction and of his particular examination of conscience every day to ensure his fidelity. Fr. Justin repeats and specifies once again that the vow of charity was approved, recommended and corrected by Fr. Piccirelli, confirmed by Fr. De Giovanni, reproved by Fr. Panades (we do not know why)

and later simplified by Blessed Schuster. In his spiritual diary, Fr. Justin describes his encounter with Blessed Schuster:

“20-26 September 1925. I am in Rome for the jubilee, accompanying the pilgrims from Pianura.”²

I met Fr. Schuster, the Abbot of St. Paul and I made my confession with him. I asked and he granted me dispensation from all my minor vows, except the religious vows and the great, universal vow of charity. He said to me: ‘who has given everything, has given also the parts’. Without any difficulty he dispensed me from those particular vows (Like: reciting certain prayers, abstaining from coffee).” The Blessed Trinity, pleased with the vow of charity, communicates his very life to the soul: “Pay attention to observe your vow of charity. The Blessed Trinity communicates to your soul the life of grace in every way. *Vivo, iam non ego*”.³

The founder desired that all the Vocationists would bind themselves to the Blessed Trinity with the vow of charity. This desire compels him to often talk about the culture of charity. This desire is clearly expressed in the following annotation in his spiritual diary: 23 September 1933 – Liturgical anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation. A good number of our young brothers and sisters have bound themselves to the Lord with my vow of charity. They are the

² Opere, Vol. X, 93.

³ Opere, Vol. XI, p. 184.

true Vocationists. May they be blessed! Cajazzo, Fraraccio, Giacci, Scandiffio, De Caprio, Di Matteo, Palmieri, Sabatino.⁴

In the memorial holy card for the death of Fr. Palmieri, the first Vocationist that flew to heaven, Fr. Justin wrote: “After a slow and long struggle, he triumphed and was elevated by divine grace to unite himself to the Lord with the sublime vow of charity at the third level, and to consume his life at the service of Vocations.” The Vocationists are encouraged to follow the example of their Father and unite themselves with God through the vow of charity.

⁴ Opere Vol. X, p. 293.

CHAPTER 15

Pastoral Activities

Soon after his priestly ordination the bishop appointed the newly ordained to serve as prefect of discipline in the seminary of Pozzuoli. The appointment was fair and judicious. The bishop could not think of a better-qualified person for the formation of the seminarians. In addition to teaching wisely academic subjects, Fr. Justin, with his distinguished behavior, permeated with wisdom and prudence, was a true model to imitate. Superiors, professors and seminarians were happy and excited for the appointment of Fr. Justin.

The only ones who were greatly disappointed and suffered a lot were the *Fedelissimi* of Pianura, who had been waiting anxiously for his ordination to have him near as their teacher and guide. The jubilation of the seminary community and the agony of the young boys of Pianura were short lived, because his poor health made it necessary for him to be in his native place.

From the letters of Blessed Justin it appears that his spiritual director suggested and insisted that he make known

his poor health to the bishop. During the Spring of 1914 he was transferred to Pianura to serve as Chaplain for the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary; a few months later he was also given the appointment as Rector of the little church of St. Ignatius at Masseria Grande, a section of Pianura.

Both as Chaplain of Holy Rosary and Rector of St. Ignatius he soon became a magnet for the young people of Pianura and many of them used to go to these churches to make their confession with him. At that time the faculty to hear confessions was granted gradually. During the first two years of his priesthood Fr. Justin could hear confessions only in those two small churches, which soon became centers of confluence for confessions and spiritual direction. This appointment facilitated the ministry of the future founder with his groups. The group, *Volunteers of Jesus* became an oratory for the youth and the *Fedelissimi* [those who showed signs of a possible vocation] became an external Vocationary or pre-seminary. The young Chaplain in the church of the Holy Rosary confraternity founded the Pious Union and the Slaves of Mary, who became ardent and precious cooperators for the work of ecclesiastical vocations.

Blessed Justin was an excellent, untiring and penetrating preacher. He preached every day. First he preached to the youth, the catechists and the faithful of Holy Rosary and St. Ignatius churches, and later of St. George parish and other religious communities. Most of the time he used to preach sitting down on the dais of the altar, and in the parish from a small ambo placed almost in the middle of the church to

feel closer with and to the people. While he was preaching he always wanted a lit candle on the altar to remind the preacher and the listeners of the presence of the Holy Spirit, divine inspirer.

He preached, or better, dialogued with the people in a catechetical format, without dramatics, without posture or oratorical tones. He spoke in a convinced and convincing manner with simple words suitable to the audience, enunciating the words clearly and without precipitation.

Often his preaching to the *vocationarians* (aspirants of the Vocationary) and to the people was corroborated and enriched with examples from the bible and the lives of the saints. In his preaching to the people and to his religious communities he developed a theme to its exhaustion, at times, continuing up to two or three weeks. To facilitate the understanding of his listeners, often he started his preaching making a short synthesis of what he had said the day before.

Once, the superior of the formation house noticed that a young professed brother used to disappear during Fr. Justin's preaching and asked him why. With simplicity and spontaneity the young man responded: *Fr. Justin is so convincing that after every talk I feel very guilty for not practicing what he says. So I avoid his preaching in order not to feel guilty!* His words were indeed so convincing that they penetrated the heart of his listeners. Sixty-two years after his death, I still remember some of his teachings and many of the examples he used.

He preached every day, without interruption. Often he preached twice a day, especially during novenas, devotional months, Advent, Lent, Easter time, and spiritual retreats to every class of people.

He was talking from his heart to the heart of the listeners urging them to reciprocate God's love for them. He kept preaching and teaching how to live our personal relationship of love with the Trinity, how to practice and grow in the life of grace, how to practice the virtues, pay attention to the divine inspirations, to live divine union with the Blessed Trinity, applying the various ascetical teachings in our daily life. Those who listened to him had soon the perception that what they were hearing was not only fruit of study. Following the spirit of St. Dominic of Guzman, Blessed Justin shared with his listeners the fruits of his meditations and contemplations. From reading and studying Fr. Justin's notes, I have seen that he had some kind of outline for every talk he gave, but then he spoke off the cuff, and what he said flowed from his heart.

At the end of a week-long retreat the future Fr. Mario De Rosa approached Fr. Justin and unexpectedly asked him: *If we were to dedicate ourselves to profoundly study and meditate on the Blessed Trinity, could we arrive at talking as you do?* His answer came quickly and clearly: *No!* And then all suddenly his face turned red like fire, the well-known vein on his forehead expanded, and almost as someone caught in a crime, exclaimed: *Oh! What you make me say? Study, study!*

Religious communities of priests and sisters, diocesan priests and seminarians loved to attend the annual retreats preached by Fr. Justin. The invitations from bishops, major superiors and founders of new communities were so many that sometimes he preached two retreats simultaneously. One year he preached thirty-six retreats. Several of his retreats were published in individual booklets by Fr. Anella; and others, which were published by Fr. Justin in *Spiritus Domini*, are now part of the *Opera Omnia* published in Italian. Most of these retreats that have been published were notes taken by Fr. Ugo Fraraccio and by some sisters. In 1950, after the interruption caused by World War II, Fr. Justin started again the publication of *Spiritus Domini*; he wrote this note in his diary: *"We restart the publication of Spiritus Domini, I will take over this work too; for this, I will review, brush up and complete the notes taken by the cleric Fraraccio. Why he did not continue?"* After reading this note, I asked Fr. Fraraccio why he did not continue, and I got this answer: *"Soon after my ordination, I was sent to Montesano and did not have the joy of listening or accompanying him in his preaching."*

Another pastoral activity continually exercised from his ordination to his death was the ministry of writing edifying letters and enlightening teachings. In 1927, he gave life to the Vocationist ascetical magazine *Spiritus Domini*. A good part of Fr. Justin writings throughout the years has been published in this periodical. Today, ninety years after its foundation, *Spiritus Domini* continues to spread the charisma and spirit of Blessed Justin.

Fr. Justin wrote a lot. As he himself acknowledged in *Spirit of Prayer*: "They [prayers] are divided into verses in the manner of the psalms, as if they were stanzas. As a matter of fact, they heavily reflect some esthetical laws of the interior rhythm from which ... the human spirit could not or would not want to refrain itself!

(Oh, how beautiful was the act of the one who was born a poet, but in this world he renounced writing poetry, in order to make of his life a poem which could be sung by some beautiful angel in heaven: the only feast of glory, the only court of love!).¹

Since Fr. Justin had a classical-philosophical formation, in writing, he followed the Latin style, with very long sentences, lots of subordinate phrases, an overabundance of adjectives and positioning the words not according to the logical order, but according to the emphasis he wanted to give to them. He uses a lot of exclamations and exclamation marks to express his feelings, emotions and admiration.

Three thousand forty two letters have been published in seven volumes and are part of the precious spiritual and cultural patrimony of the Congregation. Naturally the letters published are only a small part of all he has written. Fr. Justin did not make copies of his letters; these are all letters that the recipients had kept and returned to the Congrega-

¹ Russolillo, *Spirit of Prayer*, Voc. Ed. Newark, NJ, 1996, p. 11-12.

tion at the beginning of the process of beatification. Twenty-six volumes have been published, but still some notes, articles and some letters that were recovered after the publication, expect to be published. While most of his writings are ascetical-mystical, the letters show us Fr. Justin as a practical, prudent, expert and down to earth director, administrator and organizer.

His main works are:

Ascensione - Ascension: ascetical guidelines of spirituality that constitute the basis of the Vocationist spirituality.

Spiritus Orationis – Spirit of Prayer: spiritual elevations that could be considered his spiritual autobiography, along the lines of the Confessions of St Augustine.

Faciamus Hominem – Let us Make Man: profound commentary on the creating words of God, discovering in them the love of God, the elevation, dignity, complexity and the ultimate vocation of the human being.

Per l’Orazione Mentale: Ascetical Meditations on the direct words of God.

Le Relazioni: Lectures presented at various diocesan and inter-diocesan Congresses.

Spirito e Vita: Homilies and commentaries of the words of God.

Cammino Verso l'Unione Sponsale – Journey toward the Spousal Relation: contains two main works, *Toward the Ultimate goal* and *Directory of Holy Virtues*. It presents the ultimate goal as the spousal relation of the soul with God and how to achieve and persevere in it through the practice of virtues.

Il Libro dell'Anima -The Book of the Soul in three volumes contains the inspirations and some mystical experiences from 1913 to 1955. This is a true diary of his intimacy with the Lord, of his physical and moral sufferings, and a clear vision of the heights to which he was called.

Le Lettere - The letters, in seven volumes, are masterpieces of spiritual accompaniments addressed to Vocationist Fathers and Sisters, to bishops, priests and members of other religious families, to the authorities, relatives and friends.

Consacrazioni: one of the pathways to reach Divine Union is that of the consecrations by binding us ever more intimately with the Lord. This is a collection of progressive consecrations that the soul spouse renews every year.

Offertori del Preziosissimo Sangue: This first book published by Fr. Justin contains a multitude of Offerings of the Precious Blood, a typical Vocationist Devotion, which consists in offering or applying the merits of the precious blood for the intentions and needs of individuals and of the whole world.

Constitutions of the Vocationist Fathers and Sisters:

They delineate spirituality, the way of life, formation, goal, practices and ministry of the Vocationist Fathers and Sisters.

Rules and Constitutions of the Society of Divine Vocations: They come in two volumes and describe the life, stages of formation, structure, ascetical practices, ministry, administration and government of the S.D.V.

Devozionale: This is the Prayer book of the Vocationist Congregations; it is divided into three volumes, Ordinary, First Semester and Second Semester. It consists of Spiritual Program and community and private prayers for the 12 months of the year, liturgical cycles and days of the week. Only a small part of these three volumes constitutes the English Devotional.

There are still several outlines of spiritual retreats, letters, articles that have not been published.

The two main prongs of Blessed Justin's pastoral activities have always been vocation ministry and catechesis. The two activities are strictly interconnected, so that it is very hard to differentiate where one ends and the other starts.

When he returned from his military service, as previously mentioned, his first interest was to consolidate the teaching of catechism and the formation of his future aspirants. He kept encouraging those who showed signs of a vocation and often invited young men to consider or discern their vocation.

The young ladies spontaneously started to raffle off some of their embroidery work to raise funds, so that Fr. Justin could keep an ever-larger number of boys in the seminary. When he became aware of this activity he wrote a note to Rachele Marrone, their leader saying: *"The work of the divine vocations does not consist in collecting funds; this is only a very secondary part, for now do not make any publicity of raffles. The work of divine vocations consists especially in a grandiose form of feminine holiness, in Christian women well disposed to be like little mothers to many future priests, and much more numerous saints. I will explain this better when Jesus wills."*²

The priority in the work for vocations had to consist in a saintly style of life, which becomes spring of many other activities.

Since he could not initiate the realization of the foundation of his religious family on account of the contrariety of bishop Zezza, and desiring to unite ever more the souls that were following him, he asked the bishop for the authorization to establish a Pious Union in order to unite and assist the young ladies that followed him, with vocation oriented spirit.

The Pious Union aimed at gathering and forming vocations. He wrote the bylaws and submitted them to the bishop for approval, which was granted on December 13, 1918.

²Opere XIII, p. 53.



*Sister Rachele Marrone
with Maria Russolillo,
Apostle of Universal Sanctification*

On February 1, 1919, at the first vespers of the feast of the Presentation, Fr. Justin admitted to the Pious Union the first group of pious women, who had asked to be admitted. As an external sign of membership they were given a Miraculous Medal that they wore pending from the neck on the chest on a ribbon of the liturgical color of the day.³

The Ceremony was celebrated in the parish church of Pianura. The following day all the members participated in the procession of the purification, singing the hymn that Fr. Justin had written for the occasion:

Mother what a grace Jesus gave me
To the holy temple he called me!
O good Virgin, show me the way
To walk on my good Jesus' pathway.

³ Cf. Positio, vol. II, p. 981.

O sweet Virgin, to the holy temple
Shape me on Jesus' model
The priestly Virgin you are
Universal temple and altar.

O Holy Virgin, form me
As Jesus' holy temple.
O Holy Virgin, offer me
Acceptable host to my Jesus.

Of virgins the sacred band sings
Of angels the white flying shines.
O Mother, open me
To Jesus' most amiable heart.

This first group of young ladies became the founding
group of the Vocationist Sisters.



Bronze statue of Fr. Justin, work of Giulio Mosca, in Florham Park, N.J.

CHAPTER 16

Spiritual Director

Called by God Trinity to guide souls on their spiritual journey to divine union, Fr. Justin graciously offers them his hand and his heart, in which God's love reigns. He prevents any selfish attachment to the souls. In every encounter, he lifts the souls to God. Every contact with a creature becomes an impulse to elevate them to the creator¹.

With unlimited gracefulness, he accompanied the souls across the purificative and illuminative way to finally reach the unitive way and plunge them into divine union with God, the goal of every soul. He feared like the plague, inhibited and comfortable spirituality. As Founder and Spiritual Director, he inculcated to his spiritual children to fly high through the spheres of holiness rejecting all forms of spiritual mediocrity. In his letters, in his conversations and in all circumstances he urged every one saying: I want you to become a great saint!

On the footsteps of St. Ignatius, in his spiritual direction,

¹ Cf. Opere, Vol. IX. p. 39

Fr. Justin often used military language, like siege, sentinel, enemy, battle, attack and occupation to describe the vigilance and methods needed in the daily struggle against evil. To a future Vocationist he wrote: "your soul is in a state of siege, be always on the lookout around the gates, which are the senses, so that the enemy does not capture you suddenly. But keep the holy joy."² He forged the soul in all aspects urging her incessantly to fulfill accurately all her duties.

Fr. Justin loved immensely the souls that entrusted themselves to his guidance. He had for them the tenderness of the Lord. He himself reveals his feelings for the souls God entrusted to him. In his diary, on July 24 1925 he wrote: "*O my God, Oh! How I would like that he were to depend on me for everything, since you have given me to him as spiritual director, and you want him to be yours through me. How I suffer seeing him to direct himself at will or following the common imperfect flow. O my God, how I fear that he might befriend others for causes that are not you and with effects that are not a closer union with you. For this reason, I would love to have him all mine, because I want him to be all yours or all of someone who could make him more totally yours. Yes, I really feel it, let him be of someone else, provided that he may become a greater saint than if he were mine. How I tremble seeing him with others, who might be cause or occasion of imperfections!*"

O My God and my all, how I wish that he were to consecrate himself totally to asceticism, for the fear that other academic disci-

² Opere XV, p. 298.

plines might distract him from you, or might become less fervent in your service! How I suffer to see him attracted to other occupations and studies not related to the science of the saints. O my God, how I would love to be for him in everything father and mother, brother and friend, teacher, director and confessor... but, oh, I would love to be well qualified in everything. I am really happy if someone else can be all this for him, provided this someone else makes him a saint and all yours. How I suffer seeing him a disciple, client, penitent of others, who are not saints, who are not filled with your spirit!"

Certainly Fr. Justin was a guide for many souls, but above all he was a father! His paternal solicitude stretched not only to what pertained to the field of inner direction, but also extended to family and health; he took care of the whole person without neglecting any aspect. He did not exclude anything, body, soul, conscious, unconscious, reason, feeling, will, instinct. Where does this love that brings him to be all things to all men come from? It can only come from the love of God that permeates him totally!

It is this love of God that gives him profound paternal sentiments toward the souls that in his footsteps start their journey on the pathway of the consecrations from one ascension to another, to achieve holiness. For them he used to forget dealings, labor, and preoccupations to dedicate himself totally to them. As an admirable director, he seemed to prefer vigorous and daring souls that he drove to the heroism in the practice of holy virtues.

To the young George Saggiomo he wrote: "The Lord has

united us through a spiritual paternity in me, and through a spiritual filiation in you. Poor you, in my hands! I will not be satisfied with half virtues, I want in you high virtues, those of the saints... I will not give you respite or peace until I see you in paradise, but very high."³ He did not neglect the feeble and sickly lambs that he carried on the shoulders of his charity. Docile to the guidance of the spirit in directing the souls he combined sweetness and tenderness with a dynamism that often is overlooked. He was compelled by a jealous desire of perfection in his trainees, moved by the aspiration of keeping every spiritual slowdown far away from their souls.

He loved to be spiritual director for the Vocationist priests and students. He was pleased whenever he was asked to be spiritual director and did not easily leave those he directed off the hook. When someone dozed and neglected his duty of spiritual direction, he would take the initiative and solicit a meeting. To a young confrere he wrote. "It seems that this is the first time that you make me and call me your spiritual director. He who wants to really do spiritual direction must agree to do it regularly according to the guidelines of our Directory. If you want to do it seriously, read again the chapter and the section that talks about it, and follow faithfully those norms."⁴ To Fr. Giannone he wrote: "If you were to show me your book of the soul as spiritual director,

³ Opere, Vol. XV, p. 307.

⁴ Opere, Vol. XIII n. 188.



Fr. Justin with nursery school children, April 14, 1955

I would love you much more, because I am sure that you would be much better.”⁵

Who could have discovered, on his face always serene, in his smile always very sweet, the interior torment, the martyrdom of his love never completely satisfied to bring all souls to consecrate themselves to love? Meekness was the characteristic feature of the spiritual formation of Fr. Justin. With meekness he overpowered the sins and the faults of his interlocutors and conquered souls to God communicating to them something of his Trinitarian love.

⁵ *Opere*, vol. XIV n. 898.

He did not condemn the sinner, but consoled and reanimated him, being aware of the sufferings and problems of the disciple, without judging him he reassured him of the love of God. He proposed increasingly higher goals, instilling in the person more self-confidence and more hope. All this is possible only if one lives in the knowledge of the fact that the healing power is at work in those who seek advice.

Sweetness in him was fortitude, as he brilliantly wrote in *Ascension*. This is evident in some letters to Fr. Giannone, Fr. Iovine, Fr. Baiano and many others. His sweetness admirably combined with fortitude caused some strong personalities, not easily tamable like Giannone or Iovine, to go back to him like meek lambs, after having been harshly corrected and rebuked. His sweetness, which was not limpness, became the manifestation of faith in the God, who loves man even in his sin.

Fr. Justin had great esteem for all men, because he was able to see the face of God in every human being, and the possible saint even in the most hardened sinner. At this point, it might be opportune to ask what kind of pedagogy was at the basis of his direction that produced so many fruits of holiness. Undoubtedly, foundation-root of his spiritual formation of souls was his Trinitarian love that was, at the same time, font, goal and means, and the unlimited esteem for man created in the image and likeness of God and called to holiness.

Fr. Justin knew how to do humor and had a vein of fine

irony, which sometimes he used to correct without offending. I quote, as an example, a letter written to Fr. Giannone and the Vocationist students of Vallo della Lucania: "It seems to me that Jesus has abdicated in your hands to his judicial power and you with zeal hold his post as judges of men and older people, of the living and the dead, and woe to others if they were to judge and condemn you! Then it would be a duty for all to arise in your favor because you are the most recognized scholars, the most educated, the most modest, the most obedient, the most amiable, the most angelic young people who have ever gladdened the heart of the Lord! So, my dear, learn to obey with simplicity, to suffer in silence with wisdom; always interpret well and always justify your neighbors, and let the Lord take care of you..."⁶

The souls guided by Blessed Justin, regardless of the level of spiritual life they are in, advance sustained by love and urged to grow always more in love, *usque ad summum, usque ad extremum* – *up to the maximum, up to the extreme*. What does love consist of for Blessed Justin? In great desires, in a firm decision of the heart, mind and all faculties, which every hour and moment nourish and sustain our efforts to centering on "*today I want to become a saint*". He leads himself and those he guides to the consciousness and actualization of "*I want, very strongly I want, most intensely I want*".

With charity and determination, he affirms the principle

⁶Opere, Vol. XIV, N. 880.

that he wants to be the rule of life for everybody, where the glory, love and will of God is concerned:

“All that I can do, I must do,
All that I must do, I want to do,
All that I want to do is done!”⁷

All the Justinian spirituality is impregnated with the espousal dimension, which finds its fullness in divine union: It is the goal ever longed for, endpoint tenaciously remembered, constant theme of meditation and preaching to incite everyone to this ideal. “Intimacy of God, intimacy with God! How we miss it and how it wants to be always cultivated! Consider it as the ultimate goal of our vocation and of our Congregation. Consider it as the supreme grace for our family and for each individual.”⁸

He kept the yearning to grow in divine love alive in the souls; this involves persevering and tending to perfection *with all means and in all providential opportunities*. Freedom is an essential component of love. God created us free, knowing that we could abuse this faculty to rebel against him and betray him, because he willed and wills us like him in love. God has everything; he needs nothing. The only thing that God does not have and he wants is our love. He does not have it until we give it to him freely. To make impossible this

⁷ Opere, Vol. IX, n. 29, p. 34.

⁸ Opere, Vol. XIV, n. 909, p. 398.

tremendous possibility of using our freedom to turn against the Lord, Fr. Justin encourages us to consecrate our freedom to God.⁹ Some of his formulas of consecration start with this expression: With the best use I can make of my freedom, I consecrate... Freedom means self-donation out of love.

This is another peculiar characteristic of the spirituality of the Founder. Living as soul spouse, he lives in love and urges us to embark unreservedly on this path because love never says enough. The dryness, the anxieties, the dizziness of heart, the very mistakes we make will serve to grow in divine love provided we confess them, accept and love the holy abjection that comes from them; so we change our lead-like heaviness into gold.

Sentimentalism? No, “acts I want”! It is clear that for Fr. Justin “good sentiments” are nothing, if good effects do not follow them. As all good spiritual teachers, Fr. Justin places as the foundation of spiritual life the death of the self through the practice of Christian virtues. He does not imprison the soul, but offers her wings to take off and fly up to the heaven of heavens. The fundamental test of spiritual progress has been and will continue to be the test of humility; words cannot prove the authenticity of spirituality; the way of life is the eloquent word of the spiritual man.

A key word in the spirituality of Blessed Justin is *divine*

⁹ Cf. Opere, vol. IV, p.45-63.

union. If the soul entrusts herself to his guidance and is docile to his inputs, he will drive her to become soul-spouse of the Trinity. From the beginning, he commits himself to make her know the will of God, which is not found in prayer or in extraordinary happenings, but on the beaten paths of everyday life and small contrariety. How beautiful and practical is his principle: *Everything that is done or said to me without my will is divine will.*

As spiritual director, he formed the souls not to desire the extraordinary, but to live the ordinary in an extraordinary way, reaching the heroism in the practice of virtues. The ordinariness of Fr. Justin's pedagogy contains in itself a goldmine of opportunities that if accepted and lived in the proper sense, represents the most secure way to reach the goal. For this reason, to those who were asking him for extraordinary penances he responded: *We have never seen that anyone has crucified himself. We must accept those moments when others crucify us.* This tells us all the concreteness of this man of God, who with vigor eliminates illusions. At the beginning of the foundation of the Congregation, Monsignor Dell'Isola asked Fr. Justin if he had all the extraordinary signs needed to found a Congregation, he answered: Extraordinary signs, no; but the ordinary ones are all there! The souls formed by Fr. Justin like Blessed Josephine dei Ponti Rossi, the Servant of God Fr. Dolindo Ruotolo, Fr. Dino Barsotti, Mother Giovanna Russolillo faced life with courage, strength and determination, because they knew well that in order to achieve perfection they had to live and fully sanctify the ordinary tasks of daily life.

He strengthened and fortified the souls to sanctify themselves in the fulfillment of their duties and overcoming the difficulties of daily life with serenity and perseverance. He kept warning them to watch from painful returns upon themselves, from changing moods of a fickle will, from the illusions of the inferior part, so that freed from all uselessness, they could remain always united with the Lord by cooperating with his grace, they could arrive at doing always and everywhere his divine will.



*Fr. Justin Addressing Cardinal Pizzardo
at the Vocationist Sisters Chapel*

CHAPTER 17

Two Original Practices¹

Notes

Fr. Justin adopted an original practice: to dialogue, instruct and direct personally his disciples through short written questions and answers. Every night the prefects collected the questions of the students and brought them to Fr. Justin, who on the same paper gave a short answer, consisting, most of the times, of a clarification, observation, a counsel, correction or admonition and returned them to the originators.

Some of these notes are published in the **Letters** to the individual confreres, who had kept some of them. Msgr. Dario Di Ciesco remembers some and has maintained some. Let us see some samples.

1) Question: Today I have talked a little too much dur-

¹ This chapter is taken from an article published in *Spiritus Domini*, My 1965.

ing the time of silence and thus I have disturbed the confreres.

Answer: *A little too much! What does it mean? Even one word is too much in time of silence. God bless you.*

- 2) **Question:** Today I have seriously sinned against the virtue of charity having ridiculed a confrere in the presence of his companions; some of them even joined in. I will try to do some act of gentleness toward him.

Answer: Really bad! Enjoying yourself like the soldiers ridiculing Jesus on the night of his passion.

- 3) **Question:** It seems that my preoccupation for school work does not allow me to fully satisfy my religious duty of piety; as a matter of fact, often, inadvertently during prayers I do not observe liturgical modesty.

Answer: *What does liturgical modesty have to do with your preoccupation for school? Indeed, precisely for your academic needs you should be more pious.*

- 4) **Question:** Today I did not observe segregation and I talked during the meals. As reparation I propose to pray the penitential psalms before going to bed.

Answer: *Specify why you commit some faults. Why did you not observe segregation? If you have a need, ask permission.*

Before Christmas Fr. Justin asked the members of the community to formulate three resolutions, one liturgical – one apostolic – one ascetical, and present them through the evening notes.

Fr. Dario wrote:

- 1) During the liturgical celebration of Christmas I will concentrate on thinking about the sufferings of Jesus, poor and exposed to the severe weather.
- 2) I have a friend who for several years has not been receiving Holy Communion. During the Christmas season I will bring him to the table of the Lord.



*Fr. Justin with Fr. Gaetano Mauro, founder
of P. O. C. R at Montalto Uffugo*

3) I will deprive myself of something that I like.

Answer: *What a shame! They should be great resolutions for the entire life and not for one day. Make one hundred acts of love every day!*

Talking about meditation one day Fr. Justin said: I could excuse someone really tired that falls asleep; it means that he sleeps on Jesus' knees. A few days later it happened to Dario. Seeing him asleep, Fr. Justin clapped his hands to wake him up and asked: Are you sleeping? *On the knees of Jesus!* Answered Dario, with his unbeatable chutzpah.

To Fr. Fraraccio who wrote:

1) *I will sleep without a pillow.*

Fr. Justin answered: *It is healthy for the body.*

2) *I will get used to sleeping with a semi-opened window.*

Fr. Justin added: *It is healthy, and we should get our body used to hardships.*

3) When I am seated I will try not to rest my feet on the floor.

He commented: *It is too hard to do.*

Fr. Raffaele Martino wrote: I made my spiritual exercises with little profit.

Fr. Justin: *And how did you do these spiritual exercises? With which author did you get help for yourself? An excellent book is always necessary.*

At times to stimulate the attention of the students to his exhortations or meditations, at the end of his preaching, Fr. Justin used to ask a question exhorting the seminarians to respond in writing using a small piece of paper. Often, to the ones who responded correctly, he would give a little gift, or a holy card. I remember two of them:

What is the name of the way that leads to hell?

Desired answer: The way that leads to hell is called venial sin.

What is the most necessary virtue?

Expected answer: Faith.

This system of short notes, abundantly used at the beginning of the Congregation has its origin in the manner that Fr. Justin made his spiritual direction both active and passive. We have several samples of this type of direction, which have been confirmed in writing also by Fr. Panades, his spiritual Director: "He wrote as in a column at the left end half of the paper, leaving blank the right side to make it easier for the spiritual director to respond or comment, without having to repeat or remember the question to which he was responding."

Fr. Justin used to ask all those who asked to be directed by him to follow this form of communication: few words, a lot of happenings written on the left column of the paper, leaving the right side for his answers, comments and counsels.

Matter of the Sacrifice

The Matter of the sacrifice is an ascetical practice that Fr. Justin first practiced and then taught to his parishioners and to the members of his religious families. I have learned it directly from his voice and found it to be something extremely helpful; it produces immediate and extraordinary effects in my psychological, social and spiritual life. I never get tired of teaching it and encouraging everyone to practice it.

Sacrifice is the offering to God of something dear and precious to us. Fr. Justin immediately concludes that in order for a sacrifice to be mine, I must sacrifice offering something that belongs to me or is part of me. The Mass is the sacrifice of Jesus because he offers himself to the Father. The Mass is meant to be Jesus' sacrifice and mine. As a matter of fact, during the Mass, the priest addresses the assembly saying: *Pray brothers and sisters that my sacrifice and yours, may be acceptable to God the almighty Father.* The sacrifice cannot be mine if on the paten or in the chalice there is nothing of mine. So it is necessary that, at moment of the preparation of the gifts, something of mine (the matter of the sacrifice) be placed on the paten or in the chalice.

With this practice of the Matter of Sacrifice, Fr. Justin simply suggests that we offer to the Lord placing on the paten the most pleasant or painful, the most beautiful or ugly thing that happened to me the day before. In my daily life when something good or bad happens to me, the first thing that comes to my mind is: could this be my matter of sac-

rifice for tomorrow's Mass? Before each Mass I ask myself: What am I going to place on the paten that is really mine?

In Ascension, Fr. Justin simply wrote: "What will bring even more joy to a fervent Communion is our practice of ... the matter of sacrifice."² Insisting on this practice, he pleads: "Every major superior, frequently and privately should ask individuals what they have prepared to offer as a matter for the sacrifice in the celebration of the Eucharist."³ This last request to the superiors, without saying, points out the obligatoriness of this practice.

This is the best way to thank the good Lord for the wonderful, good things that he pours unto me. It is the easiest way to transform in positive anything bad, ugly or negative that happens to me. Whenever something really painful happens to me, if in lieu of giving free reign to my anger and resentment, I say thank you, Lord, for giving me something that I can offer you in my next Mass, I easily keep my cool, my peace and serenity. Only God knows how many acts of anger, resentments and bitterness, how many bitter arguments and fights have been prevented.

Likewise, when something great, beautiful or pleasant happens to me, if instead of boasting, I say: Thank you Lord, for giving me something to offer you in my next Mass, I be-

² Ascension, art. 675.

³ Ibid. art. 857.

come more humble and grateful. The constant idea of having something to offer to God, helps me to remain tranquil and peaceful, and often enables me to have sentiments and prayers of gratitude toward the offenders. So my detractors, offenders and crucifiers become my real benefactors.

CHAPTER 18

Encounter with the Spouse

From the moment of his conception, man starts his journey toward death. The history of mankind confirms the certitude that death is inescapable; we all must die. The saints teach us that we die the same way we live. For some, death is the scarecrow that saddens and conditions life; for others it is an enemy to be held off; for others still it is *sister death*, and for Blessed Justin it is *the encounter with the spouse*. Three times a day, in our community prayers, he prepared himself to the encounter with the spouse, and had his Vocationists do the same with the prayer: Behold the bridegroom is coming, go out to meet him! Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

In his spiritual life Blessed Justin always combined Christmas with Epiphany, and Easter with Ascension. His entire ascetical journey has been a perennial epiphany and a constant invitation to the souls to follow the risen one to the mountain of the ascension.

I always find touching and appropriate his Christmas wishes: May your life be an eternal Christmas!

Like our risen Lord, Fr. Justin joins the afflicted and dis-

couraged disciples made make their journey back to Emmaus after the death of Jesus. He consoles and sustains them with the divine word. In the verses below we see the mystic who joins the pastor and the visionary poet who gets closer to the sunset:

And we go together,
Toward life's sunset,
Toward the dawn of that life,
Climbing a little hill,
Where waits for us
An inn for the night,
A castle for refuge.



Fr. Justin in conversation with the confreres

He gets close to me,
Because I suffer for him
He joins me conversing
With the brother...
And he starts to talk.

O divine Scripture
By the Lord inspired,
Now by the Lord explained!
Divine presence felt by the soul
Sensed by the heart,
Resented by the flesh!
He starts to walk away.
Stay with us!
Even for you, it is evening out,
In the hearts of men
Unaware of you,
Without a place for you.
Sit at our table...
Break for us the bread,
The breaking of bread
Reveals you and you disappear.¹

At the end of his earthly journey, Blessed Justin synthesizes his life in this way: *"Hominis est preparare animam - It is for man to prepare the soul. Our entire life is preparation to heaven. Who prepares himself best? He who expects a higher good*

¹ Campion, *Poesie e Cantici*, p. 104

with greater anticipation. Let us animate ourselves with the great desires for the supreme good, for the supreme union with God.

Let us harmonize the tension toward the future with concentration on the present, ordaining the highest sanctification of the present to attaining the infinite good in the future.”²

Since his birth, the frailty of Justin did not encourage or anticipate the prospective of a long life. Doctors and neighbors of mamma Giuseppina prognosticated a short life. It is probable that little Justin heard these prognostications and rumors, and that they might have helped him to turn his eyes, his desires and his life to God and to the afterlife.

When he was a child, aunt Michelina used to take him for a walk to the outskirts of the town so that he could breathe clean air. The parents and the aunts always tried to procure healthy food to keep him in good health. As previously mentioned, his poor health almost forced him to be dismissed from the seminary. We can say that Fr. Justin was never in good health; his interior fortitude compensated for his physical frailty.

Jesus cried at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, even though he knew that he was about to call him back to life. He cried to sanctify our sorrow and to help us to comprehend the depth of human sentiments. In the same manner, Fr. Jus-

²Opere, Vol. XII, p. 342.

tin, even though well aware that death is the beginning of a new life, the taking possession of the kingdom prepared for us since the creation of the world, throughout his life he experienced anxieties and lived with the fear of death like all mortal men.

On December 31, 1936 he wrote in his book of the soul: *"After coming out of the claws of bodily death, I feel that I am in a new sphere more distant from the world and its things".*³ Ten days later he wrote again: *"Still sick, and in the domain of the fear of death."*⁴ A week later he added: *"Suffering and the fear of death are preceded by a black melancholy."*⁵

In the spring of 1955 the Vocationists and the faithful of Pianura noticed an extraordinary increase of activities on the part of Fr. Justin. Notwithstanding the fact that the body of the Blessed was totally covered with sores, literally he dragged himself through the courtyards of Pianura distributing catechisms to everybody with the suggestion: *Carry it always with you, as you carry the rosary beads; read it during your free moments. Teach it, kiss it!*

He reserved to himself the Lenten preaching, and that of the months of May and June. Many noticed that on various occasions he had to lean on the altar to sustain himself on

³ Opere Vol. XI, p. 94.

⁴ Ibid. p. 96.

⁵ Ibid. p. 96.

his feet. Nothing and nobody could stop him. The people sensed that something rare and strange was going on. The good parishioners felt that he wanted to propitiate the Most High. Friends and faithful had seen so many crises in the health of the pastor; there had always been highs and lows in his health; the present crisis did not seem different from the previous ones.

In the fall of 1954, the tangible signs of Herpes Zoster, also known as *fire of St. Anthony*, appeared around the neck of Fr. Justin; rash, boils and tearing spread allover the body, even on the head. In June of 1955, his health deteriorated significantly with piercing stomach pains and swelling of the spleen. A strong phlebitis made his every move very difficult. Doctor De Simone his physician and longtime friend insisted that he should be hospitalized, but Fr. Justin resisted and insisted: "*I am fine, I am fine!*" In the beginning of July of that year, he consulted the well-known Doctor Cataldo, so as not to displease his doctor friend.

On June 6, feast of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, in spite of his extreme deterioration he participated to the traditional procession of the Blessed Sacrament and carried the heavy monstrance through the streets of Pianura. The joy of carrying Jesus hid his sufferings, but those who knew him well did notice his superhuman effort. We are tempted to ask ourselves whether Justin carried Jesus or Jesus carried Justin!

We do not know if he was aware of his imminent death.

Fr. Francesco Sepe who was close to Fr. Justin from the first year of seminary to his death was sure that Fr. Justin knew the time of his passing from this earth to heaven and he infers it from the following happenings.

Re-thinking of the prophecy of 1923, when his mattress caught on fire, “we are at half way” said Fr. Justin. At the time Fr. Justin was 32 years old, exactly at half his life! (Fr. Francis at the time was 42 and he died at 81).

In the penultimate visit to Fr. Justin’s room, Fr. Sepe contemplated at length a picture of Young Jesus attached to the wall of his room: “Do you want it? He said: “Take it, take it!” “I was dumbfounded and amazed. He gave it back to me and with insistence.” (To understand this, we must know that Fr. Sepe got that picture from aunt Michelina. Then, Fr. Justin asked him for it, and he held it very dear. Now, since he had to leave it was right to return it to the one to whom it belonged.

Fr. Sepe adds another point to prove that Fr. Justin knew the time of his impending death. He used to celebrate Mass every day for Fr. Justin’s intentions. Punctually at the end of every month the founder made sure that he would receive the offerings for the Masses of that month. The day he was leaving for Mercato Cilento, July 20, 1955, seeing Fr. Sepe, Fr. Justin asked Fr. Castiglione: “Give him the offerings for the Mass intentions of July”. Fr. Sepe kept saying: “*Don’t worry, the month is not over yet and I do not need the money anyway.*” And Fr. Justin insisted: “*Take it. Take it; it may come in handy.*”

Let us still follow Fr. Sepe: *"I had the most convincing sign in my last visit to him. I regret that I did not perceive it then and there. I would have learned from his lips that he was about to leave us. Entering his room, I saw him drowsy, stopped by the door and contemplated his face. He opened his eyes, saw me and smiled, a smile that only the angels can give. I got close to him, picked up his hand and kissed it. To understand this I must explain that every time I tried to kiss his hand very graciously he always withdrew it under his mantle. This time, no; he lifted his hand and allowed me to kiss it with visible complacency on his part. Then he whispered "Thank you" with such suavity that I will never forget!"*

Three years after Fr. Justin's death, Fr. Sepe told us novices that in the 54 years that he had known him, and after 34 years of community life as a Vocationist, it was the first and last time he was able to kiss his hand. Another convincing indication that Justin knew the time of his death was the other prophesy made during his first celebration, after the long and painful crisis he suffered in 1936, when he said that God had compassion for king Hezekiah and extended his life with twenty years!

The penultimate entry in his book of the soul, dated July 7, 1955, indicates his awareness that his life is coming to an end: "I feel heavy and dazed in my head, yet I must preach the retreat. I trust in divine action that will manifest itself more now that nature fails me."⁶

⁶ Opere, Vol. XII, p. 355.

On July 20, accompanied by Fr. Castiglione, his secretary, he left Pianura and went to Altavilla. There he spent some time with the novices and the Sisters. From there he also wrote a letter to his physician, Dr. De Simone telling him that he was having lacerating pains in his stomach. The next day, after the celebration of the Mass, he left for Mercato Cilento, where the fresh and healthy air of the mountains seemed to give him a slight relief.

On July 27 he decided to go to the nearby house of Laureana Cilento to greet the Vocationist students of philosophy and theology who were there for their summer vacations together with the educator, Fr. Antonio Di Pierno. The students welcomed him with great joy and Fr. Justin showed great amiability and was visibly happy to spend some time with them. When saying goodbye, he allowed the sisters, the students and the priests to kiss his hand; a gesture he never allowed before. He must have been aware that this was his last greeting to them!

The morning of the 28th, after the celebration of the Eucharist, he decided to go back to Pianura. On the way, with unusual insistence, he stopped at Cava dei Tirreni, again to give the last greeting and blessing to the priests and sisters of that community. After a couple of hours in Cava dei Tirreni, he restarted his trip to Pianura; however, once in Naples, again he insisted on stopping at the Community of Posilipo, to greet the confreres of that community. The events of the following days confirmed that he really wanted to see those residences, the sisters and confreres that lived in those communities for the last time.

The last entry in his book of the soul seems to be his last farewell to the world and the expression of his conviction and joy of seeing face to face the divine spouse. It is one last exhortation to himself and to us; a true synthesis of his spiritual journey.

“13th, 14th, and 15th of July. Preparation for the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. She is the Virgin of the spiritual ascension to the divine union. The holy mountain is Jesus, as we say in the collect of the Mass of St. Catherine of Alexandria.

Let us ascend to Jesus. Let us follow Jesus! The way is Jesus himself in the holy Gospel, doctrine and examples. The food for the climbing is Jesus-Eucharist. The life is his heart, in the glory of his triumphant love at right hand and in the heart of the Father! Who wants to climb up to that peak?

Let us restart the way every day; every day let us take with us Jesus-Eucharist, Jesus-Gospel. Let us serve Jesus-Church; let us ascend to Jesus-Paradise, every day!

The Blessed Virgin helps us and gives us her example, the fiat [yes] of her heart to Jesus' heart, to the glory, love and will of the Most Holy Trinity.”⁷

The confreres of the motherhouse seeing Fr. Justin so deteriorated started worrying and immediately called his

⁷ Opere, Vol. XII, p. 355.



Tomb of Fr. Justin from 1997 to 2011

brother, Dr. Michael Russolillo and Dr. Cataldo. Both recommended that he immediately be taken to the hospital. Fr. Justin with humility and firm determination asked that he be given all the possible assistance in the religious community. On July 31 a blood test, confirming the diagnosis previously made by Dr. De Simone, showed a grave form of galloping leukemia.

The morning of August 1, Fr. Alberto asked Fr. Justin if he would consent to go to the hospital. The patient responded: *If it is necessary I will go*. Fr. Alberto and Fr. Mancuso hurried to inform Dr. Russolillo that his brother was ready to go to the hospital. Dr. Russolillo, in deep sorrow, simply said: "now it is too late" Fr. Justin is practically dead!"

Aware of the gravity of his clinical condition, Fr. Justin allowed Fr. Castiglione to stay at his side on a chair near his desk. About 2:00 a. m., Fr. Castiglione noticed that Fr. Justin was awake and sitting on his bed, and asked if he needed anything. Blessed Justin answered: "Last night you did not give me the absolution. Do you remember? Please, give me the absolution now".

About 9:00 a.m. of August 2, Fr. Justin said to Fr. Esposito: "Today is the feast of St. Alphonsus, it is the name day of the bishop, please, go and wish a happy feast day to the bishop of Pozzuoli in my name."

Seeing that the situation of the founder kept getting worse, the confreres of the Vocationary informed the Vicar General and the confreres of the various communities. The Vicar General and Fr. Di Pierno arrived in the late afternoon from Rome. Trying to bring him up, Dr. Russolillo gave him a blood transfusion. Brother Frieri tried to distract him with some kind of jokes. Concentrated in prayer the dying father let them do all they wanted and then seemed to lose consciousness. At a certain moment he opened his eyes, looked around and with a faint voice said: "*Why do you continue to torture me? By now, everything is useless.*"

In the little room of the founder were present his sister, Mother Giovanna, Sister Concetta, Sister Angelina, and several priests. Fr. Fraraccio recalls that the last words of Fr. Justin were: "*I bless you all, sons and daughters*". Around six p.m. he entered into agony and did not talk anymore. His breathing became heavier and more strenuous. To alleviate

his pains, Dr. Russolillo gave him an injection, with no visible effect.

At 8:30 p.m. Mother General said to Fr. Fraraccio: "What are you waiting for? Give him the Sacrament of Anointing of the sick. Can't you see that he is waiting for it?" Fr. Fraraccio told me that he tried to get the attention of Fr. Justin, and added: "*I do not think that he heard me! But when I touched his eyes for the anointing he opened them immediately.* It was a spontaneous reaction at being touched. He looked, understood and nodded. I whispered to his ear: *Anointing.* He seemed to smile, to say thank you and closed his eyes. When I opened his hands, I had the impression that he was helping positioning them for the anointing. At the end of the sacred rite I recited aloud the prayer for the dying." Fr. Adinolfi more than once implored: "*Fr. Justin, bless us!*" Since there was no answer, Fr. Thomas placed a crucifix in his hand and moved it in sign of the cross.

At 9:00 p.m. he started to breathe more regularly; it seemed that he was relaxing and resting. His face re-acquired its usual expression of peace, serenity and smile. He died peacefully at 9:10 p.m. on August 2, 1955.

The news of his worsening condition arrived almost simultaneously with the news of his pious death. As the bells of St. George's parish, started to announce his passage to eternity, the whole population of Pianura became mute and was deeply shaken by the news. Instinctively they turned off the radio and closed shops and recreational centers. With a broken heart, deeply touched and confused the reli-

gious and the faithful made their way to the Vocationary in reverent silence.

The Fathers had hardly time to close the gates; they needed the help of the police to control the crowds that were pressing to enter; and all of a sudden in the middle of silence erupted a shout: "*We want to see our pastor.*" This cry kept becoming louder and louder.

The fathers quickly prepared the body and exposed it in the Vocationary's church; men and women, young and old passed visibly moved before the lifeless body and wept as one weeps for a father, a mother, a brother. The Committee of the Festival in honor of St. George called an emergency meeting and decided to cancel the patronal feast, and to spend the money they had collected for the funeral of the beloved pastor.

The morning of August 3 radio, telephones, telegrams and newspapers announced and spread throughout Italy the news of the death of the saintly pastor. Soon, the tide of people coming from various cities and towns of southern Italy, began to flow. The Vocationary's church could not contain the people who wanted to see, touch and pray before his coffin.

The parish church was set up in a hurry for the occasion and in the afternoon of August 3, the body was transported to the parish, where Blessed Justin had been pastor for 35 years. Not even the parish church was sufficient to contain



Photomontage of Fr. Justin with Vocationary

the crowds who wanted to see, pray and contemplate for the last time the saint who had become part of each one of them. With the help of the police they had to set up corridors that practically forced people to a one-way path, without giving a chance to pause in prayer, as they would have liked.

Passing in front of the coffin, people did everything they could to touch the body with handkerchiefs, rosaries, flowers or other objects to be preserved as relics. For two days and two nights the crowds were increasing unabated. Bishops, priests, senators, representatives, civil and military authorities, nuns and lay brothers, noble people, poor and ordinary citizens bowed their heads in front of the coffin and wiped a few tears, showing visibly their love and respect,

meditating once again on the reality that only sanctity lasts forever, and makes a person truly great before God and before men.

Friday afternoon the traffic of the city was completely paralyzed. There was no possibility for a bus or private vehicle to arrive to Pianura. So many had come from far and near for his funeral. Bishop Castaldo, assisted by the entire chapter of Pozzuoli, hundreds of religious and diocesan priests, presided the celebration. Hundreds of policemen controlled the crowds while the open casket was taken in procession through the streets of Pianura. The holy priest dressed as to celebrate Mass, with purple chasuble and chalice in his hands, once again passed to bless his people and his native town.

Was it a funeral or a triumphant procession? Precious tapestries, richly embroidered blankets decorated windows and balconies. A continuous rain of flowers fell on the coffin and there was endless procession, while church bells rang in celebration. Nobody ordered to ring the bells in a festive fashion. The young people of the parish spontaneously wanted to express their gratitude and the certainty of having a powerful intercessor in heaven and so they rang the three church bells in a festive fashion. From the bell tower the young people enjoyed a heavenly liturgy, the most touching and the most participated celebration they had ever seen. The people who followed along with sadness and tearful eyes, the flags at half-mast and the band's glum music, reminded all of the sad reality.

Once the funeral procession arrived at the cemetery, people began to hunt for flowers and of the fifteen wreaths that had been carried in procession there was not trace left.

The body was entombed temporarily in the Cemetery of Pianura, next to his parents. On April 14, 1956, the mortal remains of the beloved father were transferred from the cemetery to the chapel of the Vocationary, in a tomb built behind the altar of the militant church, where they remained until 1997. After the recognition of the body required by the process of beatification, it was buried in the crypt, where it still rests and is a source of consolation and graces to all who call upon the Blessed.



Bishop Guido Casullo leads the funeral procession



Photomontage, work of Emilio Tamburrino

CHAPTER 19

Toward the Glory

“Now the soul shall sing to the Lord always! If all his relation with the Lord is relation of love, if all his life of prayer is a conversation of love with the Lord, if all his life of activity is a court of love to the Lord, she will always sing to the Lord because she loves him and love sings.

Love always sings, love is itself a song and causes the vibration of every fiber of the human being in the natural and the supernatural, at the approach, the coming, the presence, the sight, the word, the gift, and the embrace of the Lord.”¹

The fame of the sanctity of our Blessed started to spread and extended even before he passed from earth to heaven. Fr. Stravino, S.J., who was rector of the seminary in Posillipo, said: “Fr. Justin is a man to be canonized alive.”

Fr. Justin never thought of himself as a saint. In his humility, he saw and considered himself as a sinner. The following episode is significant and enjoyable. A lady came from

¹ Russolillo, *Invitatorio Apostolico*, Positio II, p. 1412.

Naples to see the saint of Pianura. She arrived at the parish, saw Fr. Justin and asked to see the saint of Pianura; calmly and with maximum ease he invited her to follow him; arrived in front of the statue of St. George he said: *This is our saint*, and disappeared.

In a way, he seemed to be aware of the esteem and high consideration people had for him. In a letter to a newly professed brother, exhorting him to be more opened, he wrote: *"Do you also believe that I read in the hearts and know everything, without you telling me?"* In reality many young Vocationists had this conviction and consequently sometimes they did not feel comfortable in his presence.

The fame of his holiness grew and expanded considerably after his death. The extraordinary participation at his funeral, the hunt for possible relics, the transformation of his funeral into a spontaneous manifestation of triumph, all were instantaneous results of his fame of holiness.

In the book of the soul Fr. Justin repeats the principle that holiness does not consist in mystical phenomena or in miracles and then continues to say that the Holy miracle-workers must be the ones most close to the Lord, because through them the Lord's holiness shines in the eyes of men.

Reading his various biographies: *L'Apostolo delle Divine Vocazioni, Fatti Santo, Chiamato per Chiamare, A Servant of Divine Vocations, A Life for Vocations, Don Giustino Russolillo, Storie, Racconti e Aneddoti della sua gente, Tra Storia e poesia, A*

servizio delle Divine Vocazioni, Il Parroco Santo di Pianura, it appears clearly the picture of a great saint and of a true miracle worker, who succeeded in not making much noise with his miracles.

Blessed Russolillo summarizes his ascetical, philosophical and theological teachings in his prayer. Like Ovidius, notwithstanding the fact that he did not want to write poetry, he had to admit “Quidquid scripsi versus erat - whatever I wrote, was poetry”; Fr. Justin could say: “even though I wanted to teach, explain, dialogue, everything became prayer.” We can see all this in the following prayer, which ultimately encourages us to ask that we may please the Lord and find favor in his presence.

“Holy Miracle Workers of all times, and especially of our time and of the time which more affects us, to you the second homage of all Christians [veneration], because you do not cease to nourish their faith with your wonders, and you lead them to place all their hope in the Lord in the most serious and desperate cases of their physical and moral lives; you bring them to progress in holiness through the consolation of your favors, which dilate and launch up high the poor human heart!

O Holy Miracle Workers, obtain for us an ever more dominating right intention of the greater glory of love of God in every plea for your grace and true gratitude, in the betterment of all our Christian behavior, for every fulfillment of prayer and for every benefit received.

Grant that every Christian, according to the desire of God, may have so much faith and such a spirit of prayer, as is needed to do the works that Jesus did and even more for the triumph of the Gospel in the world; may each one receive some special charisma of the Holy Spirit, even better than the early Christians for the progressive improvement of the spiritual edification of the kingdom of God in the world.

O Holy Miracle Workers, on account of your power to make miracles, you are the most glorified in the world among all the saints. Grant that we may know in what you pleased the Lord the most, for which he wants to glorify you more among us, because we too want to please his heart and find favor in his presence! Obtain for us this miracle, more than any other: To please the Lord and find favor in his sight!"²

The continuous visits of the faithful to his tomb, first in the cemetery of Pianura and later in the church of the Vocationary, now dedicated to Blessed Justin, is a testimony to the devotion of the people and their trust in his intercession. His fame of sanctity has grown and has been nourished by miraculous happenings of every kind.

Notwithstanding the fact that the first postulator of the cause of beatification, Fr. Oreste Anella, vehemently discour-

² Opere, Vol. XX, p. 268.

aged any collection or propagation of presumed miracles, people have spoken and propagated hundreds upon hundreds of miracles of every kind that happened, both during his life and after his death.

The growing fame of holiness and the numerous stories that circulated of presumed miracles, moved the religious and ecclesiastical superiors to initiate the process of beatification.

From among the many miracles attributed to the intercession of Fr. Justin I limit myself to narrating only three of them, one that happened while he was alive, one at his death and one after his death, plus the one that was examined and verified for his beatification.

From the testimony of Fr. Michael Colaguori in *Fatti Santo* we have this story. Fr. Justin visited often S. Prisco of Caserta, there he assisted and followed spiritually the Sisters of the Eucharist and accompanied them in their blossoming. In 1952, Maria Leccese, cousin of the Treasurer of the Congregation, lost her sight at age sixteen. In their consternation, the family made the rounds of all eye doctors in the area, to no avail. They heard of professor Lo Cascio, director of an eye clinic in Naples, and were planning to visit him, but before making the appointment with him they wanted to ask Fr. Justin's advice. They brought the young lady to Pianura and explained the whole story to him. His answer was simply: "Professor Lo Cascio is an excellent professor; do not bring her to anybody else."

They returned to S. Prisco when it was already night. Maria did not feel like going to bed, she was restless. She insisted on staying on the terrace to enjoy the fresh air. In the darkness of night and blackness of her blindness, she raised her extinguished pupils toward the sky. In her heart she kept hearing clearly Fr. Justin's pleasant voice saying: "Do not bring her to anybody else". She remembered the gentle caress of Fr. Justin's hand on her eyes, all at once, she had the impression of seeing a little light... was it a star... was it a dream? Then she started seeing other stars ... she was awake! Taken by fear she turned her eyes to the floor and saw the shadow of the houses... She opened her mouth and started shouting: "I see, I see" and gave free flow to her endless tears. All the members of the family ran to her and she was able to distinguish each one of them. They all thanked God together remembering the encounter with Fr. Justin.³

From the *Positio Super Miro*, on page three we find this testimony of Catherine Golusio of the miracle that happened in Pianura at Fr. Justin's death: "My mother was desperate because when I was only three years old, my left breast had grown like that of a fifteen year old girl; I was diagnosed as having a breast tumor which had to be removed as soon as possible. The primary doctor of Loreto Hospital of Naples had signed such a diagnosis. In those days there were rumors that Fr. Justin worked miracles. My mother took me to

³ When I visited the Sisters of the Eucharist with Fr. Fasano in 2003, the Mother General, cousin of Maria, repeated to us exactly the same story.

Pianura. Fr. Justin was dead. Two guards helped my mother to dry the sweat coming out from his body with a handkerchief (it was very hot) because she intended to place it on my sick breast. She did exactly that and I was healed. My mother wanted to make sure and she brought me again to the same hospital where I was to be operated. The primary doctor of Loreto Hospital of Naples examined me and having ascertained that there was no trace of any tumor or any other problem, exclaimed: Who was that jackass, who gave such a diagnosis? Imagine the shock he must have had when he realized that he was the one who signed it!"

A third presumed miracle taken from *Positio Super Miro*, witnessed also by me. The mother recounts the miraculous story of her son's healing.

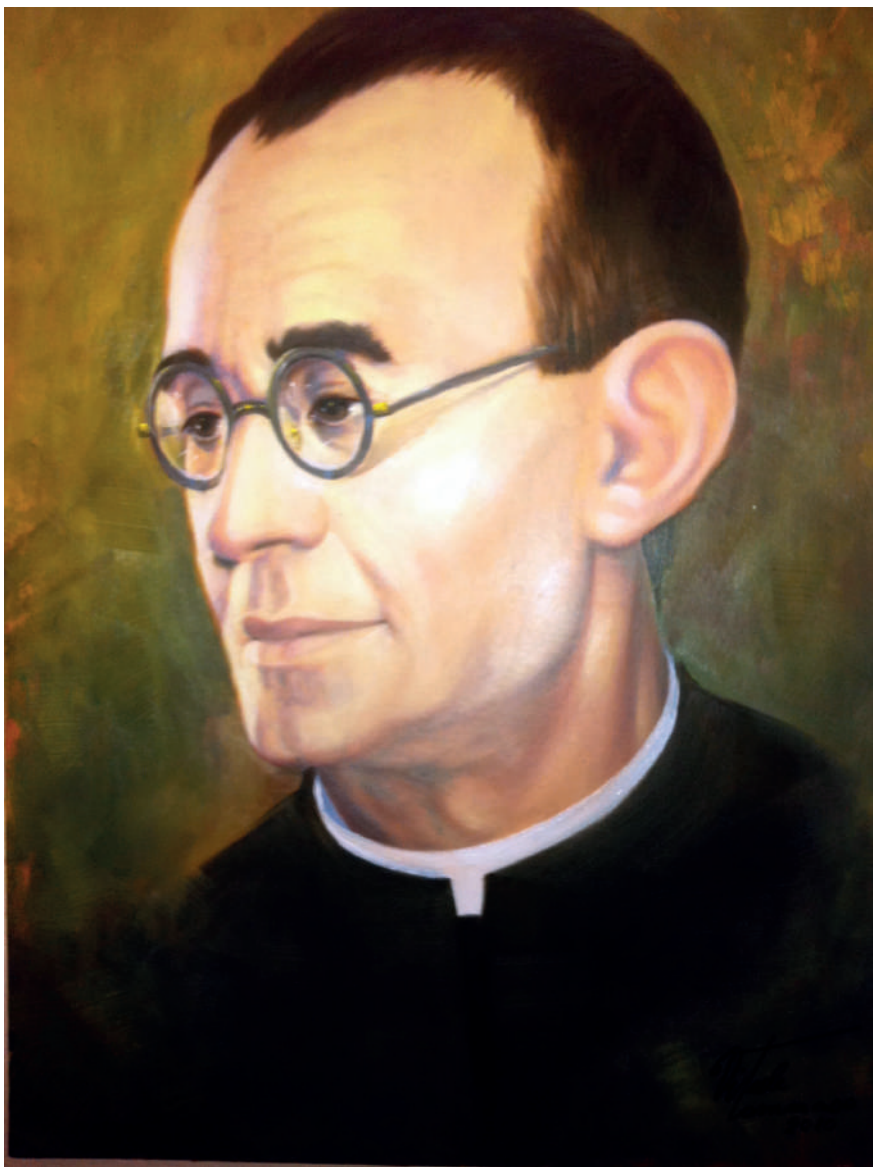
"My son, Roger Abiague, born August 9, 1986 in Belleville, New Jersey was an autistic boy. I was desperate. I opened my heart to Doctor Rios who spoke to me about the Servant of God Fr. Justin Russolillo. Doctor Rios informed Fr. Thomas Adinolfi of the Vocationist Fathers about Roger's condition. The good priest suggested celebrating a Mass in my house and praying to Fr. Justin for Roger. Fr. Thomas brought a very small statue of Fr. Justin, a few booklets and some holy cards with the prayer for the glorification of Fr. Justin. At the end of the celebration of the Mass, we all recited the prayer to Fr. Justin and kissed the little statue and entrusted Roger to his intercession. This happened the evening of November 19, 1989 at 7:00 p.m. in my house, located at 94 Nicholas Street, Newark, N.J. There were many of us

at the celebration. We all ardently prayed for the healing of Roger through the intercession of Fr. Justin with faith and hope to obtain the miracle.

The next day we started to notice some improvements. One of the teachers of the nursery school, who accompanied Roger, was so impressed by the sudden change that she called my mother, Roger's grandmother to find out what had happened to the child and how the marvelous change had happened; that day Roger started to talk. Roger, now ten years old, often repeats: I am able to talk because Fr. Justin healed me. According to Dr. Rios, the healing is complete and medicine could not offer any hope of a normal life for my son." (Signed by Maria Ana Abiague, Newark, August 29, 1996).

In June 2000 Roger, a cute teenager, graduated from eighth grade, first of his class. Once again he wanted to show his gratitude writing, of his own initiative, a letter to the Holy Father asking for the canonization of Fr. Justin, stating that, only thanks to Fr. Justin's intercession, he was what he was!

The Society of Divine Vocations initiated the process for the beatification of Fr. Justin, appointing a general Postulator in the person of Fr. Oreste Anella, S.D.V. On July 17, 1976 Fr. Anella asked Bishop Sorrentino of Pozzuoli to obtain from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints the authorization to start the cause of beatification. On December 15, 1977 such authorization was granted; and on April 23, 1978 the decree authorizing the opening of the process in the di-



Painting, work of Tommaso Vitale

ocese of Pozzuoli was released. The process of beatification started on January 18, 1980 at the archdiocesan tribunal of Naples and in 1985 was presented to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. On December 18, 1997 Pope Saint John Paul II proclaimed him Venerable.

Soon after his Venerability, the miracle that paved the way for him to be proclaimed Blessed by Pope Benedict XVI happened.

Gaetanina (Ida) Meloro of East Hanover, New Jersey, born on June 23, 1938 in Newark, New Jersey, was a friend, cooperator and parishioner of the Vocationist Fathers from the beginning of their arrival in Newark. Besides teaching in Newark's public school, she also taught English to the adult parishioners who were arriving from Puerto Rico, Cuba and other countries of Central and South America. She taught Catechism first at Our Lady of Perpetual Help and then at St. Michael's, for over 20 years, before moving to East Hanover. She also served on the parish council and was president of St. Michael Rosary Society.

Her gynecological medical history was negative until January 1, 1988 when she started having some blood loss. She saw her physician and a gynecologist and was diagnosed of having a large tumor situated at the rear of her vulva.

A biopsy was taken and on January 27 Dr. Denehy, her gynecologist-oncologist in the light of the clinical exam pronounced a diagnosis of cancer of the vagina with a 4 x 6

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 St. Barnabas Hospital in Livingston, N.J.

From February 23 to the 28th, she underwent chemotherapy treatment with Mytomicin C and 5FU. Both Dr. Denehy and Dr. Eastman her radiologist and oncologist witnessed that at the end of the external radiotherapy, before starting the intra-vaginal 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 tumor and a CT scan of the pelvis on June 17, 1998 showed the absence of any abdominal mass and of metastatic adenopathy. A gynecological check-up in October 1998 and a Pap test turned out to be completely negative. No evidence of recurrence was detected in the numerous check-ups in 2001, 2002, 2003. The two doctors “*ab inspectione*” in 2004 and 2005 verified totally negative gynecological and abdominal results and pronounced her to be in excellent general condition.

While the doctors were working hard with her treatment, simultaneously the patient, her mother and brother, some friends and some Vocationist Fathers and Sisters started a group Novena prayer to Venerable Justin Russolillo imploring Almighty God to cure her through his intercession. The

whole group kept praying together expressly asking for Ida to be cured. Ida started feeling better from the first day she started chemotherapy; she had no negative effects from the chemo and was able to drive herself back and forth from the hospital. Convinced that Fr. Justin had miraculously cured her, she asked to interrupt the therapy, but the doctors did not deem it proper to do so. The cure took place and was proved to be total, lasting and inexplicable to medical science. All of this is fully documented and proved by various documents, examinations, witnesses and treating doctors, *ab-inspectione* doctors [assigned by the ecclesiastical tribunal], doctors that examined the case, other witnesses and theologians.

The extraordinary nature of this cure (what makes it miraculous) consists in the fact that the tumor was not shrunk or burned by the chemotherapy (which is what usually happens with any treatment), but that no trace, scar or sign of the tumor remained.

By signing the decree that recognized the inexplicable nature of Ida Meloro's cure, obtained through the intercession of Venerable Fr. Justin Mary of the Trinity, the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, opened up the way to his beatification.

In Pianura of Naples, where Fr. Justin was born, grew up, lived and became holy, Cardinal Angelo Amato, Prefect for the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, as papal delegate, proclaimed him Blessed on May 7th 2011.

In the glory of the saints, Blessed Justin continues his mission and assures us of his protection so that we may always take pleasure in that true joy that leads us to the union with God.

*I salute and adore you
In the saints, angels and just
O divine love, O my God!*

*O love, you alone are joy,
Make me sower of joy
In the hearts,
Diffuser of joy in the world
So that all may turn,
Come and unite themselves to you,
Who alone are joy.⁴*

⁴Russolillo in *Campion, Poesie e Cantici*, p. 87.



Inside of the first church dedicated to Blessed Justin

APPENDIX

Texts for the liturgical commemoration of Blessed Justin Mary of the Trinity



CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO
ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

Prot. N. 687/10/L

BLESSED JUSTIN MARY RUSSOLILLO,
Priest and founder

From the Common of the Pastors

PRAYER

O God, you called Blessed Father Justin Mary
to raise generous ministers for your work
of universal sanctification,
grant us, we pray, through his intercession,
to discover and faithfully follow our vocation.
Through Our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives
and reigns with you, in the unity
of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen

For the Liturgy of the Hours

2 August

BLESSED JUSTIN MARY RUSSOLILLO

Priest and Founder

Born in Pianura of Naples in 1981. Aware since his childhood of his calling to the priesthood and to holiness, dedicated his life to the service of vocations of special consecration and to the rehabilitation of betrayed vocations. From 1920, he was pastor of Pianura, where he diligently and zealously promoted catechetical apostolate, daily Communion and daily ministry of the word of God. He cared in a special way for the youth and founded the Congregations of the Vocationist Fathers and Vocationist Sisters and the Secular Institute of the Vocationist Apostles of Universal Sanctification, to be collaborators of the Holy Spirit by leading souls to the divine union with the Blessed Trinity. He was an untiring preacher of spiritual retreats and a prolific writer of ascetical works. He died in Pianura in 1955.

From the Common of Pastors

OFFICE OF READINGS

SECOND READING

From the writings of Blessed Father Justin Mary Russolillo.

(The Clergy and ecclesiastical Vocations, Works, vol. VII, p. 78)

The plant-priest must produce other priests

“Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and

thrown into the Fire" (Mt 7, 19). It is not only licit but due to take the above quotation in its most profound meaning and apply it to the clergy about the divine vocations. The plant produces many things, and all are of some use for man, leaves, flowers, wood, shade, perfume, fiber etc. What is most expected from a plant, the one thing to which all its parts are preordained, from the roots to the last leaf, the one thing for which the plant exists is primarily and essentially the fruit. As fruit, in a comprehensive way, we mean the plant's reproduction.

The fruit is the ultimate effort and product of the plant. This is always connected with some kind of sweetness, even to our palate; it is destined to the seed, or better consisting in the seed, to which the plant transmits all its vitality and enwraps it in easily assimilated substances prepared throughout an entire season with vegetative motherly tenderness, so as to predispose it to reproduce the plant. The glory of the plant will consist in producing fruits in large quantity and good quality so as to be able to surround itself, during its life, and leave afterward the glory of an entire plantation, of which it was the operating principle.

Likewise, the plant-priest will produce many wonderful things in the various ecclesiastical services, in the various works of apostolate, in the various priestly ministries, in his various cultural ramifications. What is mostly expected of him, that to which must be ordained all his action, that which is his own fruit is the priest, the fruit-priest produced by the plant-priest.

The priest must also produce fruits of penance for himself and for the whole world of souls. It is recommended that the priest accumulates many and precious merits in order to increase the treasure of the Church. It is desirable that the

priest leaves after his death holy works of every kind in order to continue in his name some apostolate until the end of the world. He has all this spiritual fructification in common with all Christian people. The specific and proper fruit of the priest, to which can literally be applied the divine statement: "I chose you and commissioned you to go out and bear fruit that will last" (Jn 15, 16), is the fruit-priest.

This is especially and properly the fruit that remains and reproduces the plant-priest; in it, the priest remains and perpetuates himself in the Church to give life, nourishment and increment to any other plant to produce good fruits.

RESPONSORY

(Cf. Jn 20,21; 15, 16; Mt. 7,19)

R/. As the Father has sent me, so I send you to go and produce fruit that will last.

V/. As the Father has sent me, so I send you to go and produce fruit that will last.

R/. Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut and thrown on the fire.

V/. Go and produce fruit that will last.

PRAYER

O God, you called Blessed Father Justin Mary
to raise generous ministers for your work
of universal sanctification,
grant us, we pray, through his intercession,
to discover and faithfully follow our vocation.
Through Our Lord Jesus Christ you Son, who lives
and reigns with you, in the unity
of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

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