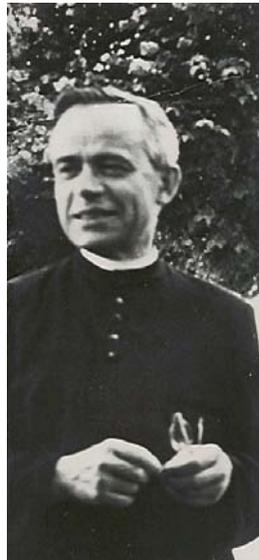




Beato don Luigi Monza Milano 30 Aprile 2006

## **FATHER LUIGI MONZA 1898 - 1954**

### **HIS LIFE AND WORKS**



**by Luigi Mezzadri**

**Translated by Carmen Rigamonti**

In all ages God switches on some lights in the night of man. These lights are his friends. There is nothing special in them, at least for their contemporaries later on, but only later on their prophetic role can be discovered. This happens not because of their ideas: human destinies are not related to words, but because they have been mild tools in God's hands.

Father Luigi Monza has been one of these God's friends.

His gift has been the teaching that man is not a veined crystal unable to be generated. Even if man is wounded, separated, always thirsting for a love difficult to be reached, as he gets it from polluted springs a hope always remains. Love has not died. The fire of Pentecost can light the charity of the primitive community again, give life to communities able to be «One heart and one soul only» and in this way collect brothers from dispersion.

It is not easy to tell Father Luigi's life. One must get into a difficult character, one should have Father Luigi's view, his heart, his sensitivity. But only Father Luigi himself could have done this.

Should all this be missing, one must go on by hypotheses, the documents must be questioned, the facts much more.

An approximate and out-of-focus portrait will always come out. People who met him can assert that Father Luigi was not like this. But such a kind of man does not need to be helped by a biography which is instead helpful to the ones who did not meet him as introduction to his writings and to the comprehension of his work.

Once he confidentially said «For long as I live, my work will be as a closed book. The book will be opened after my death and that work will expand itself to the extreme borders of earth!» The profile we are presenting is an attempt at opening this book and reading inside it all the stages of a blooming work started very modestly but spreading always further on.

## The seed in the drill

In order to be a bright sign, Father Luigi Monza had to do hard work and search. His parents Giuseppe and Luigia, were from Cislago (Varese). All their riches were work, courage and faith. When he was born (22 June 1898) the signs of pain were the first to welcome him in his opening to life. His two little brothers, Pietro and Antonio Giuseppe, died before him respectively at the age of 5 and 2. Father Luigi himself was so frail that it seemed wise to confirm him when he was one and a half. He attended the first three elementary classes in the village, but soon he had to give up studies considered a luxury in those times. So at first, he started to work in a winder, then he worked as a shoemaker and, in his free time, he helped his father in the fields.

In the meantime a called started emerging inside him. The myths of the welfare society had not moulded the aspirations of the juvenile world yet. The sacerdotal vocation was felt as something highly seducing. At about 9 or 10 years old he experienced a strong disappointment when the opportunity of becoming a priest according to his aspirations was offered to him. Young Luigi felt blocked inside. He did not accept the proposal and ran away, bursting then into tears disappointed for having refused God's invitation.

But this was only a postponement. In his very religious family, God's call for a son or a daughter was considered a special blessing. At the beginning of January 1913 his sister Cristina entered a congregation of nuns. After a while a vocational proposal was also made to Luigi by a Salesian priest. Work had matured the man. Now he could take well thought-out and free decisions. In autumn 1913, together with other two mates, he left for the salesian college located in Penango Monferrato (Asti) to attend the secondary school.

The following year, while in Europe the fires of that «useless slaughter» which was the first world war were lit, Luigi's personal horizon became sadder and sadder. His father, fallen from a tree during his field work, broke his spine. Not to leave the burden of the family on his mother's arms, he decided not to go back to Penango (Asti). His stay in the Institute was then a period that he always remembered with great nostalgia. For the rest of his life he always considered himself a little Salesian, especially regarding his passion for the education of young people.

He worked so hard in and for his house that he was more a sound adult rather than a teen-ager. He did not take care of himself while working, even in the found time to carry on with his studies, also at night in the warmth of a corner in a stable, helped by Father Carlo Baj as well as by Father Lorenzo Cazzani, coadjutors in Cislago (Varese).



***Leisure time with the first parish group***

At the end of the summer in 1916 the parish priest Father Luigi Vismara, surprised at Luigi's strong will, proposed doing his best in order to get a free situation in seminary for him. It was necessary an immediate answer. Over 18 years he should have found all the ways closed. It was a tragic dilemma. His sister was far away; his brother Pietro (same name of the first-born son) had been sent to the front. The youngest brother Mario was a child of 7. He turned to his relatives with his heart full of anguish. United they accused him of being insensitive and irresponsible. His mother, instead, a simple woman, a little curt but very courageous, said to him «My dear son, don't take care of us: if God calls you, you go, for God».

His mother's courage gave him strength and on the first of October 1916 Luigi solemnly received the priest cassock from the parish priest. His father who was paralysed was also present and was taken to the church by some friends. Shortly afterwards he entered the Villoresi college located in Monza (Milan) to attend the gymnasial studies.

The school year had just started and Luigi was hastily called back home. His father had got worse «You can imagine the anxiety, the worries and the pain round the bed of our father!» - he will write to his sister -. It was all a sighing, crying, praying and coming and going of relatives and friends. After some moments, sure that death was waiting for him, he raised his trembling right hand to hold our mother's hands tight and whispered: «I must go...».

His father's death (16 January 1917) and other two events, as the military service and his brother Pietro's death (4 Dicembre 1918) definitely uprooted him from his family and his past. So, after the discharge, he could start again his studies in Saronno (Varese) (1919-1922) and the theology courses first in Gorla Minore (Varese) (1922-1924) and then at the seminary in Venezia Avenue in Milan (1924-1925).

We do not know much of these years. A careless and discontinuous preparation did not give him the possibility of deepening theology in an organic way. On the other hand, in the twenties, the same theological reflection did not start from an examination of the real problems but re-proposed schemes and theories unable to grasp the present. Because of all antimodernist controversies «doing» was the only chance for Christians and priests.

Finally, at the end of the third year of theology, beforehand with some exams of the fourth year in order to recover the time spent in the military service, he was ordained priest on 19 september 1925, Father Luigi, ripe fruit of Cislago community, was given to the Milanese church to be the chief support of communion among the believers.

## The gold and the fire

The first pastoral engagement was a revelation, in the first place of the pastoral qualities of the young priest. He was assigned to the parish of Vedano Olona (Varese) standing by Father Pietro De Maddalena and immediately showed a great ascendancy over young people. He had identified some formative activities, such as sport, chorale, amateur theatricals on which he had planned out all the activity for the parish young people enriching with deep spiritual contents. For Father Luigi praying was the heart of his apostolate. A crowd of young people full of enthusiasm, culturally prepared and spiritually strengthened united round him.

The beginning of his function in Vedano Olona (Varese) coincided with the «fascistization» of the state inaugurated by Fascism in 1925. All resistance was eliminated. The fascist party was becoming all-powerful and started penetrating all live environments with the help of the skilful direction of Mussolini who played the role of moderator between Farinacci's extremism and order elements according to Federzoni. The person was subordinated to the state in such a way that the password was: «All inside the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state». Culture, school, art, sport, fashion, all was polluted. There was a violent reaction when one did not accept that the state absorbed everything or these were not giving in or compromises. In Vedano Olona (Varese) the aggregation to Fascism was refused by the parish young people. Events such as football match between Father Luigi's team and the fascist one became cause of quarrel. Parish young people won on the football ground but then were beaten by the black-shirts coming from other countries. The parish priest, to avoid dangerous situations, decided to suspend the sports activities but without asking his collaborator's advice. Father Luigi considered this decision as a giving in or much worse a betrayal damaging his young people. In public, he uttered bitter words and went so far as to break the flagstaff of the sport society. But he soon came to himself and wrote a letter of apology in a noble tone: «Right Reverend Parish priest, I feel so sorry for myself when I am so bad and rebel against any discipline. And I am suffering so much more as I know that others are suffering because of me. My pride was a bad adviser and made me reluctant to accept an observation I thought not to deserve because I did not want to blame those young people saddling myself with all the responsibility. In this way loving them too much, I hated them.

Unfortunately I realized that those who were present had a bad impression, even if I had not acted with the intention of offending, but only of speaking driven by all the bitterness stored up for the events of these days. For this reason I do not think to have the possibility to do some good any longer and I consider my position in Vedano Olona (Varese) unbearable, being certain that without me the village could enjoy more peace. I do not think to give any other reason for more pain, as well as I do not doubt that the superiors will have great difficulties in assigning me a new situation that does not imply working among young people». It was 31 May 1927 the removal was not difficult to be obtained, as the diocese had a lot of priests. The parish priest understood his chaplain's reaction and reassured him.

But the events were urging. Nobody had made inquiries about the people responsible for the fascist punitive expeditions and bomb exploded under the arcade of the parsonage Authorities – which were weak with the violent and strong with the weak – acted when someone shot a party leader during the night between 28 and 29 June. All details had been well carried out not to think of a true provocation skilfully prepared. About 40 people were arrested. The parish priest De Maddalena was sent away from the village. Father Luigi tried to calm down all the souls but in the afternoon, while he was baptizing a child he was reached by the police who stood beside him during the religious function. After examination he had to leave Vedano Olona (Varese) to take refuge in Gaggiano (Milano), where he was arrested by the plain-clothes police and taken to Varese prison. He was accused of attempted murder. He stayed in prison for 4 months subject to exhausting examinations (one of them lasted for well 11 hours). The conviction of being innocent was not enough to him also because, together with external hostilities, he had to face one of the hardest mystical proofs: he had the impression of being abandoned by God. His isolation, the promiscuity of the cell that hurt his sensitivity, the physical prostration, his forced inactivity had produced doubts and uncertainties in him. Praying seemed useless to him. In 1926 Kafka had described the situation of a young man knocking at the front door of a castle that nobody opens, Father Luigi felt the same anxiety. The prayer of the Psalms had suddenly become monotonous to him. He felt completely abandoned by His Father as Christ on the Cross, while men – excluding his young people who were far away – revealed themselves hostile to him. It was a proof that worked inside him and hard engraved him. He told a friend in confidence about these moments and this is precious because it gives us the possibility of grazing the defences of his reservedness and examining the Monza mystery from its inside and its development. God, who was slowly preparing him for his plans,

needed a different agreement. If only obeying God is creative, it was necessary for man to lose his own pride, as well as his own independence, his own will to be guided by God only. In this way, still before the bars of prison opened, Father Luigi, free «inside», was ready to begin his exodus towards God.



### The three curtains

Out of prison, without any evidence against him, he was ordered not to set his foot in Vedano Olona (Varese) again in open violation of the criminal law in force, the days of the omnipotence seemed to cross also God's roads. The diocesan authorities decided to remove Father Luigi to parish of St. Mary of the Rosary in Milan. He arrived at the end of 1927 and was asked to take care of the parish young male. He stayed in this parish only a few months. Like Giovanni Battista Montini, who was the same age, he could not understand the conventional people's behaviour «who always know how to find the deep reason that considers the beaten ones in the wrong». Furthermore he was distressed at the idea of being no longer able to give something to young people. Therefore he asked to be removed. He was satisfied and sent to the Sanctuary of our Lady of the Miracles in Saronno (Varese). From the human point of view this was not a success in his career.

Nevertheless the Saronno (Varese) period was very important for Father Luigi's inner maturation. In the shade of the Sanctuary he lived a waiting moment. This was in a way his Tabor: contemplation before his new and decisive phase of action.

Father Luigi could evaluate the experiences of his past years, in particular three of them were very precious: war, prison and young activity.

The first two revealed him the face of a society built without God and violent to man.

In contact with his young people he had understood that new generations were ready to build a new society. It was only a question of «teachers». The teachers of his time were violence, exaltation of war, totalitarianism. A lot could have changed if man had gone back to the first times of the Church. Man's teachers would have been the communities of the believers, «one heart and one soul only», with the only meaningful word of charity.

Unlike Vedano Olona (Varese), Father Luigi's irradiation in Saronno (Varese) had a slow star. The Sanctuary was not a parish and did not have a young activity. It was only a place of devotion. But when charity burns inside, then there is nothing that could stop it. Father Luigi started to collect young people for singing. The choir rehearsals became a meeting opportunity and a complete educational moment: young people did their homework, played and prayed. His house was the place for the assemblies, the back garden was the football ground. So when Cardinal Schuster raised the Sanctuary in archiepiscopal delegation (1931) Father Luigi did nothing but extending an action already deeply planned.

So he started working for the young activity. Unlike his two previous experiences now Father Luigi could see far away. Beyond the parish wall there was the entire world, a world without God and for this reason Christians' task is to prepare God's way towards the world.

The first intention of continuing the experience with the young people and of making it more than a formative moment ending in itself exactly dates back to Saronno (Varese) years. This was told in confidence to a few close friends. About 1932 Father Luigi had the feeling that «a crowd of people being busy round work» was in front of him. He too tried to take part in it directly hard working, but a mysterious force was stopping him and he had a painful impression. It seemed to him to be called to «animate, assist and guide that work» still indistinctly outlined, in which activity, however, he would not have taken part directly. This idea was torturing him inside, he knew he had to carry it out but was not able to make it understand. God's work had not to be qualified according to programmes or concrete objects. He kept on saying «Saints are enough for God».

That work therefore should have been the relaunching of the unique and absolute value of charity, a celebration of God's marriage with humanity. It meant to propose to some souls to practice charity, that kind of charity that collects man from his loneliness and gives him a family. It so happened that he felt struck with lightning by the idea that the work, apart from the object, should have witnessed a love that becomes family. «La Nostra Famiglia» was born.

This «family» should have let its members get into the different environments in order to be real witness of charity.

In 1933 Father Luigi made a proposal to some young ladies that in the past had not been able to follow a religious vocation. After all, in the thirties, female vocations were numerous. Entering an order or a congregation was felt like saving oneself from the world. The answer to a world far away from God was being far away from the world. Now a lot of girls were not able to crown this aspiration and ran the risk of a dull life. Father Luigi proposed them this idea. They were still very human considerations as he had addressed to people whom he could get in touch with in a more reasonable manner. Actually contacted people either went away or did not persevere.

In 1934, guided by Providence, Father Luigi met a penitent in the confessional. She was that kind of restless person because always in search of something and unsatisfied. Clara Cucchi, this was her name, wanted to enter a religious community but was too weak and uncertain. Meeting this priest was for her a real revelation, while as far as Father Luigi is concerned, he realized that God's time had come. In the summer of the following year he wrote to her: «Get ready to obey God's wishes».

## **The little sprout and the big tree**

To carry out God's work, Father Luigi needed long times. A long stay in Saronno (Varese) could be wished for. But once again he had to change his plans. In 1936 Cardinal Schuster entrusted him the parish of St. John in Lecco. In this parish there was still an old habit of popular participation to the nomination of the parish priest and this expressed a deep reality of communion. At the death of the parish priest the vestrymen had the right to propose a list of three among which the archbishop should have chosen the new parish priest. Actually the experience had shown that such choices, instead of bringing the souls nearer, contributed to produce contrasts. The Cardinal archbishop, during one of his visits to St. John's community had asked for a spontaneous renunciation of this right. In exchange he promised to send «a priest according to God's heart». And in was just Father Luigi the man chosen «according to God's heart» in order to build the bridge of charity.

Father Luigi was in his full maturity. He was 38. His past had been characterized by a rich experience with young people and a long period of spiritual assimilation. For a parish of 2500 souls the apostolic lines of the thirties were tested: catechesis, preaching, eucharistic devotion, «Azione Cattolica», charities and recreational activities. The suppression of the political activities outside the ones considered by the regime made the church the only place where one could meet freely. But being present in church activities was supported. A particular pastoral creativity was not necessary. Important was that the parish priest was really able to receive and welcome people and that the church was a place for praying and concentrating.

On his function in Lecco, as we deal with a very recent period, the witnessings are abundant and very explicit. First of all everybody's opinion underlines the deep religious sense of this priest. A businessman commented: «I have met many priests, but it is only one who has a real sacerdotal soul and a winning

simplicity». He was always very silent and intent, almost absorbed, and not an instinctive person. He was well self-controlled, sign of a strong inner mortification. At St. John's parish life was centred on Eucharist. Very late in the night the light in the church was switched on. It was Father Luigi who, at his God's feet, prayed for his people. During the day one could find him on the right of the altar, with his head between the hands immersed himself in a deep talk. Eucharist and worship were recurrent in his preaching because he was convinced that man could be renewed only from inside. Love starts among brothers only when the human aspects dissolves in touch with Eucharist. He gave such a great importance to the Eucharist cult that he wanted decorous vestments and a precious tabernacle for the liturgy. In the church he was very demanding. He wanted participation and concentration. While he was celebrating – the preconciliar liturgy had many silent moments – one could experience a shaking silence of fullness.

Preaching was very simple. The schemes of the sermons we have are linear, organized on some keywords. A sermon on the "ideal" is based on: seeing, knowing, loving and living it. All converged to life, doing, Paradise and Eucharist: «from the very beginning we already knew that, at a certain moment, from the orderly points of his considerations he would proceed to the recall, the exhortation, the outburst of his soul tormented by God's glory and by the wish to do good to all the souls and lead them all to the house of Father, that is the fine Paradise».

While the fashion preachers loved to mention literary quotations (above all Dante and Manzoni, the most unconventional quoted Papini or the French novelists of the thirties), Father Luigi quoted the Gospels, S. Paolo, S. Giovanni and the Acts. Probably the kind of preaching in which he felt happier was the so called "exhortation". On the occasion of First Communions (preaching was often made just before the Communion), Christenings or Funerals he could be very happy not so much for the contents as for the intimate warmth emanating from him. He often became more expressive in fact. Then his eyes lighted up and he had a full voice. He also shouted. A witness writes: «Father Luigi may have been seen by other people while crying when he spoke about God's love... I cannot cancel from my mind that precious and extraordinary moment. Speaking of the spiritual life he burst in uncontrollable tears when he experienced God's love!» Concrete signs were necessary as an answer: «How much selfishness is in this world – he told a friend in confidence unusually letting himself go – oh, if we still were as the primitive Christians! We have to find souls able to live according to love of primitive Christianity!»

## **A church in the middle of the world**

For a long time Father Luigi had perceived that his mission inside the Church had not to be limited only to the parish experience. Charity has no borders. Certainly the centre of all could have been the parish provided that in it there were some people who practised charity more intensely. The first witnessing had to be priests' one. Therefore he wanted that the parsonage was a proof that love among brothers is not a dream. And although he lived a difficult situation with some brothers - they did not understand him and misunderstood his action – he did his best, with every effort, often exhausting, to understand, bring nearer and forgive: charity is not spontaneity but gifting and suffering.

Not only priests, but all Christians had to be called to practice charity as the first Christians did. A reliable witness has grasped a very important passage from one of Father Luigi's speeches. On the occasion of a feast in his honour the parish priest of St. John's asked for understanding. «He knew – so said this witness – to have taken away and that he had to take away some of his time and energies to his parishioners to concern himself with that work that was slowly to be born. He could not resist God's call and so they had to let him do, on the contrary they had to support him in this incipient effort, in this way his parish would become the propulsor centre of a well wider action of charity». Words hardly came out of his mouth. Finally Father Luigi exclaimed: «I am telling you that tonight St. John's is in the middle of the world, in the heart of the world; because here among us a work of love and Christian charity is being born».

While he was saying these words Father Luigi had already found the way of God. Previously, following perhaps Clara Cucchi's aspirations, he had thought of a spiritual centre, an oasis to regenerate Christian groups-how, according to God's style, Father Luigi by chance discovered God's tracks on his way.

It happened in a journey by train. Father Luigi had decided to go to Biandronno (Varese) to see a house where to set up a work for female vocations. On the train he met Father Ambrogio Trezzi, who was parish priest in Vedano Olona (Varese), in place of Father De Maddalena. When he came to know

about the intentions of the parish priest of St. John's, he suggested a well more attractive place: the "Lazzaretto" in Vedano Olona (Varese). The place was beautiful and Father Luigi knew it well. But he was not still allowed to set his foot in this old parish again. Father Trezzi offered himself to organize everything. A curtained car was hired and the two priests, as conspirators, went to Vedano Olona (Varese). Father Luigi thought he could try, some papers got ready to annulling the restrictive provisions of Father Luigi's personnel freedom. Then contacts were started in order to buy the land. The parish priest of St. John's gave the sum of 70.000 lire to Father Trezzi. But some days after he rushed to his friend to ask for the money back. The person who had lend him the money did not trust any longer. It was necessary to ask other people. Somebody did not receive the two priests well.

At last, after many efforts, a sufficient sum was collected and on 29 August 1937 the first stone of Vedano Olona (Varese) house was laid down.

But as, according to the new foundation, «society should have gone back to the charity of the first Christians», God's work could star even without an already built house. A house in Teglio in Valtellina (Sondrio) was rented and it was decided to put an end to all the obstacles. At the moment of parting, among the various persons who had given their willingness to take part in that work only three of them happened to appear: Clara Cucchi, Teresa Pitteri and Tranquilla Airoldi.

The first plan for that work was to lodge spiritual exercises. In those days, in Lombardy, spiritual exercises were very thriving. The various associations, when a retreat was organized, had difficulties in finding well equipped institutions, so much was the flow of the different classes of people. Father Luigi thought to employ the young ladies to make them able to guide the spiritual exercises.

When the house in Vedano Olona (Varese) got ready – and it was a hard work for months – the retreats began. The first course was a failure: the entry were to few. At the beginning of 1939 a course for fiancées had a considerable success and so many other different one. But when that work seemed to be founded on solid bases, the war broke out. Retreats were largely cancelled and the house received a higher and higher number of evacuated people, among which some Hebreus and antifascists were hidden.

In the meanwhile Father Luigi did not reduced his apostolic engagement in Lecco. In 1942 he organized a popular mission in his parish coinciding with the growing anxieties for the young people who died far away on the battle fields. In this situation he helped, encouraged and shared his people's anxieties by this time tied to him in an indissoluble way. The journeys from Lecco to Vedano Olona (Varese) were less frequent. But everytime Father Luigi brought something. Vedano Olona (Varese) was the town situated on the mountain, the spiritual lung of St. John's and the seed of God's work. From a very interesting witnessing it results that Father Luigi thought of a male group too. One of his young people from Saronno (Varese) said: «On a very important day for me I went to Father Luigi to tell him that I had decided to get married, for a while he stayed silent...» then he told me «I am happy but I am sorry too. I had also thought of you to create a secular group of young men, devoted to the apostolate, who going on with practising their professional activities in the world, could then live retired and united in a religious community. Young men missing, I will have to think of young ladies!».

Always in 1942 another attempt was done: some people who followed the same ideal, without abandoning their own family, placed themselves side by side to the sisters living in community life. The idea was excellent. In a society that in the war revealed the brutal consequences of being far away from God the only sign of hope was constituted by a spreading of small groups of people ready to practice the heroism of charity in every day life. But at the moment the experiment was not successful.

## Beyond old frontiers

The so longed for peace was a disappointment for all. Men came back – the once who came back – but they had not become better men. The Church reflected and prayed for the «great return and the great forgiveness» the «better world» and the «Pilgrim Virgin Mary». Social tensions became more and more intense. It was necessary to rebuild not only houses, but a tissue broken up by hate, charity according to Father Luigi's point of view, could help society to come to maturity on condition it become a real morel, social and political task. The parish priest of St. John's had also big disappointments. Once, getting down from the pulpit, before starting again with the Holy Mass, he addressed the parishioners with these bitter expressions: «I repent of being a priest and of having become the parish priest of St. John's». But he immediately came to himself. His personnel bitterness could not cancel the task of

contestation and animation of society, because he knew that it was God's will. And so he concluded: "No! If God's let me be born another time, I would like to be still a priest, still the parish priest of St. John's".

If in his parish he worked hard for the renewal of the activity with young people, to prepare his people to a real engagement in society, for the small work in Vedano Olona (Varese) unexplored horizons opened. After some attempts (at Cugliate and at Campo dei Fiori) in which the first sisters did their charity novitiate a new field of action was discovered. There was the very serious problem of the psychic disabled children. Only in the books one could read about their recovery. Society, hypnotized by new myths as well as new fashions, thought in another direction and for the children the sentence was without any appeal. It was the director of the neurological Institute of Milan, Prof. Giuseppe Vercelli, who suggested this pioneer work. It was a further step that took away the newborn community from Clara's aspirations. The small group of sisters could not resist this call and with great excitement literally attacked this sector in which man's need was more deeply felt. The charity of the first Christians once again became prophecy, news of salvation for the lost, engagement in worldly realities.

Father Luigi saw God's work growing in an unexpected way. A bursting out vitality was coming from the depth as if a vein rich in subterranean waters had been drilled. «He had always said yes» he had let himself guide and now he could see that, in spite of men and his own humility, God's sign was his work. Other houses came (Ponte Lambro – Como, Varazze – Savona) and were followed by their spreading in other regions. But Father Luigi's story is much more than this swarming of works, because it is the development of God's work. Even if he did not know the legal framework where to put in his intuition, he stuck to some full stops: his work did not have to have a precise a definitive apostolic aim. The aim was charity that had to be practiced as the first Christians because premise and ferment of a new society. The outline of the traditional orders and congregations did not persuade him. A more ductile and modern tool was necessary. He felt hostility round himself. Even his relatives criticized him. The Milanese curia seemed to be irritated because of the attempts of this humble priest. To the first sisters who had presented him a proof of regulations Cardinal Schuster said: «Till now you are few in one house. Nevertheless you have traced out a rule as if you had a hundred! The rule follows the development of the religious life and does not precede it. Be very discreet!».

When all seemed blocked, the promulgation of Poi XII's document the apostolic constitution *Provida Mater* (2 February 1947) that recognized the secular institutes, suddenly come. It was a very important date, because it opened a new phase in the consecrated life of the Church, or better re-proposed the idea of the primitive Church. The ones who felt to be called to the gift of celibacy did not go away - in the first centuries – from the pagan towns.

Their living in the world, in Antiochia, in Rome or in Alessandria of Egypt, without being of the world, came from the choice of celibacy that in the pagan society made them visible signs of the new skies. The celibacy, so lived in the most intense way, made the soul absolutely free and therefore ready to serve totally all the brothers. Father Luigi had perceived all this for a long time, but without being understood. They thought he was dreamer or a presumptuous person because he wanted to boast himself founder.

But all the same vocations came. In spite of the hostilities or the amused curiosity of the inhabitants of Lecco and Vedano Olona (Varese), the community was growing. It was chosen the name of «Little Apostoles of Charity». The institute was approved in diocesan seat then in Rome and, at the same time it was happily reconsidered the idea of admitting also some sisters who individually lived the ideal.

The key points of the Institute are two. In order to understand them one can use the graphic image of two concentric circles.



The external circle is the space where the Institute lives: the world, the environment where the man performs his play and suffers his loneliness. This world is hostile, marginalizing and polluted by evil. Nevertheless this is the reality in which Christians have to live. According to Father Luigi escaping from the world does not answer any longer, to man's needs and God's calls. It is necessary to do like the

Good Shepherd. In the ancient times this image did not remind so much of the parable of the lost sheep, as rather of the mystery of incarnation: Christ burdening himself with the human nature that is radically saved just in the incarnation.

In the thirties, when Father Luigi, in the silence of his praying, in Saronno (Varese) and then in Lecco, opened himself to the voice of his God, a current way of thinking totally refused the «world» and it was suggested a completely alternative model that answered to contingent needs, but, at the same time, ran the risk of deepening the separation between the Church and the world.

Father Luigi, like Roncalli, Montini and Mazzolari understood that the Church had to play the role of dialogue. Christians of the new time had not to be religious people catapulted into the world but they had to take part in the destiny of the world with a spiritual approach not only for the individual improvement but also for the social one, engaging against injustices, delays, exploitations and marginalization.

The inner circle is the Institute's soul: charity.

While it was conceived an authoritarian society, in which man was helped to live as a Christian also by the pressure coming from above, Father Luigi preferred animation coming from the bottom. As a matter of fact he wrote: «As it is not conceivable Christianity without love, so it is not conceivable a Christian without the expansion of his charity which should embrace the whole world. Do not say therefore: "I want to save myself", but say instead: "I want to save the world". This is the only deserving horizon of a Christian because it is the horizon of charity». Every time life divides and society strangles with its interfering bureaucracy it is urgent to sow in the articulations of this society some models of communion that give birth to communion according to God's plan that saves by uniting and unites by divinizing.

**You will see, you will see!...**

All the people who met Father Luigi describe him as a small and short man, with dark eyes and dark hair, of measured deeds, but neither affected or stiff. He used to speak little. His observations were always quiet and precise. He had an enchanting simplicity with the closest friends. When he was aware of being understood, he became witty. Humor was a vibration of humility, a way of looking at things and people with detachment and comprehension because all placed under the light of God. A lot of people noticed he never used to waste his time. He might have perceived that the time of his life was short. And he wanted to spend it all without keeping even a fragment for himself. And yet when he met somebody, he paid an infinite attention to the other, so much attention that, after his death, his parishioners kept on saying: «He loved nobody like me!» And many were the ones who were convinced of having been objects of his preference.



***Father Luigi Monza in the 25th anniversary of his ordination***

He followed the Little Apostles under the spiritual profile.

Temporal choices were less important. He played the role of founder not defending his authority in all at any cost. The Little Apostles themselves could be enough for the contingent problems. Just for this reason he let his community absorb that liveliness of initiative, that sense Christian freedom, that autonomy so typical of a secular Institute.

He was aware of having played his role and given to his community arrival and departures coordinates: a straight line ascending towards God. All the rest would come later.

For a long time he had perhaps understood that, at this point, he could have put himself aside. «All this work can do without me». And to the ones who were afraid of the future he kept on saying: «God wanted it. God would take care of it». And he wrote: «My daughters do not need me any longer, now they can walk by themselves».

On 26 August 1954 he was struck by an infarct. Days of anxiety started. One morning, Miss Zaira Spreafico (who was at the head of the Institute), asked him: «Father Luigi, what are you telling God?».

«That I am happy to do his will here!»

«But don't you ask God to make you recover?»

«No, it is not possible and I do not want it!»

«But, Father Luigi, don't you think of your work?»

«God will think about it!»

«Father Luigi, this is not charity; ask for your recovery to stay among us»

«Then I will do it as a submission act, but I will say to God so: Mother Superior wants me to ask to be recovered!». After some moments of hope Father Luigi perceived that the thread of his life was thinning out. After a collapse he noticed the anxiety on the faces and the reddened eyes. And with a small voice he whispered to Miss Zaira Spreafico who, more than all the others, felt the weight of the responsibility: «You will see, you will see, you will see».

News about Father Luigi's worsening conditions had called many people to the parsonage. Visits made him tired. The man of the word had been forced to sacrifice his word. Suddenly he remembered his woman-servant.

Making gestures he wanted to be assured of her future. When he understood that he would have been fulfilled he made a gesture of deep happiness. Then he expressed the wish to have all inside the room. He was under the impression of having lacked in charity denying his children the last blessing of their dying father. He died on 29 September 1954 at the age of 56, 3 months and 7 days.

In the last period he did not mention the «Nostra Famiglia». It was not his work, because it was «God's work».

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