

DICASTERY FOR LAITY, FAMILY AND LIFE

Holiness in Families around the World



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HOLINESS IN FAMILIES AROUND THE WORLD

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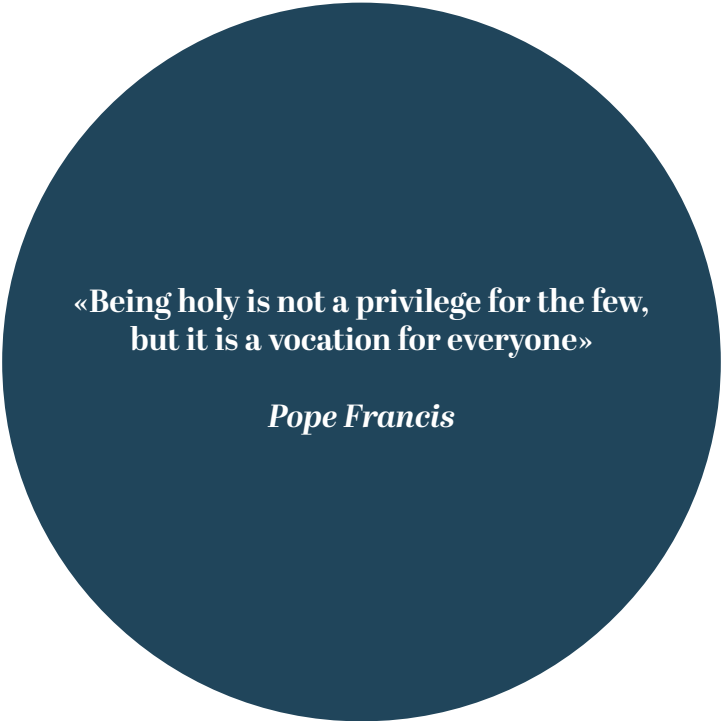
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«Being holy is not a privilege for the few,
but it is a vocation for everyone»

Pope Francis

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INTRODUCTION

HOLINESS IN FAMILIES AROUND THE WORLD ... THE MOST ATTRACTIVE FACE OF THE CHURCH (GE 9)

A few years ago, as I was preparing a workshop with my husband on holy spouses in the Church's most recent history, I realized that there are so many families in the world that have embarked upon a journey of holiness! Couples of spouses and "families next door" (cf. *GE*), who left evidence of how to joyfully live everyday full of *Christian grace*. For some of these couples and families, a cause of beatification has been initiated: Servants of God, venerable, blessed, and a married couple who are saints precisely by virtue of their marriage, Louis and Zélie Martin, the parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. In fact, As Pope Francis recalls, "In many holy marriages too, each spouse becomes a means used by Christ for the sanctification of the other" (*GE* 141). Yet, we have never even heard of most of them. These were Italian, Spanish, South American, African, and Asian couples from all parts of the world who were able to put God at the center of their families.

When one consults the list of cases currently underway, one can truly realize how the call to holiness is the way in which Christ is revealed through the vocation of each person, not only as individual baptized faithful, but also by virtue of our state of life, such as marriage. In fact, we spouses are called to walk the path of holiness together: not only as two distinct individuals, but also as a couple, in the only Sacrament of Matrimony. If, in fact, through Baptism the Holy Spirit descends upon each of us, making us children of God and calling us to personal holiness, in marriage the Holy Spirit descends *upon the loving relationship* of the spouses to transform their ability to love to the point of making them holy together!

So, in the Year for the Family “*Amoris Laetitia*”, the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life has prepared this booklet on “Holiness in Families around the World” with the purpose of providing family ministry with a path to reveal the beauty of the vocation to marriage and family as a way to holiness.

We are aware that, more recently, in addition to married couples, in the Church other “categories” of saints are emerging within the People of God: children, young engaged couples, heroic mothers who have given their lives for their children. But for this booklet we have chosen married couples only, in order to precisely highlight the “sanctifying” significance of the Sacrament of Matrimony. Who knows, if perhaps in the near future we can produce another booklet with profiles of children and young saints of our time!

Therefore, we thought that this could partially fulfill the goal of the 2022 World Meeting of Families, that is, to reread *Amoris Laetitia* in the light of *Gaudete et Exsultate*’s call to holiness: provoking an intertwined reading of these two apostolic exhortations can help us rediscover the precious value of living together as a family, revealing how an apparently “normal” family life can truly become *life in the Spirit*, life in God.

Besides, this is the meaning of the expression “family spirituality”. «The spirituality of family love – states *Amoris Laetitia* - is made up of thousands of small but real gestures. In that variety of gifts and encounters which deepen *communion*, God has his *dwelling place* [...] » (AL 315). «A positive experience of family communion is a true path to daily sanctification» (AL 316).

WHY THESE FAMILIES?

In the text we are presenting here, we have gathered together 8 married couples whose processes of beatification and canonization may never come to an end, but who can allow us to breathe the “air of holiness”. They are “normal” families, who nevertheless were able to recognize Christ in their daily relationships and keep their gaze fixed on God, allowing Him to render the ordinary aspects of their days “extraordinary”(GE 17).

Some of these couples lived during the last century, others before that, but as we read through the pages of their diaries and the testimonies of those who had met them, we realize that each one of those families could be our own. They have the same problems with love, misunderstandings, difficulties related to work, the education of children, and the challenges imposed by a society – present in every age – not very inclined to sharing Christian choices. We could have chosen other married couples for whom a cause of beatification is underway, but we preferred to prepare a short, easily accessible booklet, which does not claim to be either complete or exhaustive, but rather to show the similarity of these families with the families of today. And through anecdotes, memories and testimonies, it will show that the holiness to which we are all called is a possible reality!

Not only that, but we will discover that, in the end, the instruments that the Lord makes available to us are always the same: prayer, sacraments, research and entrustment to the divine, gestures of charity and service to others.

Our hope is that each one of us be encouraged to seek, as did these couples, the original and only way of holiness that the Lord wishes to give to our family, reminding us that «the measure of our holiness» does not depend on our greatness, rather «from the stature that Christ achieves in us». (*GE* 21).

There is, in fact, a fundamental difference between a *good marriage* and a *holy marriage*: in a good marriage husband and wife strive to love one another; in a holy marriage the couple places their efforts in the hands of God and so their gestures go beyond what they are capable of doing, showing *what God can do*. With this in mind, we can put aside all concern about the complicated family situations we experience today that seem to make our life in God impossible: in one way or another, the same difficulties have been experienced by married couples of all times. Our hearts are, in fact, thirsty for God's love in the same way as the Alvira couple in Spain, the Beltrame Quattrocchi couple in Italy, or the Rugamba couple in Rwanda. What counts, says Saint Paul, is that in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, we must always behave in a manner worthy of the vocation we have received (cf. *Eph* 4:1). And these families were able to do just that. One can, in fact, grow in virtue and grace even in the midst of poverty, sickness and difficulties of every kind.

It is wonderful to know that God “hides Himself” in our homes, since, as Isaiah says (45:15), «Truly with you God is hidden». So let’s look for Him then! Not only because the family is the first place where our holiness can take shape, but also because it is through the front door of their homes that holy spouses, those who spread God’s love around themselves, come and go.

Hence, let us entrust this pastoral tool to Mary the Most Holy and to Saint Joseph: even in the beauty and perfection of their holiness, they were man and woman, spouses and parents. Like us, they experienced hardships and worries; yet – as Pope Francis says – they knew how to allow themselves to be surprised by God, welcoming life not as an unexpected event they needed to defend themselves against, but as a mystery that hides the secret of true joy.

Gabriella Gambino

Under-Secretary of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life

STRUCTURE

- Biographical notes.
- Everyday life, with some ideas for reflection.
- Instruments of “holiness”, with some ideas for reflection.

WHO IS THIS FOR?

- Spouses and families who wish to deepen their understanding of how to live the Gospel to the fullest.
- Communities that long to embrace the great mystery of marriage as a path to holiness.

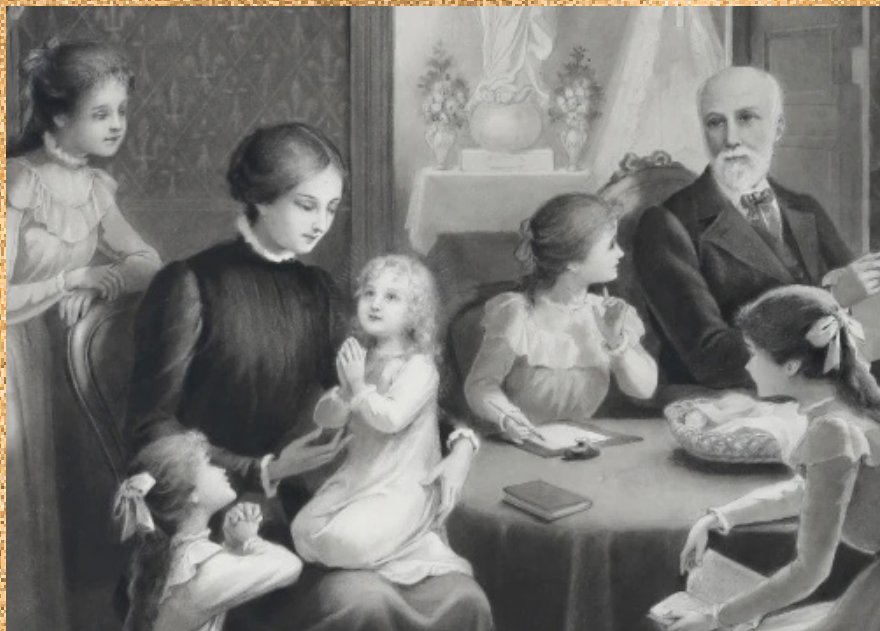
HOW TO USE

- As a training course to be used as a couple or with other families.
- As a family ministry process for formation in parishes and dioceses.

A journey “together towards Heaven”

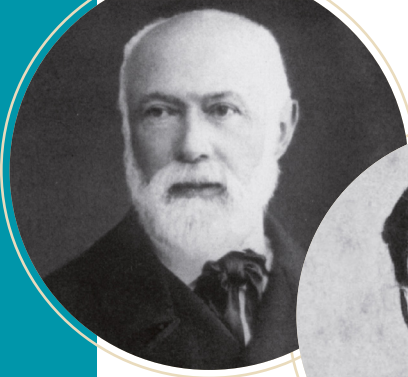


SAINT
LOUIS MARTIN AND ZÉLIE GUÉRIN
St. Thérèse of Lisieux's parents



WHERE GOD SHOWS THROUGH

The Martin family offers families throughout the world a glimpse of hope even in the midst of great difficulties. They lived their daily lives and worked with trust and the ability to give themselves up to God; marriage as a “two-way climb towards Heaven”; family commitment as a gift from God.



BIOGRAPHY¹

LOUIS MARTIN (1823-1894)

Louis was born in Bordeaux (France) in 1823. At the age of 22 he moved with his family to Alençon where he began his studies. To the regret of the family, he refused a military career, preferring to devote himself to working as a watchmaker, which had fascinated him since childhood. So his apprenticeship began, first in Rennes and then in Strasbourg. These were decisive years, during which the desire to consecrate himself to God was born in his heart. However, his difficulty in learning Latin forced him to give up this project. In 1850, he returned to Alençon, where he opened a watch and jewelry shop.

MARIE-AZÉLIE GUÉRIN (1831-1877)

Marie-Azélie (Zélie) was born on December 23, 1831, in Gandelain, France. The education she received from her parents, of steadfast faith, yet harsh, authoritative and demanding, would shape her personality, rigor and spirituality forever. After finishing her studies, she felt called to religious life, but the Superior refused to let her enter the convent because of her poor health. Zélie did not lose heart, and with the help of her sister, she devoted herself to the art of embroidery that she learned at the “School of Lace” and, in particular, to manufacturing a certain lace known as Alençon lace. When she was only 22 years old, she opened her first embroidery workshop which, in a short time, thanks to the support of several Parisian manufacturers, expanded and became a true business.

¹ Cf. Dominique Menvielle, *La famille Martin en cordée vers le ciel*, Éd. Emmanuel, Paris 2020,

ENGAGEMENT, MATRIMONY AND CHILDREN

In April 1858, on the Saint-Léonard Bridge Zélie crossed paths with a handsome young man who struck her with his good looks, his bearing and his physiognomy. It was Louis Martin, who had a watchmaker's workshop. It was "love at first sight" and after only 3 months of engagement, they decided to get married.

They had nine children, four of whom died at an early age; five girls remained and, as Louis would say, the Lord gave them the gift of naming them as His brides. Of the five nuns, Thérèse became a saint (Saint Thérèse of Lisieux) and Léonie, who had worried her parents so much because of her difficult character and some behavioral problems, is today a "Servant of God".

WORK

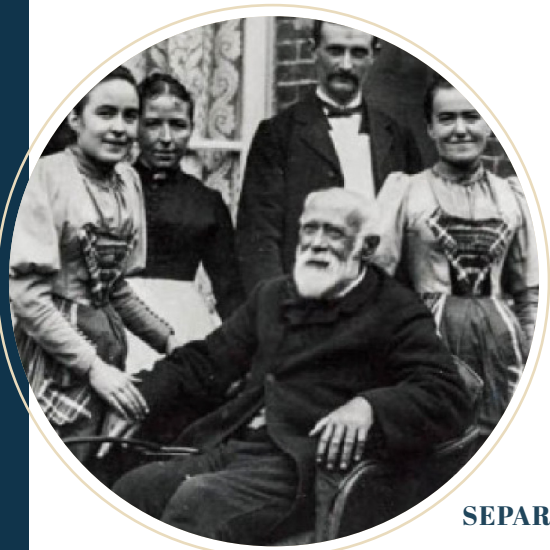
There were joys and worries as well as difficulties in reconciling the work of both parents with the education of their children and the many tasks that a large family entails.

The success of Zélie's workshop led Louis to close his watchmaker's store to help his wife.

GRIEF, ILLNESS, AND WIDOWHOOD

There were moments of great hardship too: the loss of four of their children and Zélie's illness, which led to her premature death at the age of 46. Louis remained a widower with four daughters who were still small (the youngest, Therese, was only five years old) and, in order to respect Zélie's wishes, he decided to move to Lisieux. Leaving Alençon for Lisieux meant giving up the lace workshop, leaving friendships and an environment to which he was attached, but the girls would have the companionship of their cousins and the closeness of their aunt and uncle Guérin, to whom Zélie had silently entrusted them shortly before her death.²

² Cf. S.G. Piat, *Storia di una famiglia*, Ed OCD, VII edizione I ristampa, Roma 2018, pp. 253-273.



THE ILLNESS AND SEPARATION FROM HIS DAUGHTERS

In 1887, Louis was struck by a first attack of paralysis, the beginning of his long and humiliating ordeal, which would eventually force him into a wheelchair. In addition, he developed progressive cerebral atherosclerosis, which made him dangerous to himself and to others. His family was forced to put him in a psychiatric hospital, a factor that at the time meant considerable social alienation. In addition to this, there were rumors in the city that Louis had gone mad because of the pain of the abandonment of his daughters who, one after the other, had become nuns. When he was alert, Louis became aware of all this and suffered greatly, but at the same time he made an offering to the Lord.

During a moment of clear thinking, he said these words to the doctor who was treating him: *«I was always used to being in charge and I see myself reduced to obeying. It is hard»*³.

These are Louis' words after Teresa entered the Carmelite Order: *«God alone can demand such a sacrifice, but He helps me so powerfully that in the midst of my tears, my heart overflows with joy»*⁴.

He died peacefully after a heart attack on July 29, 1894, assisted by Celina who had delayed her entrance into the Carmelite Convent to take care of him.

³ *Ivi*, pp. 366.

⁴ *Ivi*, pp. 346.

THE PROCESS OF BEATIFICATION AND CANONIZATION

1957 - 1960: the diocesan phase of the processes of beatification of the Servants of God Louis Martin and Azélie Guérin.

1971: the two causes proceed as one when they are discussed before the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

26 March 1994: the couple of Servants of God, with the recognition of the heroic virtues, is proclaimed venerable by John Paul II.

2003: the study of the miracle attributed to their intercession is opened.

19 October 2008: Zélie and Louis Martin are proclaimed blessed.

THE FIRST MIRACLE⁵

Pietro Schilirò was born in Monza (Italy) on May 25, 2002. A week after his birth, he was baptized urgently, because doctors believed he was in danger of dying. *«Father Antonio Sangalli - says his mother Adele - the Carmelite who was following us as a spiritual father and to whom we had asked to celebrate the Baptism, entrusted us with the image of the Martins that he had found by chance while looking for the book of the Baptism rite. After two days the result of the biopsy arrived: Peter could live a few hours or a few days. We went home and prayed the rosary with friends, then talked about the funeral.»* But during that night of silence something happened: *«We changed our outlook. First we were resigned, then we told ourselves that we were making a mistake, that we were accepting that science could have the last word. But if we are children of a good Father, the Lord of life, with the freedom of children we could ask for grace, trusting what the Lord wanted to do»*. In their request, the Schilirò's were not alone: they began to distribute the image of the Martins to everyone, relatives, friends, parishioners, even non-believing neighbors.

⁵ Quotations found in *Miracolo di famiglia* (10/05/2012), <www.agensir.it>.

The days passed between prayers and waiting, but there was no positive sign. [...] The child was so sick that his parents couldn't even touch him and they stayed close to him with prayers and singing. Towards the end of June, Pietro had a very serious crisis, and when his parents arrived at the hospital they found him distraught, yet better: during the night, incredibly, he had shown signs that he was able to breathe. Three days later his tubes were removed. The head of the hospital, a non-believer, found himself testifying at the process for his beatification that he *«could not deny the extraordinary nature of the events that had taken place»*.

Once the miracle was documented, Pietro was considered a sort of “phenomenon”. His mother recalls that *«some people had misunderstood»*. Around the age of 3, it was discovered that Pietro had become deaf. *«It was an important fact - says his mother - because it helped us and those around us to put him in the right place. He is a child like any other who needs to be accompanied in his growth and faith. He has a good relationship with his class and for the others it is an opportunity to welcome those in need»*.

What amazed Adele Schilirò in praying to the Martins was discovering that *«these spouses resembled us. Holiness is within our reach, they, like us, lived an ordinary life, they had the same worries about work, he was a watchmaker and she was a lace maker, about friends, about neighbors... Comparing ourselves with them made us discover that marriage is truly a path to holiness»*.





THE SECOND MIRACLE⁶

Carmen, a small girl from Valencia (Spain), was born on October 15, 2008, after 28 weeks of a very difficult pregnancy. At the hospital, the parents were told: «prepare for the worst». Complications, frequent in a premature baby, multiplied: respiratory difficulties, heart problems, brain hemorrhaging at the most advanced stage. Carmen's father entered the Church of a Carmel to pray. At the end of November, the case seemed desperate. For the first time, the mom was able to touch her baby in the incubator. The family began to discuss her burial.

On November 23, the Prioress of the Carmel gave the parents the Prayer to Louis and Zélie. They did not know them at all, nor did they know their daughter, Saint Therese of the Child Jesus. The next day, a providential hospital transfer took place. Contrary to all expectations, Carmen endured it; the infection was eliminated. She began her recovery and was discharged on January 2, 2009.

A serious concern remained: brain hemorrhaging dilated the child's skull and caused her to suffer. An examination was scheduled for February 19. It would probably be necessary to operate. Again they asked for the Martins' intercession. A few days later, the ultrasound revealed that the brain hemorrhaging had disappeared, only the scars remained and, what was even more surprising (the doctors were still unable to explain it), was the total absence of neurological or motorial consequences.

On March 18, 2015, Pope Francis authorized the recognition of the miracle of little Carmen's healing, attributed to the intercession of Blessed Louis and Zélie Martin.

CANONIZATION

18 October 2015: Louis and Zélie Martin are proclaimed saints by Pope Francis.

⁶ Cf. *I miracoli dei coniugi Martin, canonizzati al Sinodo: «La santità nella vita familiare è possibile»* (11/10/2015), <www.tempi.it>.

PEARLS OF HOLINESS

Where God's power emerges

«Louis and Zélie understood that they could become saints not in spite of marriage, but through and with marriage, and that marriage itself had to be considered as the starting point of an upward climb for two.

Today the Church not only admires the sanctity of their lives, but recognizes in this couple the sanctity of the institution of conjugal love, as it was envisioned by the Creator Himself. The conjugal love of Louis and Zélie is a pure reflection of Christ's love for His Church.

*The Martins, had no hesitations about putting God first in their lives. In their home, God was always the first to be served. When their family was put to the test, the spontaneous reaction was always acceptance of God's will. If Mrs. Martin often said that **“God is the Master and He does what He wants”**, Mr. Martin echoed her by repeating **“God is the first to be served”**.*

Louis and Zélie are a gift for young engaged couples because of the courage they showed in obeying the Church even when the Church asked them to go against the tide, against the trend. They were not afraid of words such as purity, chastity or virginity, they did not skip any steps, they lived, even if for a short time, an engagement that respected the will of God and the teachings of the Church.

Louis and Zélie are a gift to spouses of any age for the esteem, respect and harmony with which they loved each other for 19 years. Both heroically lived out their marriage promises of faithfulness to their commitment, indissolubility of the bond, and fruitfulness of love, in happiness and in trial, in health and in sickness»⁷.

⁷ From the homily of Card. José Saraiva Martins for the beatification of Louis and Zélie Martin, Lisieux, October 19, 2008.

«Louis and Zélie Martin, parents of St. Therese, **wanted to live closer to the Word of God**, in all its sweetness and its demands. The result of this was that **their personal and conjugal lives were transformed from within** through the daily practice of the Sacraments, in a constant relationship with God. [...]

Louis and Zélie **soon understood that suffering was part of the daily Christian life**. In union with the Passion of Christ, they bore the immense sadness of the loss of four young children... without forgetting the family drama of Zélie's tumor and her death when the last child, Teresa, was just five years old. At the end of his earthly existence, Louis would experience a psychiatric hospital with all that it entails in terms of purification»⁸.

⁸ Msgr. Marc Aillet, Bishop of Bayonne (France), cf. *I coniugi Martin, primi santi sposi nella Chiesa* (15/10/2015), <www.lanuovabq.it>.



EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE MARTIN FAMILY⁹

How God reveals Himself through their family events

1. MARITAL LOVE AND HARMONY

Louis and Zélie spoke of each other with words that allowed a deep, rooted love and great mutual respect to shine through. Their gaze was constantly directed towards the other spouse, so that the “I” was constantly replaced by the “we”. Their words knew how to overlook mistakes and instead sing the praises of their spouse.

«My husband is a holy man. I wish a similar one for all women. I am always so happy with him: he makes my life very peaceful»¹⁰.

«He understood me and comforted me... Our feelings were always in unison and he comforted and supported me»¹¹.

Louis ended a letter addressed to his daughters with these words: *«my dear daughters, I hold you all in my heart with much fondness and I entrust you to your holy mother»*. (November 25, 1877)

Louis wrote to his wife:

«Dear friend, I will not be able to reach Alençon until Monday; it seems like such a long time to me, and I look forward to being near you. Needless to say, your letter gave me great pleasure, except that I noticed that you are tiring yourself too much. Thus, I recommend you to stay calm and moderated, in your work [...]. I had the joy of taking communion at Our Lady of Victories. I also lit a candle for the whole family. I embrace you all from the heart, awaiting the happiness of being reunited with you. [...] Your husband and true friend, who loves you for life»¹².

⁹ Cf. S.G. Piat, *Storia di una famiglia*, op. cit., pp. 145-180.

¹⁰ Zélie's letter to her brother Isidoro, 1 January 1863.

¹¹ Zélie's letter to her daughter Pauline, 4 March 1877.

¹² From one of Louis's letters to Zélie from Paris, 8 October 1863.

After more than ten years of marriage, Zélie writes these words to her husband:

*«I embrace you with all my heart, I am so happy today, just thinking about seeing you again, I can no longer work. **Your wife, who loves you more than her life**»¹³.*

*«In my mind I follow you all day long. I say to myself, ‘He must be doing this now.’ It seems to me that I shall be with you again so late, my dear Louis: **I love you with all my heart**, and being deprived of your presence causes my heart to double; **it would be utterly impossible for me to live away from you**»¹⁴.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let's reread the words with which Zélie and Louis spoke about one another. Do we have the same affectionate attitude towards each other in our daily lives?
- How do we talk as a family, about each other?
- How do I speak about my family members, with other people?
- How do I react to the weaknesses of my family members?

¹³ Zélie's letter, May 1869.

¹⁴ Zélie's letter, Lisieux 31 August 1873.

2. THE JOY OF PARENTHOOD AND EDUCATIONAL COMMITMENT

Despite the sacrifices and worries, Zélie writes: «*I love children madly*» (Letter Dec. 15, 1872); «*I longed to have many of them to raise them for Heaven*»¹⁵.

The upbringing of the daughters was by common consent, exercised with gentleness and firmness, especially through the example of ordinary life.

It seems that after observing an argument between her parents, little Marie went to her mother and asked, «*Don't you get along?*» Zélie's response was clear: «*Don't worry, I love your father very much*». The parents talked about it by themselves and Zélie said, «*We need to control ourselves,*» we cannot have such a behavior that raises such questions in our children.¹⁶

This exchange of remarks proved the normality of this couple in the ups and downs of family harmony but, at the same time, also the firm will of a serene and constructive confrontation to improve.

They were careful to respect the personality of each child, but without exaggerating. Louis had confidence in Zélie's actions: «*Yesterday the whole morning was devoted to buying a complete outfit for Maria; a beautiful dress, a coat very much to her taste. I must start over again for Leonia; I thought of giving her your things, but Maria next to her would be too elegant: everything must be at the same level. All I do is buy things every day; your father jokes that it's a passion of mine! I try to explain to him that I can't do otherwise; but he finds it hard to believe. But he trusts me, he knows well that I will not lead him to ruin!*»¹⁷.

¹⁵ Zélie's letter to Pauline, 4 March 1877.

¹⁶ Cf. *Litigavano fra loro i genitori di santa Teresina?* (08/02/2021), <it.aletea.org>.

¹⁷ Zélie's letter to her sister-in-law, December 1875.

There was also concern about her daughters' upbringing, especially Léonie. Zélie entrusts herself to God in prayer and asks for the intercession of her beloved sister for her daughter.

This was what Zélie wrote in a letter to her daughter Pauline, March 12, 1877: *«You know how your sister was, completely insubordinate, she never wanted to obey me except by force; she did, out of a spirit of contradiction, all the opposite of what I wanted, even if she herself wanted it. [...] Now I treat this child with such sweetness that I hope to be able, little by little, to correct her defects»*¹⁸.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let's try to think of some meeting points or points of dissent that generate discussion in the education of one's children.
- Let's reflect on how we can build up harmony, day by day, even in the small things, between husband and wife and in the family.
- Are there any "rules" we could set for ourselves to always seek the good for our children together? For example: consult each other before granting permission, listen to each other's opinion openly, avoid "imposing" our own opinion.

¹⁸ Zélie's letter to Paolina, 12 March 1877.

3. TIME FOR FAMILY AND FUN

«Our father loved his children very much. He had a maternal love for us»¹⁹.

In a letter from the Carmel, Teresa wrote to her father Louis: *«Thank you, dearest Father, for everything you give me... do you remember, Father, when in Genoa we used to follow Mr. “X” and the others from afar? How much fun we had! I’ll never forget the memory of this beautiful trip with my dearest Father»²⁰.*

In Lisieux, the father, Louis, tried to preserve a warm and joyful environment. He created small games for his daughters, using his skills and precision as a watchmaker. He was the one who animated the Christmas vigils with songs, poems, chess games, chestnuts cooked on the fire. He also organized walking tours to preserve the healthy tradition of Sunday walks that took place in Alençon.

These are Marie’s words, in a letter to her aunt: *«For us, he would make all possible sacrifices, he would sacrifice his happiness, his life, if necessary, to make us happy»²¹.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- A large family and the responsibility of work don’t stop the Martins from carving out time to be with family and have fun together.
- What activities do we share as a family? What do we like to do together? How do we have fun?
- What undermines our “couple time” and our “family time”? How might we best defend them?

¹⁹ Céline, *Procès de béatification et canonisation de Sainte Thérèse de l’Enfant-Jésus et de la Sainte-Face*, v. 336.

²⁰ Thérèse’s letter to Mr. Martin, 17 May 1888, LT51.

²¹ S.G. Piat, *Storia di una famiglia*, op. cit., p. 254.

4. BALANCING FAMILY AND WORK

Zélie ran a lace workshop, Louis had a watchmaker's store and a goldsmith's store, and helped his wife in the workshop. Both of them worked with intelligence and great commitment trying, not without difficulty, to harmonize the needs of work and those of the family. They were careful to respect the rights of the workers and suppliers. They remained firm in their decision not to work on Sundays, a day that would have been decidedly propitious for business, but it was the «*feast day of the Good Lord*» and had to be respected.

«I will take the train to Lisieux on Sunday at three-thirty in the morning. I tried to arrange things in another way, but I do not see a better solution. It is impossible for me this time to leave on Saturday, and on Sunday I cannot travel all morning, it would be contrary to my principles, for I find that great care must be taken not to cooperate to work on Sundays»²².

The workers «*cared about Mom, they would have been very sorry not to work for her anymore. They all loved her very much. I realized this when, during her last illness, I was the one receiving them*»²³.

On June 24, 1874, Zélie wrote to her sister-in-law, «*Therese is beginning to say almost everything. She is getting prettier and prettier, but I am very busy because she is constantly around me and it is not easy for me to work. So, to make up for lost time, in the evening I continue my lace until ten o'clock and get up at five. I also have to get up once or twice during the night for the little baby. But in the end, the more I have to do, the better I feel*»²⁴.



²² Zélie's letter to her brother, 26 November 1871.

²³ Testimony of their daughter Maria.

²⁴ Zélie's letter to her sister-in-law, 24 June 1874.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let's reflect on the time we spend at work.
- Do we have any strong footholds to defend our family time?
- Are there any choices we could make to live work time and our family time in a more balanced manner?

5. ATTENTION TOWARDS OTHERS

Even though they had a large family, they still tried to help those in need: *«On our way back, we met a poor old man who looked like a nice person, good-natured. I sent Teresa to bring him a small offering, he seemed so moved and thankful that I understood that he was probably very unhappy. I told him to follow us, and that I would give him some shoes. We gave him a good meal: he was starving. [...] I told him to come whenever he wanted and that he would receive bread. [...] This meeting made me very sad, I can't help thinking about the good man who however looked very happy for the little money I gave him. [...] As he ate, he took his shoes in his hand, looked at them happily and smiled at them»*²⁵.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- In a not-so-easy family situation to manage, there is no lack of attention to others, knowing how to look past the domestic walls and always being willing to open the door of one's home.
- Let's look around: is there someone, right now, who would like a glance from us, our attention, a bit of our time? For example: a relative, a neighbor, a colleague or a friend?

²⁵ S.G. Piat, *Storia di una famiglia*, op. cit., pp. 163-164.



CONCRETE INSTRUMENTS OF HOLINESS

The fixed points of the Martin family

The daily life of the Martin family, made up of joys but also at times of anguish, was lived always keeping two dimensions together. There was a horizontal dimension, which enabled them to know how to rejoice in beautiful things and to accept suffering in difficulties. There was also a vertical dimension, which constantly directed their gaze towards heaven, preventing them from turning in on themselves and preparing them to accept everything as a gift from God.

Hence, the Martins live a **spirituality embodied in their daily lives**, which led them to love starting with small things, to have special attention for each of their children, to take care of the people who worked for them or those in need. We did not see extraordinary actions, but small gestures, simple, within everyone's reach.

1. LOOKING TO THE HEAVENS, ENTRUSTING ONESELF TOTALLY TO THE WILL OF GOD

«Let us put ourselves in the hands of the good Lord; He knows better than we do what we need: “It is He who makes the wound and He who binds it up”»²⁶.

After the passing of her two little boys, Zélie was very tried, she could not live the new pregnancy with serenity and confided her fears to her sister-in-law: *«I see with pleasure, my dear sister, that your little daughter is your joy: I was so happy with my first one; in my eyes there were no children like her. I hoped it would go so well for everyone else, too. I was wrong. [...] You can't imagine how terrified I am about the future, about this little creature I'm expecting. [...] The best thing is to put everything in God's hands and wait for events in calmness and abandonment to His will. This is what I will try to do»²⁷.*

²⁶ *Ivi*, p. 225.

²⁷ Laura Mattioli, *Il cammino di santità e di missione nella famiglia come risposta alla volontà di Dio*, Thesis ad Doctorandum in Theologia, Romae 2021, pp. 86-87.

After discovering the seriousness of her illness, Zélie came to say: *«If the Good Lord wants to cure me, I will be very happy, because I want to live; it costs me to leave my husband and daughters. But at the same time I say to myself: if I am not be healed, it is perhaps because it will be more useful for them if I leave»*²⁸.

*«We must put ourselves in the position of generously accepting God's will, whatever it may be, because it will always be what is best for us»*²⁹.

After announcing her decision to enter the Carmel, referring to her father, Pauline wrote: *«In the afternoon I met him as he was going up the stairs and he looked a little sad and said to me: 'Don't believe, my Pauline, that if I am happy to give you to the good God, I will not suffer to separate myself from you'. And he embraced me with a moving tenderness»*³⁰.

After the sisters, Celine also confided her desire to enter the convent and her father Louis' response was moving: *«Come, let's go together in front of the Holy Sacrament to thank the Lord for the graces He grants to our family and for the honor He gives me in choosing brides in my home»*³¹.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let us reflect on how, in our life as a couple and as a family, the “horizontal dimension” (everyday life) is lived together with the “vertical dimension” (referring everything to God).
- Let's review the last few days: in what situation have we struggled alone, forgetting the help that comes from the living presence of Jesus in our home?

²⁸ Zélie's letter to her sister-in-law, 20 February 1877.

²⁹ S.G. Piat, *Storia di una famiglia*, op. cit., p. 226.

³⁰ Laura Mattioli, *Il cammino di santità*, op. cit., p. 74.

³¹ *Ivi*, p. 89.



2. PRAYING IN THE FAMILY

Common evening prayer closed the day, and Thérèse - who always had the closest seat to her father - noted, «All I had to do was look at him to know how the saints prayed!»³².

Each day began with this offering formula taught to the children [...]: *«My God, I give you my heart, take it, if you like, so that no creature may possess it, but You alone, my good Jesus»*. Thérèse recalls it in her Manuscripts: *«I prayed a lot to the good Jesus and I often gave Him my heart using the little formula that my mother had taught me»³³.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- How might we make prayer time with our children “special”? Let’s use imagination and creativity.

³² S.G. Piat, *Storia di una famiglia*, op. cit., p. 274.

³³ *Ivi*, pp. 207-208.

3. APPROACHING THE SACRAMENTS, ESPECIALLY THE EUCHARIST AND CONFESSION

«My father and mother went to Mass every morning. They took communion as often as they could. In Lent they fasted and abstained from meat»³⁴.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Sometimes, we run the risk of approaching the Sacraments out of habit, without an awareness of the great gift we can receive. Has this happened to us? Could we, for example, decide to deepen our knowledge of a particular sacrament?

CONCLUSIVE REFLECTIONS

- How can Louis and Zélie's example help our family?
- What message are they giving us at this time in our relationship as a couple and as a family?

IDEAS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

- I think of my family: what can I thank the Lord for?
- I reflect on how much the life of the Martin family has evoked in me.
- I beg for the gift of the Spirit regarding a problem I am having.

³⁴ Céline, *Procès de béatification et canonisation de Thérèse*, op. cit., v. 335

PRAYER FOR INTERCESSION

*God Eternal Love
you have given us in the saints Louis and Zélie
an example of holiness lived in marriage.
They have preserved faith and hope
in the midst of the sorrows and difficulties of life;
they educated their children in freedom
so that they may come to be saints.
May their prayers and their example help families
to enjoy the beauty of God's companionship
in life and the joy of serving love.
Through their intercession,
grant us the grace we ask and make us holy.
Through Christ our Lord.*

TO DEEPEN

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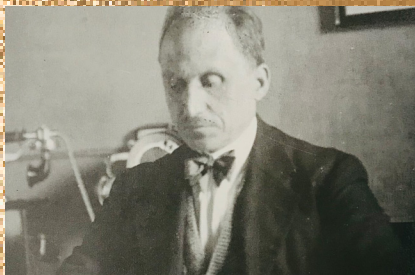
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Intertwining threads



BLESSED
LUIGI BELTRAME QUATTROCCHI
AND MARIA CORSINI

*Parents of the venerable
Enrica Beltrame Quattrocchi*



WHERE GOD SHOWS THROUGH

Luigi and Maria's family life gradually unfolded like the marvelous pattern of a fabric that, day by day, whose reverse side reveals a great deal of work of each carefully woven thread. The "we" had always taken precedence over the "I" and that is how they were able to grow in serving one another.



BIOGRAPHY

LUIGI BELTRAME QUATTROCCHI (1880 – 1951)

Luigi was born in Catania (Italy) on January 12, 1880, in a family of Friulian origin. His father's job, an official of the prefecture, required the family to move several times, the last move being to Urbino. With the departure of the Beltrame family from Catania, his uncle and aunt, Luigi and Francesca Quattrocchi, childless, were deprived of the joy of their nieces and nephews. So they proposed to their brother and sister-in-law to raise little Luigi, who they were particularly fond of, promising that they would have welcomed and loved him as a son but without replacing the parents or depriving him of their love.

EDUCATION

Luigi, followed his aunt and uncle to Ancona and then to Rome where, after finishing high school, he enrolled in the Faculty of Law. His uncle, rather strict, followed him in his studies, while his aunt tried to soften her husband's ways. Luigi received an education based on a sense of responsibility and duty, surrounded by the love of his parents and his aunt and uncle who, in agreement with his parents, adopted him.

In 1902, he received his law degree and began his career as a lawyer.

He enjoyed the great classics of literature, loved music, theater, the beauty of nature and traveling.

HIS LAY SPIRIT

A man of his time, Louis cultivated a secular spirit and kept his distance from religion and the Church, but he was deeply honest and respectful of the diversity of people. This led him to feel in harmony with the young Maria who, in her simplicity, revealed to him a justice that went beyond the books of law and spoke to him of intentions and morality.

MARIA LUISA CORSINI (1884 – 1965)

Maria was born in Florence (Italy) on June 24, 1884, the only daughter of Florentine parents. Her father, an army officer, was authoritarian and short-tempered; her mother was lively and domineering. This often led them to disagree. Young Maria, while feeling loved by her parents, was disturbed by the animated arguments and sometimes invited them to make peace by leaving an olive leaf under their napkin. One day, she goes so far as to say to her father, «*See, Father, I wouldn't have married you the way Mother did, with your bad temper!*»¹. The little girl developed a sensitive and introverted character, but at the same time she was strong and decisive.

EDUCATION

Maria grew up in a lay environment, with values such as homeland and freedom that, at the time, were openly at odds with the teachings of the Church. In 1893 the family moved to Rome and, disregarding Maria's love of literature, her parents enrolled her in the Women's School of Commerce for Managers and Accountants. A choice that revealed a lot about the influence in this family of the Renaissance ideas of freedom and emancipation of women. The technical studies did not however prevent the young woman from continuing to cultivate her passion for literature, learning English, French and studying piano.

¹ *Lettera beati Luigi e Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi* (05/02/2009), Abbazia San Giuseppe di Clairval, <www.clairval.com>.



ENGAGEMENT, MATRIMONY AND CHILDREN

THE MEETING

The friendship between the Corsini and Quattrocchi families allowed the two to meet. Luigi was a young and brilliant law student; Maria studied at the school of commerce, she studied piano and read the classics. Their friendship was born on common cultural interests.

THE TURNING POINT

A serious illness, which ended in peritonitis, brought young Luigi close to death and Maria, as she herself would say, prayed a great deal for him. This was the opportunity for her to open her heart to God. In her despair, she sent Luigi a picture of Our Lady of Pompeii, accompanied by these words: *«This is the picture before which I have prayed and implored so much for your health. Kiss it every evening and every morning and always keep it with you. May the Lord and the Blessed Virgin bless you and your family»*².

After 47 years, when Luigi passed away, this small image was found jealously guarded in his wallet.

² Giorgio Papàsogli, *Questi borghesi*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI), 1994, p. 35.

A PASSIONATE LOVE

During their engagement, after a month apart Luigi and Maria began to exchange numerous letters, which today tell us of «a yearning, passionate love, revealed to the other without reserve, yet not without a delicate modesty. Luigi wrote to Maria: “*Your love has redeemed [my soul] from a sterility that would have killed it*”. Maria, then, writes to Luigi: “*Never as in this moment, do I need to have you near me, to cling to you, strongly, to call you, to hear you speak.*”».³

THE WEDDING

On November 25, 1905, Luigi and Maria were married in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. The young couple settled in the Corsini home, where Maria’s parents and grandparents already lived. Living together was very respectful, even though Maria probably suffered from the fact that she was still considered to be a “young lady” and therefore had no official duties in the running of the house. Luigi understood how to accept the situation and helped his wife to manage it in the best possible way.

THE FIRST PREGNANCY

Their first pregnancy came a few months later, and the birth of Philip, on October 15, 1906, brought them great happiness. Motherhood taught the young mother to inevitably forget about her needs, as one of her daughters noted: «*Of course, for her, accustomed to remaining up-to-date with the latest theatrical, musical, and literary news, it was no small sacrifice to reduce her reading to almost nothing, and to eliminate shows and concerts*».⁴

³ Cf. Erminia Catapano, Vincenzo Angrisani, *Mistica Coniugale*, LEV, Città del Vaticano 2006, p. 13.

⁴ Cf. *Lettera*, *op. cit.*

The following year Maria faced a second pregnancy and this time she was very worried, so much so that she wrote to her husband, away on business: «*Who will give me the strength to think of two children? To bear the physical and physiological fatigue of pregnancy and the rest? Believe me that I am truly desperate*»⁵. Little by little, thanks to prayer, serenity returned to Maria's soul, with the acceptance of God's will. On March 9, 1908, Stefania was born.

THE THIRD PREGNANCY

On November 27, 1909, a third child, Cesarino, was born after a difficult birth.

THE FOURTH PREGNANCY

At the end of 1913, Maria faces a fourth pregnancy, which becomes complicated from the fourth month, when she was diagnosed with "*placenta previa*", which meant, at that time, a death sentence for mother and child. Maria and Luigi were devastated.

DOUBTS

Luigi was restless and asked himself: why her? Why to a mother of three children, an essential presence in the house, both for them and for grandparents and great-grandparents, who count on her help? Why is it she who is affected, deprived of her mission, broken in her prime?



⁵ *Ibidem*.

THE STRENGTH OF FAITH

During the eight years of marriage, Luigi's faith, in the presence of Maria, had matured and now gave them the strength to come together and answer with a categorical no to the advice to abort. Distraught and bewildered, the doctor who was following them said these words to Luigi: «*You don't realize, Lawyer: You are preparing yourself to be a widower with three children to support!*». The answer remained unchanged: "no" remains "no". The pregnancy continued, almost hopelessly, but without uncertainty... **God had won**»⁶.

TERRIBLE ANGUISH

The possibility that mother and child might not make it was real. In the face of this tragedy, the communion of the two spouses, rooted in God, became stronger more than ever. Four months passed, Maria remained in bed and every day was welcomed as a gift. On April 6, 1914, at the end of the eighth month, beyond all expectations, little Enrichetta came into the world. Mother and daughter were safe.

STANDING FIRM ON ONE'S VALUES

Luigi's career offered opportunities and great satisfaction. However, when having to choose between his career, and honesty and values, he had no doubts about stopping or taking a step back. Even when he suffered injustice, he preferred silence and Maria participated in all of this; together they evaluated the situation and even made courageous choices. The failures, determined by the wickedness of men, made Maria's admiration for Luigi grow: «*the injustices and the cowardice, hurting one of them, invested the other making them be more and more admired in that supernatural language with which He rose above the misfortunes and ambitions of others*»⁷.

⁶Cf. Giorgio Papàsogli, *Questi borghesi*, op. cit., p. 71.

⁷Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, *L'ordito e la trama. Radiografia di un matrimonio*, Associazione A.MAR.LUI, p. 13.

SPIRITUAL CRISIS

In August 1918, Luigi went through a difficult period. **Maria knew how to welcome and accompany her husband with tact and delicacy.**

«Dear Gino, [...] Jesus is so good and asks only one thing of us, taking into account our weakness: that we yearn to be better. [...] As long as this desire remains, and you keep Him ardently in your heart, we are certain that we shall progress. [...] I will always support you, I will comfort you, I will defend you from the insidious acts of your enemy. I myself, from earth or from heaven, will present you to God as something that is mine and He will always help you [...]. I will lend you, therefore, my own faith; I will extend my hands to you, and you will use all this to remain upright on the path»⁸.

One of her children remembers this period as follows: *«Our father went through a moment of extreme spiritual crisis, linked to the severe spiritual asceticism undertaken by his wife under the apostolic impulse of Father Matteo... He allowed himself to be overcome by a moment of discouragement and ended up being “afraid of God”, almost as if He were a rival who, by encouraging his wife too high up, would in a certain way take her away from him.... She helped him to overcome this obstacle due to nature and to allow that he too be attracted by the Spirit, in a love that has never become less but which has found itself increased by the living presence of grace»⁹.*

LUIGI'S SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT

In November 1951, Luigi added these words to his spiritual testament:

«I hope that God will grant me the grace of final perseverance in this faith which I feel is so alive today, and which I try to preserve with consistency in my thoughts and deeds, as I know and as I can»¹⁰.

He died a month later, as the result of a heart attack.

⁸ Giorgio Papàsogli, *Questi borghesi*, op. cit., p. 90.

⁹ *Beati Luigi e Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi* (27/11/2017), <carlopaola.blogspot.com>.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.



MARIA'S WIDOWHOOD

The loss of Luigi greatly challenges Maria's joy of life: *«The intensity of pain is given by the intensity of love. [...] Humanly speaking, there is no longer any value or interest or attraction; since he is not there, you feel detached from everything»¹¹.*

This is a pain which, however, is not closed to God: *«But should not this pain be mitigated by the security of one's present happiness in the possession of God? [...]. Perhaps I do not take enough account, Lord, of the graces you have granted to me, giving me such a life, which was supreme joy and above all a ladder to lead me closer to you. [...] And it seems to me that there is an empty space next to it, in a void of expectation. It is a place that I must reach, that I must conquer even with these tears that fill my heart and do not find the comfort in crying. [...] Yes, that's it, that's it. As we have always hoped, believed and loved together. Only then will the fabric be complete, in the hands of the divine Weaver: it will be the last everlasting thread to be inserted into the warp»¹².*

Luigi and Maria were not the protagonists of extraordinary acts, they did not face particular suffering or mourning, they simply fulfilled their matrimonial vocation in an exemplary way. Jesus, present in their love by virtue of the Sacrament of Matrimony, **was able to accomplish great things in them and through them, because He found room in their hearts.**

¹¹ Erminia Catapano, Vincenzo Angrisani, *Mistica Coniugale*, op. cit., p. 80.

¹² Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, *L'ordito e la trama*, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

THE PROCESS OF BEATIFICATION

Rome, 12 February 1994: the cause for beatification was opened.

Rome, 21 October 2001: the spouses Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi were proclaimed Blessed.

THE MIRACLE¹³

Today Gilberto Grossi is a surgeon at the hospital of Pisa.

Gilberto's ordeal began at the age of ten, when he was diagnosed with a form of ulcerative colitis. It is a disease that usually occurs in adulthood. For a child there did not seem to be any effective treatment. The situation became more complicated, at fifteen he had to undergo an operation to remove his colon, but the benefit was short-lived because soon after [...] rare complications of the original disease appeared. Little by little Gilberto could no longer walk. The doctors did not know how to intervene. Yet Gilberto seemed to be sustained by an iron will. In spite of all his health problems, he managed to graduate from high school and enrolled in medical school. In 1994, however, his condition worsened, and this time the pain was accompanied by discouragement and depression. It was during these months that Father Paolino Beltrame Quattrocchi, whom he had met years before, suggested that he should spend some time in his house in Rome, with the proposal of helping him to enter his parents' letters into the computer. Gilberto, who by now had given up hope of being able to devote himself to medical studies, gladly accepted. [...]

¹³ Cf. «*Luigi e Maria mi hanno salvato*». Un giovane neurochirurgo "protagonista" del miracolo (23/10/01). L. Moia in "Avvenire".

While he transcribes letter after letter, he confides in the intercession of Maria and Luigi. Not only does he ask to be healed, but also to realize his two dreams, which at the moment seemed so far away: to graduate in medicine and to marry the girl who in the meantime he had become engaged to. After a few months, one morning in June 1995, he suddenly discovered that his sores had closed and the unbearable bone pain had disappeared. The following examinations testify that the disease had not disappeared but, inexplicably, the symptoms no longer existed. For Gilberto there were no doubts: his silent invocations were had been heard. A conviction that is strengthened the following year, when he manages to get a degree and get married. Immediately afterwards, he began specializing in neurosurgery, covering grueling on-call shifts and performing demanding operations. In 1999, his colleagues, who examined him to verify his fitness for his duties, could not believe their eyes: the disease appeared in all its severity, but he no longer felt any pain.

PEARLS OF HOLINESS

Where God's power emerges

«The two of them had consecrated their conjugal love in a Christian manner, and the grace of the nuptial sacrament always supported them admirably in forming and growing their family»¹⁴.

*«Dear brothers and sisters! [...] we intend to highlight an example of **a positive reply to Christ's question**. The husband and wife lived in Rome in the first half of the 20th century, a century in which faith in Christ was harshly tried, and gave a positive reply. Even in those difficult years, husband and wife, Luigi and Maria, kept the lamp of the faith burning - lumen Christi - and passed it on to their four children [...].*

*Drawing on the word of God and the witness of the saints, the blessed couple lived an ordinary life in an extraordinary way. **Among the joys and anxieties of a normal family, they knew how to live an extraordinarily rich spiritual life.** At the center of their life was **the daily Eucharist** as well as devotion to the Virgin Mary, to whom they prayed every evening with **the Rosary**, and consultation with wise spiritual directors. In this way they could accompany their children in vocational discernment, training them to appreciate everything “from the roof up”, as they often, charmingly, liked to say.*

¹⁴ Cardinal Camillo Ruini, 12 February 1994, opening of the Cause of Canonization at the Tribunal for the Causes of Saints of the Vicariate of Rome

[...] Dear families, today we have distinctive confirmation **that the path of holiness lived together as a couple is possible**, beautiful, extraordinarily fruitful, and fundamental for the good of the family, the Church and society.

This prompts us to pray the Lord that there be many more married couples who can reveal in the holiness of their lives, the “great mystery” of spousal love, which originates in creation and is fulfilled in the union of Christ with his Church (cf. Eph 5:22-33).

Like every path of holiness, yours too, dear married couples, is not easy. Every day you face difficulties and trials, in order to be faithful to your vocation, to foster harmony between yourselves and between your children, to carry out your mission as parents and participate in social life.

May you be able to find in God’s word the answer to the questions which arise in everyday life. [...]

Married and family life can also experience moments of bewilderment. We know how many families in these cases are tempted to discouragement. I am particularly referring to those who are going through the sad event of separation; I am thinking of those who must face illness and those who are suffering the premature death of their spouse or of a child. In these situations, one can bear a great witness to fidelity in love, which is purified by having to pass through the crucible of suffering.

[...] Dear married couples, do not be overcome by hardship: **the grace of the Sacrament supports you** and helps you constantly to raise your arms to heaven [...]»¹⁵.

¹⁵ Homily of Saint John Paul II (21/10/2001), <www.vatican.va>.



EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE BELTRAME QUATTROCCHI FAMILY

How God reveals Himself in their family events

1. THE “WE” IN COUPLE

Luigi and Maria very clearly perceived the danger of letting the “I” prevail over the “we”. *«The splendor of their love is also the result of a continuous commitment: through daily efforts to improve themselves, correcting excesses and irritable traits of their characters, they made the conjugal “we” grow. They learned that the more you put aside the “I”, the more you savor the beauty and bliss that comes from the “we”»*¹⁶.

*«An earthly life lived in the perennial thought, inspired by God Himself, of rendering a loved one happy, as far as it depends on itself»*¹⁷.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Which “irritable traits” of my personality do I want to try to change?
- How can I contribute to multiply the moments of unity in our family?
- We share with our spouse a moment when we experienced the joy of a special harmony in which we felt as if we were “one”.

¹⁶ Cf. Erminia Catapano, Vincenzo Angrisani, *Mistica Coniugale*, op. cit., p. 24.

¹⁷ Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, *L'ordito e la trama*, op. cit., p. 11.

Feeling that they were each other's Servants went against the Renaissance idea of freedom, but Luigi and Maria **were not afraid to go against the tide**: their love was more important than their youthful ideals. Their love was not of mutual submission, but the conscious choice of dedicating a lot of attention to one another, as well as care and thoughtfulness, so that the other would be fulfilled and happy.

With these words Maria described love: *«The desire to gladden, relieve, make someone happy - to please them with constant attention and delicate care [...] when all this becomes almost a prayer in the devotion to a very dear and worthy person – who is your spouse, father, friend, sweetest son – this is love»*¹⁸.

*«Give him/her the joy of feeling loved, surrounded, covered with every constant and most loving kindness»*¹⁹.

*«Their life as a couple was a true contest of respect, dedication, loving dependence and mutual obedience, in a common search for the “best” for each other»*²⁰.

*«Love is a gift: I give love and it comes back to me twice as much. And so it was for them: it was a game of loving each other more, of taking the other's position. If one liked something, the other really liked it. And if there was an argument, it was because he wanted to do what she liked and she wanted to do what he liked. If there was discussion... but there was such an understanding. And we grew up in that kind of environment»*²¹. (their son, Fr. Tarcisio)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Do I really want every member of my family to feel accomplished and happy?
- What care, attention, kindness did I receive in my family? Did I give thanks?
- What care, attention and consideration was I able to give in my family? Did I do this without expecting anything in return?

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 15.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ Erminia Catapano, Vincenzo Angrisani, *Mistica Coniugale*, op. cit., p. 29.

²¹ Cf. *Beati Maria e Luigi Beltrame Quattrocchi* <www.caritas-ticino.ch>.

Everything from running the family to the spiritual life was lived in an intertwining of gestures that allowed them, like the warp and weft, to create an extraordinary fabric over the years.

*«Everything in common, with a constant exchange of effective and affective values, with a single life of aspirations and goals, with mutual respect and immense love. [...] In almost half a century of life in common, I affirm before God, **never was there a moment of boredom, of satiety, of tiredness.** [...] You realize that the weft is thread by thread in function of the warp [...] to form the wonderful fabric that results from the combination of the two. [...] thread by thread; the weft according to the warp; the warp according to the weft – **and just as the one without the other cannot form the fabric, so the other has the strength and support of the first**»²².*

«Jesus will give you, of course, that strength which I, being weak, could not find. “He sowed in me and He will reap in you” as Jesus predicts in the Gospel: there are those who sow and those who reap»²³.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let's reflect upon whether, in the daily interweaving of our warp and weft threads, we sometimes only see the reverse side of a very precious fabric and fail to see that, on the right side, a marvelous pattern is being created.



²² Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, *L'ordito e la trama*, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

²³ Erminia Catapano, Vincenzo Angrisani, *Mistica Coniugale*, op. cit., p. 64.

4. A STEP-BY-STEP JOURNEY

«The transition from a human love to a supernatural love, barely perceived during the engagement, became more and more clearly perceptible. But it was a gradual journey. It is precisely on the journey that the happiness of a marriage depends. **The seed of grace, which is in the sacrament of marriage, must be developed and made to bear fruit**»²⁴.

«I do not ask you, my dear Gino, for anything extraordinary; I ask you [...] to understand by the light of God, and **with His Grace** that is never lacking, **but that abounds to the extent that we ask for it with firm faith and righteous intention**, to understand the necessity of sacrifice [...] and to accept it as it is offered to us, in the smallest, countless ordinary daily actions; or in the great, exceptional ones»²⁵.

«Undoubtedly, in the early days, the Mother's role was that of spiritual guide to the Father, who had arrived almost "neophyte" along her path...»²⁶.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Our journey of growth, both human and spiritual, sometimes speeds up, sometimes it slows down. Can we be for one another **a close presence, discreet and patient**, that can help to proceed along or resume the path?

- The whole family benefits from the grace given to spouses through the Sacrament of Matrimony. It «*abounds to the extent that we ask for it with firm faith and righteous intention*»²⁷. Are we aware of this great gift?

²⁴ *Ivi*, p. 47.

²⁵ *Ivi*, p. 57.

²⁶ *Ivi*, p. 29.

²⁷ *Ivi*, p. 57.



5. MISUNDERSTANDINGS

*«Opposing opinions, heated discussions, and even friction did not lack. Maria was not easily swayed, and arguing with her to change her mind was not easy. In those moments, Luigi may have felt distressed and nervous, while Maria seemed aggressive. But this never lasted long and **prompt requests for forgiveness brought back serenity**. They succeeded in implementing fraternal correction, welcoming the thoughts of the other with openness and humility»²⁸.*

Maria herself wrote: *«One's own perfection [...] is achieved through friction and contrast, because only in this way can the roughness be smoothed out, metal be purified of its debris, and the intrinsic value of each person be brought to light [...]. Holiness consists of one's personal and bitter labor»²⁹.*

«I know of souls who, had they not had that friction which never lacks in those who tend to the very high, they would never have risen»³⁰.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- How can I turn our misunderstandings into opportunities for personal, couple, and family growth?

²⁸ Cf. *Beati Luigi e Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi*, op. cit.

²⁹ Erminia Catapano, Vincenzo Angrisani, *Mistica Coniugale*, op. cit., p. 57.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

The Renaissance climate that was everywhere had led even grandparents and great-grandparents to worship the “I” that opposed, in the name of freedom, the teachings of the Church. Seeing the young couple fall in love with Christ, attend Church, and frequently go to confession and communion, made the two elderly couples reflect and gradually come to embrace the faith in a mature and conscious way.

Luigi was also able to bear witness to his faith in his work environment, where he never failed to respond with love to the injustices he suffered.

«We must not conceal our religious feelings, we must profess them publicly, but, first and foremost, we must do so through our works. It is through honesty and the Christian spirit that permeate our behavior in human relations, through disinterestedness, love of neighbor, charity lived and put into practice that we make profession of men who have religious convictions». (Luigi Beltrame Quattrocchi)

When Luigi died, a friend of his, a non-believer, would confess to one of his sons, *«You see, during these years when we worked together, your father never bothered me with sermons. But I want to tell you that it was through his life that I discovered God and that I loved the Gospel. Pray for me!».*

A friend of Luigi’s recalled: *«An eminent figure in the State’s legal system, he should have been the first of everyone else to assume the supreme office. A devious campaign conducted by some members of this same advocacy, with secular and anticlerical tendencies, put up a barrier against him. The servant of God, though deeply wounded in his heart by the injustice he had just suffered, had no apparent reaction».*

In 1948, he would be offered the possibility to present his candidacy for a seat in the Senate. Not sharing the orientations of his supporters and in agreement with Maria, Luigi refused the offer.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let’s reflect on how our living out our faith in our everyday environment can be a valuable witness to the people around us and those we encounter throughout the day.

³⁰ Quotations available in *Beati Luigi e Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, op. cit.*

CONCRETE INSTRUMENTS OF HOLINESS

The fixed points of the Beltrame Quattrocchi family

1. DIALOGUE

The numerous letters that Luigi and Maria exchanged bore witness to the importance they gave to dialogue, which continued even when they were physically apart.

They were aware that dialogue is not only about communicating daily matters, but also about **communicating one's inner feelings**: ideals, expectations, hopes.

«Of course it was a pain for me to give you that dry chronicle while I had an infinity of sensations, of very sweet and at the same time painful thoughts, which I felt for you and without you»³².

With these words, Maria described their desire for harmony: *«Only from the **communication of souls**, from the communion between them cemented by faith, is unity born and lives - from which you can no longer isolate yourself and without which it is torture to live»³³.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let's reflect together on the content of our dialogues: what do we usually talk about? Do we manage to express our feelings and emotions?
- Do we set aside time for dialogue?

³² Erminia Catapano, Vincenzo Angrisani, *Mistica Coniugale*, op cit., p. 35.

³³ *Ivi*, p. 74.



2. PRAYER

Taking the time to communicate their inner feelings led the spouses to overcome the modesty of being together in the presence of God, in a dialogue that becomes intimate.

«Since our childhood..., – writes one of his sons –, we were struck by the particular attitude [of great contemplation] of our father when visiting the Blessed Sacrament, in Church.... It was still my father who, after dinner, began and led the family recitation of the rosary.... As far as I remember, my father and mother received the Eucharist every day and passed this habit on to us.... I also remember with excitement how much my father loved to serve Mass...especially that of the many priests who attended the house»³⁴.

Prayer **is the joy** of the daily encounter with God but, at the same time, **it is a commitment** that Luigi and Maria made and maintained at precise moments throughout their days.

After becoming a widow, Maria recalls: *«The day began like this: Mass and Communion together. [...] Upon leaving Church he would say ‘good morning’ to me as if the day only then had a reasonable beginning. [...] at dinner, the newspaper - read aloud and discussed - then the rosary together, and off to bed»³⁵.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let's reflect together on our prayer: personal, family, as a couple.

³⁴ *Beati Luigi e Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, op.cit.*

³⁵ *Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, L'ordito e la trama, op.cit., pp. 6-7.*

Since the early years of her marriage, Maria relied on the guidance of Father Pellegrino Paoli, who guided her progress also through a “spiritual rulebook” that he wrote for her, suggesting **small but constant steps**: *“On this single foundation my daughter must build her spiritual structure, aiming above all at an “inner formation”, setting well in her mind the concept **that holiness does not consist in doing extraordinary things, but in doing well, with the greatest perfection, those things that are proper to our state**”*³⁶.

Inevitably, Father Paoli’s guidance also influenced, **through Maria’s behavior**, the spiritual growth of Luigi and their children.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Our behavior, our gestures, can tell our spouse and family members much more than our words.
- Let’s reflect upon something we do every day: how might we do it “with greater inner perfection”?

4. WOVEN WITH GOD

«This is what Marriage is like: [...] *thread by thread, woven in God one with the other without interruption - never - until eternity. [...] Life lived in this way even in old age. [...] A compact block, molded into a single mass. [...] A block willed by God through the **Sacrament of Matrimony**, composed, shaped, **made compact and unbreakable** by the mutual understanding of love. It is luminous and incandescent from the mutual elevation of souls in charity and grace*»³⁷.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let us reflect together on the gift of “forever” which demands human commitment, but is first and foremost a gift from God, in the Sacrament of Matrimony.
- The power of the Holy Spirit (which is a free gift from God) and our willingness to love (even when it causes us fatigue). How can we make these two forces interact?

³⁶ Giorgio Papàsogli, *Questi borghesi*, op. cit., p. 66.

³⁷ Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, *L’ordito e la trama*, op. cit., p. 12.

CONCLUSIVE REFLECTIONS

- How can the example of Luigi and Maria help our family?
- What message are they giving us at this time in our relationship as a couple and as a family?

IDEAS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

- I think of my family: what can I thank the Lord for?
- I reflect on how much the life of the Beltrame Quattrocchi family has generated in me.
- I beg for the gift of the Spirit regarding one of my struggles.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

*Lord Jesus,
you who called Luigi and Maria
to live day by day
in the constant fidelity of daily life
the Sanctifying Grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony,
you who with your presence
Sanctified the House of Nazareth,
let their witness and intercession
contribute to consolidating
the perseverance of families,
permeate young couples with your presence of grace,
to open their hearts in gratitude to the divine gift of life,
to make them missionaries of the Gospel
with families and people in difficulty.
Grant that Christian families
following their example
may live in a luminous way
their vocation to holiness.
Amen.*

TO DEEPEN

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God holds us in his hands



**THE VENERABLE
SERGIO BERNARDINI AND
DOMENICA BEDONNI**



WHERE GOD SHOWS THROUGH

Life had decided to take Sergio's family and his loved ones away from him. He was left alone, but he refused to let his pain prevail. The extraordinary nature of Sergio and Domenica's family life was not due to particular events, but rather to the desire to always correspond to God's will, which has resulted into countless small gestures of generosity, mutual forgiveness, and openness towards others.



BIOGRAPHY

SERGIO BERNARDINI (1882 – 1966)

Sergio was born in Sassoguidano (Italy) on May 20, 1882, into a profoundly Christian family.

The Document of his Cause of Beatification and Canonization opened with these words:

«Blessed are all those who fear the Lord, and who walk in His way» (Ps 128:1).

«The words of the psalmist are well matched to the Servant of God, Sergio Bernardini, who throughout his life, as a husband and family man, followed the Lord, glorifying Him in all his actions»¹.

EDUCATION

As often was the case in small mountain communities, it was the parish priest who acted as the schoolteacher when pastoral commitments allowed him to do so. Sergio, for his part, had already begun to help the family run the mill when he was eight years old and attended classes only when he could.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

It was the mother's duty to teach her children prayers, reciting them in the family after the hard work in the small mill they managed in Falanello.

FAITHFULNESS IN KEEPING SUNDAY HOLY

With his mother, Sergio remembered walking every Sunday the three kilometers and steep climb that led them to the Church. They would go there in the morning, for Holy Mass and return in the afternoon, for the Rosary, the Blessing and Catechism.

¹ Cf. *Decreto Sergio*, <www.coniugibernardini.it>.

THE LORD GAVE ME

In 1907, at the age of twenty-five, Sergio married Emilia Romani and life seemed to go well for them.

THE LORD HAS TAKEN AWAY FROM ME

Their first child was born and their joy was immense, but little Mario died suddenly at only 16 days old. A series of illnesses and deaths began that, in four years, he lost his father, mother, brother and his second son Medardo, who was 2 years old. His wife, already pregnant with Igina, was unable to accept the death of her second son and died a few months after the birth of their daughter.

Sergio became attached to his young daughter and thought he could live for her: *«If this child survives, I won't remarry and I'll make her study to be a teacher»*². The pain was unbearable, but he still did not doubt God's love and so he went on, carrying in his heart the words of Job: **«The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord»** (*Job* 1:21).

In all the pain he was going through, Sergio lost all hope in life when, after a painful ear infection, little Igina also returned to the Father's house.

DARK TIMES

He, who had always placed his trust in God and His Providence, now found himself disoriented, unable to nourish hope in the future. Darkness overcame him for weeks, until his parish priest reminded him of the words of Saint Paul: **«O man, who are you to reply against God?»** (*Rm* 9:20).

² Romeo Panciroli, *La roccia che disseta il deserto*, Ed. Frate Francesco, Reggio Emilia 1983, p. 23.

At that point, he started his life over again, but Sergio was unable, on his own, to manage the mill and even to pay the debts accumulated due to illnesses and seven funerals. So he decided to join the many villagers who in that period were leaving for America. He left in September 1912, the same year of Igina's death. He found work in a mine in Chicago.

I FEARED FOR MY FAITH

After a short time, he had an accident which forced him to spend three months in the hospital. The ordeals seemed never-ending, and there were many reasons for him to despair, but he did not do so. He spent this period entrusting himself to God in prayer and, in 1913 he decided to return to Italy: «*America was not for me. I was afraid for my faith*»³. He returned to his work at the mill and, in prayer, entrusted to God his desire to be able to start a family again.

THE LORD GIVES YOU IN A GOOD MEASURE AND OVERFLOWING (CF. LK 6:38)

His prayers were answered: Sergio met Domenica and 10 children were born from his second marriage. Assisted by his wife, Sergio died in Verica (Modena) on October 12, 1966.



³ Romeo Panciroli, *La roccia che disseta il deserto*, op. cit., p. 29.

Domenica was born in Verica, Italy, on April 12, 1889.

The Document of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization opened with these words:

«When one finds a worthy wife, her value is far beyond pearls. Her husband, entrusting his heart to her, has an unfailing prize». (Prov 31:10-11).

HER PERSONALITY

Her personality brought her to be cheerful, exuberant and outgoing: *«When I was young I was always cheerful: I was always telling and listening to jokes, I liked to laugh, I used to fill everything around me with songs and laughter»⁴.*

HUMAN AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

She belonged to a family of small farmers, honest and very religious, of whom she herself writes: *«they taught me to pray and attend Church, to be sincere and to do good to others. My mother set an example for me and so did my father»⁵.*

GOD TOOK FROM ME

When she was 20 years old, she got engaged to a young man who, however, after a few months, died of an incurable disease. Domenica spent weeks of great despair and only faith in God sustained her and allowed her to look to the future with hope.

THE LORD GIVES YOU IN A GOOD MEASURE AND OVERFLOWING (CF. LK 6:38)

God's answer was not long in coming and she began to see Sergio, a young man who had recently returned from America. *«Yes, he was a widower... but he immediately seemed so kind. People spoke highly of him and he had suffered a lot, you could tell. His eyes showed great kindness and peacefulness, full of faith. I immediately sensed admiration and veneration for him, because he knew how to bear his sufferings with such dignity. I immediately prayed and decided: Yes, Lord, if it is Your will. Then give me many children and, if it pleases You, consecrate them to You»⁶.*

⁴ *Ivi*, p. 54.

⁵ *Ivi*, p. 31.

⁶ *Ivi*, p. 33.



ENGAGEMENT, MATRIMONY AND CHILDREN

ENGAGEMENT: A TIME OF PREPARATION

Sergio and Domenica had two different personalities, but they soon realized they had a life project in common, they could look together towards the same goal: to create a family with many children, who would do the world so much good.

They spent time together talking about themselves and their families; Domenica was more talkative while Sergio would stick to the essentials. On their walks they read the Gospel, to have a safe ground to share and on which to confront each other. Engagement was a time for them when, guided by the Word of God, they began to fuse their hearts, souls, and minds.

MARRIAGE

After only a few months of engagement, the young couple was married on May 20, 1914.

A PROFOUND UNITY

One of the two children attested: *«These two spouses had matured profoundly due to very different events. Their personalities were also different: she was lively and clever, quick-witted, imaginative and expansive; he was mindful, methodical, silent and contemplative. But both were always serene, with a backdrop of optimism in their souls. But above all they were permeated with faith and essential and authentic religiousness»*⁷.

“THE LORD WILL HELP US”

Domenica wrote in her diary: *«We will have many children and we will educate them in the love of the Lord and in charity towards others»*⁸. This wish was granted: the children came, one after the other, and were welcomed as a precious gift from God, even though there were concerned about maintaining a family that was rapidly growing.

Sister Augusta recalled: *«The mother used to tell us that when she was worried about a new pregnancy, the father would calm her down: “Don’t worry, if the Lord sends another child, his Providence will help us”»*⁹.

In fact, there was always Divine Providence, but there was also the generosity to provide a meal, to spend time listening to or comforting those who came to their door.

⁷ *Ivi*, p.35.

⁸ *Ivi*, p.39.

⁹ Cf. Marco Bertolani, *Il mistero nuziale e la vocazione alla vita consacrata dei figli*, p.41.

www.coniugibernardini.it

LONG-DISTANCE ADOPTION

In 1963, they decided to offer part of their modest retirement money to pay for the studies of a Nigerian seminarian in Rome. This gift would be rewarded “a hundredfold”: Felix Abe Job would become a priest in 1966, and in 1971 he would be consecrated Bishop of Ibadan in Nigeria.

THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

A large family meant working diligently, both in the fields as well as in the house, but this did not prevent Sergio and Domenica from starting the day with prayer, stopping at noon to recite the Angelus and ending the evening reciting the rosary. Sunday was always lived in a festive atmosphere, between home and Church: Holy Mass and services in the afternoon, festive clothes, special lunch and in the evening they played games and joked around.

In 1963 Sergio and Domenica celebrated their **golden wedding anniversary**, in the joy of seeing the whole family exceptionally all gathered together.





THE NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT

Then a three-year period began in which Sergio went through the “night of the spirit”: *«He, a man of God, very faithful, now feared becoming His enemy; he feared having done everything wrong; he was convinced that it was he who provoked God’s punishments; he was convinced that God will have to punish him with Hell»*¹⁰.

HIS WIFE’S SUPPORT DURING THE MOST DIFFICULT TIME

Domenica supported him with great love, words and gestures inspired by faith. On October 12, 1966, she was at his side in the moment he passed away. These are the words she wrote to her daughter, Sister Agata, a missionary in Australia: *«In the end he took three very deep breaths and looked up smiling happily, in an ‘Oh’ of wonder and he breathed his last breath. I had hoped that he might be consoled by Our Lady’s presence, and this was a sign that reassured me greatly»*¹¹.

RESPECT FOR THE DAUGHTERS’ FAMILIES

Having become a widow, Domenica moved to Modena where her daughters, Paola and Maria, did their best to take care of their mother with a care that became devotion. Both had their own families and Domenica was very careful not to take away anything from them, neither their space nor their time.

¹⁰ Elvio Bonaccorsi, “*Iddio ci ha tanto benedetti non lo ringrazieremo mai abbastanza*”, 3a Ristampa, Modena 2010, p.23.

¹¹ Cf. Angelo Sandri, *L’albero dai molti frutti*, Ed. TEM, Modena 2006.

«TELL EVERYONE ABOUT MY HAPPINESS»

Realizing that her mission on earth was coming to an end, Domenica made her recommendation, both verbally and in writing: «*When the Lord calls me to His Kingdom, tell everyone of my happiness by ringing the celebratory bells*»¹².

To Sister Amalia, who was leaving for Mexico, she confided: «*Now I ask the Lord to make me happy when the time comes to die*»¹³. In another letter she wrote: «*What I will have to go through before I die I accept from now on for the Lord's sake and I offer it to Him*»¹⁴.

On Monday, February 22, 1971, Domenica suffered a cerebral stroke. She died on February 27, 1971, surrounded and comforted by her children.



¹² Romeo Panciroli, *La roccia che disseta il deserto*, op. cit., p.211.

¹³ *Ivi*, p.207.

¹⁴ *Ivi*, p.208.

THE PROCESS OF BEATIFICATION

2005: the cause of beatification of the Servants of God Sergio Bernardini and Domenica Bedonni began.

5 May 2015: Sergio Bernardini and Domenica Bedonni were declared venerable, with recognition of the couple's heroic virtues.

FAVORS

Many people, praying to Sergio and Domenica, have attested that they received particular “favors”

Tokyo 1972

Testimony of Sr. M.Tecla MITAKE¹⁵

(original written in Japanese)

Dearest Sister Augusta,

[...] At that time all hope of recovering with medication was lost and this was very evident to me and the sisters.

I was waiting for my life to end from one day to another.

Therefore, I can confirm to you that I regained my health after we prayed through the intercession of Sergio Bernardini: this is a true fact and one that I can testify to myself.

This happened at the end of 1966 and I got worse until 1967.

But from the beginning of the intercession I began to improve and in 1968 I was able to leave Tokyo, where I was in the infirmary, to go and work in our bookshop in Osaka.

Even today my prayer of gratitude for this immense grace continues.

¹⁵ Cf. 1972, <www.coniugibernardini.it>.

Modena, 12 November 2001

The healing of a patient¹⁶

A 61-year-old patient arrived at the Hesperia Hospital in Modena, Italy, in critical condition. He was operated on and had a tumor removed from his heart, a very rare disease that gives very little hope of survival. After the operation, the patient was transferred to the intensive care unit in such desperate conditions that he received the Anointing of the Sick from a Capuchin friar, a friend of the family. The Friar continued to visit him over the next few days. After about a week, the patient's condition inexplicably stabilized and slowly improved. The surgeon who operated on him noticed that the Friar often rummaged behind his pillow and he remembered this when, years later, he received a phone call from that patient, cured from a lymphosarcoma of the heart. They meet for dinner with the Capuchin friar, who revealed to them that when he passed by he made sure that under the pillow there was always the image of his parents: Sergio and Domenica Bernardini.

Bologna, May 2004

Healing of Zeno Canovi¹⁷

«Being a believer, in the morning and in the evening I thank the Lord for the day granted to me and in this thanksgiving there is always a prayer for the Bernardini spouses, because I believe that I have received a grace from them». These are the words of Zeno Canovi, who in 2004 was suddenly struck by a serious cerebral hemorrhage. Hospitalized, the pain in his head was unbearable but the position of the hematoma did not allow surgery. Sebastiano Bernardini went to visit him, leaving him his parents' spiritual booklet. Zeno read a few sentences from it, then prayed with the book in his hands, asking for help and protection. He prayed all night and cannot explain why he had the distinct sensation that the book warmed up and communicated warmth to him. The pain in his head slowly decreased, and the hemorrhage began to subside. Zeno is grateful to the Virgin Mary and to the Bernardinis, from whom he believes he has been graced.

¹⁶ Cf. *La Chiesa in festa*, <www.coniugibernardini.it>.

¹⁷ Cf. Maggio 2004, <www.coniugibernardini.it>.



PEARLS OF HOLINESS¹⁸ Where God's power emerges

«As Christians we are short-sighted when we close ourselves off from the problems of others and do not raise our gaze, and we are far-sighted when we look away and neglect loving those close to us. The Bernardini spouses not only welcomed the light of faith, making it the foundation of their existence, but throughout their entire lives they did not close themselves up in their own world.» (Msgr. Erio Castellucci)

«They were models in the holiness of their marriage and the parents of 10 children, 8 of whom were consecrated [...]. The cause of beatification of these two spouses, who proved they knew how to love and esteem each other for many years, despite trials and difficulties, who consolidated their union with prayer and sacrifice, making their family a true domestic Church, is of great relevance in today's society. Their example as simple people, yet anchored in true deep values, of genuine faith, of acceptance of the gift of life, of love for the Church and the missions, of willingness to accept God's action in their daily lives, can and must be proposed to today's families: "the life of the Servants of God speaks of daily sanctity, which we could define as 'ordinary', without striking facts, interwoven, however, by infinite small and constant gestures of goodness, of faith, of abandonment to the divine will, of desire for the glory of God and the expansion of his Kingdom». (Msgr. Benito Cocchi)

¹⁸ Quotations available in *La Chiesa in festa*, <www.coniugibernardini.it>.

«The two spouses, their conjugal life, the running of their family, the simplicity of their giving of themselves to each other and of giving the fruit of their love for the Good of the Lord and of His Church, are a living witness to the entire Christian community».

«That married couple believed in the value of life and had unlimited confidence in Divine Providence. They entrusted themselves and their children to arms far stronger than their own and to a heart far more inflamed with love than their own. God never disappoints anyone. He will not let anyone down, not even us, if, in the light of these clear examples of Christian life, we know how to walk on the roads of the world looking at Him and trusting Him». (Msgr. Bruno Foresti)

«Sergio and Domenica, two people whose existence is lifted from silence and anonymity by the light of God who reveals the wonders of Grace in the very humble.

Mountain dwellers, peasants, the poor and uneducated, who do not have knowledge of the Familiaris Consortio and, whose school is only the hard existence of every day, enter into the history of God only for having opened their hearts to the action of the Spirit». (Msgr. Giulio Murat)

A person well-known in Verica, non-believer and non-practicing. When asked why he was present at Sergio's funeral, he replied as follows:

«When the righteous die you cannot be absent. He was a man, who when I would meet him or just see him, made me think that maybe it was me who was wrong. No one more than he, who did not preach but practiced, upset my convictions».





EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE BERNARDINI FAMILY

How God reveals Himself through their family events

1. KNOWING HOW TO ACCEPT SUFFERING WITH FAITH

«When I was still young, the Lord asked me for my entire family: the 7 people dearest to me! But He helped me to respect His will with courage and gave me back so much more: 10 children and all consecrated to Him. How good the Lord has been to me: as with Job!» (Sergio).

«Truly God has been so generous in His graces with us in our Family. He has always given us so much strength»¹⁹. (Domenica)

Sergio and Domenica had encountered and experienced God's greatness ever since they were young and together they continued to walk in His presence. Over time, this had made them humble and capable of accepting everything as a free gift from their Lord. They did not always understand the reason for many things, especially misfortune and pain. But neither did they ask: *«God has given, God has taken away. Only He knows why. All we need is the certainty that, even in suffering, He is present and therefore, in the end, any situation is resolved for our good»²⁰.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let us look together at our lives; share what signs of God's presence we have seen, in the moments of joy and in the difficulties we have gone through.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Cf. Romeo Panciroli, *La roccia che disseta il deserto*, op.cit., p. 53.

2. A LOVE MADE OF ESTEEM AND RESPECT²¹

«Your father is always happy. I don't know how he does it, you know. You can really see that he enjoys the peace of the righteous in God's grace. He is always smiling and good to everyone. He is just more good than I am. I need to learn from him to be calm, patient charitable»²². (Domenica)

The children attest that they never heard their father Sergio contradict or even criticize any of their mother's instructions: *«Do what your mother says». «Your mother said that. That's how it's done»²³.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Confide in your spouse what you appreciate most about his or her character, his or her way of doing things...
- Do we know how to highlight our children's positive aspects?
- Let's reflect on the importance of not contradicting or criticizing our spouse in front of our children.



²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ivi*, p. 116.

²³ *Ivi*, p. 54.

3. “THE LORD WILL HELP US”²⁴

«I never lost faith in Providence, even when the children and the difficulties increased». (Sergio)

«Lord I thank you for the gifts we receive every day, and also for the trials and the help to overcome them all with patience». (Sergio)

«I have great confidence that God will help us, as He always has. Indeed, I say that He holds our hands». (Domenica)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let us remember together when we felt that the Lord “held our hand”.



²⁴ Quotations available in *La Chiesa in festa*, <www.coniugibernardini.it>.

«Mother lived in the Presence of the Lord and of the Blessed Virgin; she referred to Him constantly and in any circumstance: of thanksgiving, praise, supplication and abandonment, and she often expressed it even out loud and we little ones learned this behavior to be as a normal thing, but it also affected our life, our vocational growth»²⁵. (Sister Augusta)

Her daughter, Sister Teresa Maria, remembers the sense of security that it gave the children to hear the voices of their parents who, at dawn, began their day by praying. And so whoever was the first to hear them would give the alarm to the others, sometimes repeating a joke: *«they've turned on the radio, it's time to get up!»²⁶.*

«It was a source of great encouragement for us children to see these two parents interrupt the absorbing and pressing work of the fields or the house for these appointments with the Lord [one of which was reciting the Angelus], which gave them joy and a sense of fullness of life. So naturally they taught them how one can and must live the explicit command of the Lord: "pray always"»²⁷. (Father Sebastiano, son)

«After dinner, in the evening, we would all recite the Holy Rosary together, and before we went to sleep [Mother] would urge us to review the day and suggest spontaneous prayers, bless us and wish us a good night»²⁸.

For Domenica and Sergio, the children were their thoughts, their joy and their concern. Who could assist them and guard them when they were at home or out of the house, far away, on the road? The Lord and Our Lady. They had to protect them and so their hearts were always in prayer.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let us reflect on how we are educating our children to faith.

²⁵ Cf. Marco Bertolani, *Il mistero nuziale*, op. cit., pp 43-44.

²⁶ Romeo Panciroli, *La roccia che disseta il deserto*, op. cit., p. 43.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ Cf. Marco Bertolani, *Il mistero nuziale*, op. cit., p 58.



5. JOYFULLY ACCEPTING THE VOCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN

«On the Bernardini's golden wedding anniversary, on May 11, 1963, Sergio confessed to his children gathered around their parents: *"You don't know how many nights your Mother spent crying because you were far away!"*

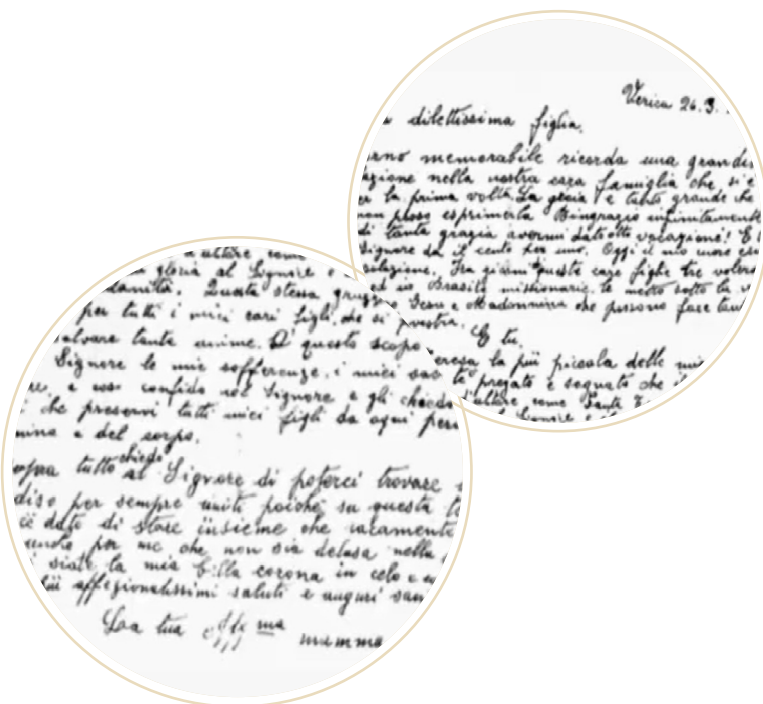
Every time they were separated due to the departure of their missionary children, the pain was always the same, as if it were always the first time they said goodbye to each other. So Domenica found no greater comfort than raising her hands to heaven and repeating a phrase that had become habitual: *"Thy will be done, Lord..."*. In an effort to suppress her tears, she added: *"his will of God must be done..."* and she would stare for a long time, motionless, towards the direction in which her children had gone»²⁹.

²⁹ Elvio Bonacorsi, *Iddio ci ha tanto benedetti*, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

«I, too, have felt the sacrifice and renunciation of my heart every time each of you left home and then asked for our permission to take on the holy habit».

«If you go willingly, we will say to the Lord, Thy will be done, just as we said it when we gave you permission to consecrate yourselves to Him»³⁰.

«I must tell you that I am not worthy of the honor that the Lord has given me in having you children consecrated to the Lord and to the good of humanity.... It is the Lord who has done this. It is not because of me. You are the Lord's great gift to me, and I thank Him every day. [...] We have only done our duty in educating you in the law of the Lord and leaving you free to follow the voice of God calling you»³¹. (Domenica, 7 October 1965)



³⁰ Elvio Bonaccorsi, *Iddio ci ha tanto benedetti*, op. cit., pp. 13.34.

³¹ Cf. Marco Bertolani, *Il mistero nuziale*, op. cit., p. 44.

«When I was born, a boy after eight girls, my father appeared at the door and shouted loudly, “A boy is born!” It is easy to understand the joy and hope, how many plans for his farm and his home! A male at last! Two strong arms, the last name carried forward... [My parents] always said yes to our preference, because they always saw in it the will of God, confident that they would not lose us and that He would take care of them»³². (Father Sebastian, the only male child and who responded to the religious vocation)

«The Lord has done this: it is a wonderful thing even in our eyes. We have done nothing but given them a good example and allowed them to be free»³³. (Domenica)

It was March 26, 1955. The family got together for the first time and upon leaving, the youngest daughter asked her mother to write a letter to each of the children. There was no time to write to each one, and Domenica wrote only one letter:

«The joy is so immense that words cannot express it. I infinitely thank the good Jesus for so much grace in giving me eight vocations! [...]. This very grace, O Jesus, I also ask you for all my dear children, that they may all become saints and save many souls. To this end I have always offered to the Lord my sorrows, my sacrifices, my prayers [...] Every day I ask Him to preserve all my children from every danger of their soul and body»³⁴.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let us formulate a prayer together that our children may discover their own vocation; may the Lord guide them in their lives and preserve them from danger.

³² Romeo Panciroli, *La roccia che disseta il deserto*, op. cit., p. 101.

³³ *Ivi*, p. 104.

³⁴ Cf. *Ivi*, p. 157.

CONCRETE INSTRUMENTS OF HOLINESS

The fixed points of the Bernardini family



1. DAILY PRAYER

«In the morning, Sergio and Domenica used to say their prayers together before getting up. [...] And in the evening, after a day of hard work, we would gather to recite the rosary, which would lead us to discuss the events of the day and the things to be done the next day»³⁵.

Particularly during the years of his old age, Sergio often went to Church and spent hours in prayer there. To his daughter, who asked him, *«What do you do there, for so long?»* He would answer, *«But don't you understand? It's my most important meeting of the day, it's the time when I listen to the Lord and talk to Him about many things about the Church and the world, especially about my numerous spiritual children and grandchildren»³⁶.* (Sergio)

«After having listened to the Word of God, we must remain in recollection and welcome it within ourselves, if we want it to truly bring us the Lord's message for our lives»³⁷. (Domenica)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

Prayer filled Sergio and Domenica's days. Let us dwell on some aspects, which come to us from their own reflections:

- Prayer is the most important meeting of the day
- Prayer is the possibility to be "one-on-one" with God, to speak to Him not only about ourselves, but also about our loved ones and our brothers and sisters.
- It is necessary to take time to allow the Word to enter our hearts and become that particular message that God wants to give us at this moment of our lives, on this day.

What concrete commitments could we make?

³⁵ Angelo Sandri, *L'albero dai molti frutti*, op. cit., p. 14.

³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 22.

³⁷ Cf. Romeo Panciroli, *La roccia che disseta il deserto*, op. cit., p. 122.

2. CELEBRATING THE DOMESTIC LITURGY

One of the children recalls: *«Their love for each other was a way of discovering and experiencing that God had made such a beautiful, such a good creature: and their being together and helping each other was a service rendered to God [...]. Family life, with all its implications, even the most common, thus became like a Liturgy that in the heart was covered with sounds and songs praising the goodness of the Lord and ended up in constant thanksgiving»*³⁸.

*«So many graces, I am not worthy!»*³⁹ (Sergio)

*«Behold, the Lord takes us by the hand. It is so evident [...] but I am not worthy of so much of God's goodness. I ask Him for strength, but He gives me more than necessary»*⁴⁰. (Domenica)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- I look at the beauty of my spouse and our children.
- How can I help other family members reveal their beauty?

3. DO NOT JUDGE

*«We must not even mention the actions of people who do not do good. It's not right: they may not have had the graces that we have had [...]. It is worse for us to talk, than for them to do so»*⁴¹. (Domenica)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- What do these words of Domenica inspire in us?

³⁸ *Ivi*, p. 35.

³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 182.

⁴⁰ *Ivi*, p. 181.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

CONCLUSIVE REFLECTIONS

- How can Sergio and Domenica's example help our family?
- What message are they giving us at this time in our relationship as a couple and as a family?

IDEAS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

- I think of my family: what can I thank the Lord for?
- I reflect on how much the life of the Bernardini family has inspired in me.
- I beg for the gift of the Spirit concerning a difficulty I have.

PRAYER FOR PRIVATE DEVOTION

*Everlasting Father, source of all good,
who has revealed to us the Trinitarian love in Your Son
and in the Sanctifying Spirit, and has given it to us as a model
of every family,
we thank you for having given us in Sergio and Domenica
a unique example of a Christian family
founded on mutual love, support and faithfulness.*

*In listening to Your Word
through prayer, the Sacraments
and filial devotion to the Virgin Mary
they have lived the openness to life,
the fulfillment of Your will,
the generosity in responding to your call
for their children and in welcoming the needy.*

*Now we implore You to grant them,
also for the merits of their Christian life
and to Your greater glory, our fervent prayer,
granting us the grace we ask of You.
Repeat three times “Glory to the Father...”*

TO DEEPEN

IT: Don Elvio Bonacorsi, *Iddio ci ha tanto benedetti. Non lo ringrazieremo mai abbastanza*
Ed. Baldini, 3a ristampa, Pavullo (MO).

IT: P. Arcangelo Panciroli, *Una coppia esemplare. Sergio e Domenica Bernardini*, Ed. Paoline,
4a ristampa, Roma 2006.

IT: Don Angelo Sandri, *L'albero dai molti frutti. Profilo spirituale dei Servi di Dio Domenica e Sergio Bernardini*, Ed. TEM, Modena 2006.

IT: Paolo e Laura Bertolani, *Una famiglia per il cielo*, Ed. Shalom, Ancona 2001.

WEBOGRAPHY (last visit on April 12, 2022)

IT: <http://www.coniugibernardini.it/>

IT: <http://www.coniugibernardini.it/files/LeggiL-AlberoFruttiDonAngelo.pdf>

EN: <https://web.archive.org/web/20181003195209/http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2015/05/07/married-couple-who-raised-10-children-recognised-as-venerable-by-the-pope/>

PDFs (last visit on April 12, 2022)

IT: <http://www.coniugibernardini.it/archivio/benedetti01.pdf>

IT: <http://www.coniugibernardini.it/files/LeggiL-AlberoFruttiDonAngelo.pdf>

VIDEOS (last visit on April 12, 2022)

IT: <http://coniugibernardini.it/video-.html>

IT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjEpezlWq2s>

IT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmVuQBlsS-M&t=436s>

PT: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ye_nybuaEH0

IT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4hEAHpRctk>

Falling more in love each day



SERVANTS OF GOD
TOMÁS ALVIRA ALVIRA AND
PAQUITA DOMÍNGUEZ SUSÍN



WHERE GOD SHOWS THROUGH

Tomás and Paquita realized that marriage was the path that God was inviting them to take in order to become saints. This realization led them to live each day with joy, despite the hardships, worries, and moments of pain, because they experienced the living presence of Jesus in their love and in their family.



BIOGRAPHY TOMÁS ALVIRA ALVIRA (1906-1992)

Tomás was born in Villanueva de Gállego (Spain) on January 17, 1906.

EDUCATION

He attended the University of Zaragoza, where he graduated in Chemistry in 1922. His professional life would always be linked to teaching, a passion to which he dedicated his entire life. He taught and directed several school centers. At the end of the Spanish Civil War he began teaching at the Ramiro Institute of Maeztu in Madrid, where he obtained the Chair in 1941. The “Ramiro” is known in Madrid as a center of excellence, and it was here that Tomás joined a prestigious college of teachers.

HIS INTUITION

His insight regarding the “*Living classroom*” was groundbreaking, whereby *«the teacher seeks to awaken in the student the desire and love of knowledge, seeing it as a good in itself. We cannot exhort students to study for reward or punishment, we must make them desire knowledge!»*¹. (Tomás Alvira)

This insight of his would also form the basis of his children’s education, which would aim at setting them free to make informed choices.

¹ Cf. *Tomas Alvira. From Teacher to Teacher* (29/12/2016), <opusdei.org>.

PAQUITA DOMÍNGUEZ SUSÍN² (1912-1994)

Paquita was born in Borau (Spain) on the April 1, 1912.

Her father died very young and her mother was left as a widow, with four young children and a fifth about to be born. She decided to move to Zaragoza, where she had a brother who could be of help and support.

A GIFT FROM HER BROTHERS AND SISTERS

After finishing school, Paquita's teacher called her mother and urged her to let the girl continue her studies because she was very good and intelligent. Since the mother knew that she couldn't allow all of her children to study, she decided to call them together and asked if they would agree to make a financial sacrifice so that Paquita could study. They were all very happy to be able to give her this opportunity, so Paquita took the entrance exam and entered the Magisterial School with top scores.

THE FAMILY ATMOSPHERE

Her mother María was a very sweet woman and was always smiling; she spoke little, preferring to meditate and evaluate well before speaking. The children grew up in a Christian environment, strict, with little economic means, but where there was always harmony, serenity and joy.

WORK

After finishing her studies, Paquita taught in an elementary school and her students remember her as an extraordinary teacher.³

² Cf. Antonio Vázquez, *Tomás Alvira y Paquita Domínguez: La aventura de un matrimonio feliz*, Palabra, Madrid 2007, pp.18-20.

³ Cf. *Los Alvira: Juntos hacia el Cielo*, documental, <www.youtube.com>.



ENGAGEMENT, MATRIMONY AND CHILDREN

THEIR MEETING⁴

It was January 3, 1926, and Tomás' father, Teacher Alvira, organized a study trip to Barcelona. Paquita was 14 years old and participated as a student, while Tomás, who was 20 and already a teacher, joined the group because he had to go to Barcelona. The trip lasted several hours, and the two young people crossed paths several times. Once off the train, Tomás is so attracted to the girl he had met that in the following years he showed no interest in other girls. They meet again years later, and Paquita was no longer a young girl. They recognized each other and got engaged.

MARRIAGE

They were married on June 16, 1939, in the Church of San Gil in Zaragoza. Nine children were born from their marriage, the first of whom, José María, died at the age of five.

MARRIAGE: THE ANSWER TO A CALL

Tomás and Paquita lived their marriage as a response to a vocation, to a call from God, and they saw it as the way that could lead them to God and, therefore, to holiness.

To speak of marriage as a vocation is not usual, on the contrary, but Tomás and Paquita profoundly felt that it was God who was calling them on this path and, guided by their spiritual Father, they lived this call to the fullest, fulfilling a happy marriage.

⁴ Cf. Antonio Vázquez, *Tomás Alvira y Paquita Domínguez*, op cit., p.14.

THE JOY

There was always great joy in the Alvira family, even in moments of difficulty and pain, as one of their daughters, María Isabel, affirms: *«My mother used to say every now and then: how much this illness is helping me. God is incredible. And she would not only say thank you, but also show the positive side that she could see in all her things. Because of the disease, invalid as she was, she couldn't do anything by herself, she was hemiplegic. Despite everything, she made us laugh a lot. She had an incredible sense of humor, she called her wheelchair "my BMW". [...] One day my father, who by then was at the end of his life, said to me, "I don't know if there are people in the world as happy as we are, but it seems impossible"»*⁵. (María Isabel Alvira)



⁵ Documentario su una coppia di coniugi meravigliosamente normale (06/12/2019), <opusdei.org>.

THE PAIN

Paquita never got over the pain of little José María's death, at the age of only 5, but this did not prevent her from living in the joy of the Risen Lord, as her son recalls: *«I remember when, on the 50th anniversary of their wedding, I made the mistake of putting a photo of my brother José María in the living room. I wanted us all to see it when we came in and take a photo of ourselves next to it. I went into the living room first, with my mother on my arm, and as we entered - 45 years had passed since my brother's death - she saw the photo and grabbed my arm tightly. Her hand stiffened and I, who had always seen her cheerful, as she was that day too, understood that she had lived in peace, without complaining, with joy, but that the wound of her son had never healed»*⁶.

ILLNESS AND DEATH

Tomás died on May 17, 1992, at the end of a painful cancer.

Paquita died on August 29, 1994, following a cerebral disease that had left her paralyzed.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

FAVORS

Many people who prayed to Tomás and Paquita have confirmed that they received particular “favors”

NOW THEY ARE LIVING TOGETHER AGAIN

I had been living and working in Spain for two years and I would often call Bolivia to talk to my mother. She would tell me that the marriage of two of my brothers was in crisis. I was very worried, thinking that I couldn't do anything from a distance. [...] Then I thought of Paquita and Tomás and **began to faithfully pray to them every day**. After about a week had passed, I telephoned my mother again, who could not believe what had happened. Unexpectedly, the two couples had reunited.

The eldest of my brothers had gone to look for his wife, [...] he convinced her to return home and now they live together again [...]. When I talked to my brother he told me that her change was unexplainable. As a result of this couple's example, my other brother's wife went to see him and was allowed back to return home. [...] I am convinced that I owe these favors to Paquita and Tomás. (A.C.S.)⁷

⁷ Cf. *Ora vivono di nuovo insieme* (29/01/2016), <opusdei.org>.

HELP US TO LOVE EACH OTHER AS YOU DO AND TO FULFILL GOD'S WILL

I was 26 years old and had been engaged for three years to a man who did not give importance to having a life plan, something that I considered fundamental. Pilar, the little one of the Alvira household, approached me and told me not to worry, but to pray a lot and gave me a small picture of her parents. [I prayed to the Alvira couple every day], asking that they help me find «one like Tomás». I started going to Mass near my house and there I fixed my attention on a young man who was a friend of my brother's; we were introduced to each other and we started going out with each other. One day he confided in me that he had been praying to Paquita and Tomás for a long time for the same intention I had: to find a good girl who could share with him the same idea of marriage and family that I had.

Since then **we have been reciting the prayer** of the little prayer card together and making a common request: «help us to love each other as you do and to fulfill God's will». We got married and today, after five years of marriage, we have four wonderful children. We are very happy and very grateful to Tomás and Paquita for this favor they have done us. (L.L.G. Córdoba)⁸

⁸ Cf. *Los Alvira, op. cit.*

TODAY SHE IS A PERKY SMILING FOUR-MONTH-OLD BABY GIRL

I have been married for three years. At the beginning of my marriage I had several miscarriages. Since they were recurrent, my husband and **I turned to Tomás and Paquita**, who had already intervened on our behalf once before.

A few months later I was pregnant again. Given my history, I was under close medical supervision. Everything seemed to be going normally and we were starting to relax, when they realized that I had no more amniotic fluid and the fetus showed a significant delay in the growth of its head and there were other alarming symptoms. The outlook was not good and the situation was complex. It was necessary to keep the fetus in the uterus as long as possible so that it could continue to develop. Moreover, the baby would probably have been born disabled and the specialists never offered us a positive prospect. [...] With all our relatives and friends, we began to pray to the Lord through the intercession of Tomás and Paquita, so that our daughter would live.

Josephine was born very prematurely, at six months and one week. Little by little her test results turned out to be normal. Today she is a perky smiling four-month-old baby girl. We know that Tomás and Paquita have accompanied us during these long months of uncertainty and anguish and that they intervened on our behalf. We are writing to express our gratitude. (M. and R.)⁹

⁹ *Oggi è una bambina di quattro mesi che sorride ed è molto spigliata* (28/01/2016), <opusdei.org>.



PEARLS OF HOLINESS Where God's power emerges

«Tomás and Paquita rendered true love, that is, God's love, present in all their actions. One of their daughters recalled, "They always struggled to fully live the Sacrament of Matrimony, to which they had been called. They loved each other very much, they gave themselves to each other: it was God's love that made them constantly think about how to make each other happy. It was evident that their human love was part of their union with God and their spiritual progress, and they cultivated it in many ways. It was evident in the way they looked at each other, the way they talked to each other or waited for each other"»¹⁰.

¹⁰ Cf. *Tomás Alvira y Paquita Domínguez - Opus Dei*, <moam.info>.

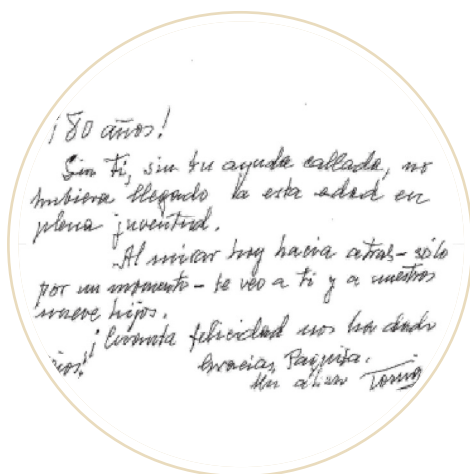
EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE ALVIRA FAMILY

How God reveals Himself through their family events

Rafael, one of Tomás and Paquita's children, gives us a glimpse into their family life, describing seven ways in which the parents took care of their marriage and raised their children through their example.¹¹

1. THE DESIRE TO LOVE¹²

«My parents persevered in their desire to love each other until the end of their existence». (Rafael Alvira)



80 years old! Without you, without your silent help, I would not have made it to this age at my prime. If I look back today for just a moment, I see you and our nine children. How much happiness God has given us.

Thank you, Paquita

*Love,
Tomás¹³*

¹¹ 7 consigli per il matrimonio sull'esempio di Tomás e Paquita Alvira (25/10/2019), <opusdei.org>.

¹² Quotations available in *Documentario su una coppia di coniugi meravigliosamente normale*, op. cit.

¹³ Boletín de la Oficina de las Causas de los Santos. Prelatura del Opus Dei. N° 68, Hoja Informativa n° 2, España 2010.

«You should have seen the way they looked at each other after 40 years of marriage! You saw a fresh, cheerful couple, as if just engaged». (García Arenillas, a friend of the couple)

«They were such a simple couple. They didn't accomplish great feats, but their gestures conveyed love». (Isabel Bueno, the Alvira family's baby sitter)

«When he was already quite old, not long before he died, one of my sisters, in my presence, jokingly said to my father: well, since you have been married for so many years, you do not care so much for mother. I think that was the only time I ever saw my father's face whiten and he said, "I love her more and more every day, and much more than when we were engaged."». (Rafael Alvira)

«One afternoon a week, I think on Thursdays, my father would come home early from work and go with my mother, usually to the theater, which they loved, or to see a movie or have dinner out together. We would stay home with an aunt. So they had the opportunity to be together alone and they never missed it». (Rafael Alvira)

«Day after day, we so desired to be like them. My father paid incredible attention to my mother. He was crazy about her. We had seen this since we were children and, of course, it made us happy, it gave us a great confidence [...] The mutual love they had was evident and it was also evident that it continued to grow». (Rafael Alvira)

«They treated each other with a great deal of fondness and, above all, with a kindness that to us, who were still a young couple with so many things to learn, was a great example». (The Arenillas', a couple of friends)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Tomás and Paquita knew how to make their love grow every day, up until the very last day of their lives. We could ask ourselves at the end of each day: did I love my husband/wife more and better?

- Tomás and Paquita's love shined through their gestures. Let me reflect on the love that shines through my gestures. What do my gestures express?

- What could I commit to so that the love, in our family, can continue to grow?

- Do we believe it is important to carve out time as a couple? How might we organize ourselves so that we don't have to give it up?



2. ATTENTION TOWARD OTHERS¹⁴

«They had the great capability of being mindful towards others. For example, they would both open the door for me when I arrived. My mother would give each child a kiss when they came home. We considered it to be something normal». (Rafael Alvira)

«I remember this about Dad: he devoted time to each of us. You could tell he was very proud of his children». (Concha Alvira)

«“When I met Paquita I met a mother, because with us she was really a mother and with me in a special way.” “This married couple, in my opinion, loved everyone that way, because when you talk to others they tell you the same things. We had come to believe: how lucky we are! They love us so much! But then we realized they did it with us, with the college doorman, with everyone”». (The Arenillas', a couple of friends)

«I was 16 years old when the Alviras offered me to help them with their children by going to live with them during the vacations. I was 16 and I was very scared when I realized that their children were about my age. There were eight children and I was a little worried, but they helped me a lot. They were a family to me». (Isabel Bueno, The Alvira's baby sitter)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let's reflect on how we manage to devote special attention to each child.
- Let's reflect on our willingness to welcome all the people we have around us.
- Could we pay more attention to someone?

¹⁴ Testimonies available in *Los Alvira, op. cit.*

3. TEACHING BY EXAMPLE¹⁵

«My parents were convinced that the decisive factor in education was the atmosphere in which it takes place, and that the best pedagogy was indirect. The good example they set for us influenced us greatly. This is how they transmitted faith to us. For example, they would go to Mass and we would see them take part in it with a devotion that made an impression on us. They showed us what God's love means by winning us over with affection; they sacrificed themselves without saying anything to help us. And their spirit was contagious». (Rafael Alvira)

«I think this is the most important thing, the key to what we all were able to take in: their example. I learned a great deal by seeing how they dealt with their illnesses, during which both of them suffered greatly. My father, for example, after one night when he had been in the hospital and had suffered terribly, when we went to pick him up, he started singing Aragonese songs in the car. This I will never forget and I wondered where he got so much strength, so much energy to be able to sing. Examples like this were ongoing». (María Isabel Alvira)

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.



«They were a normal family with eight children, with the problem of dressing them: what should I buy for them? What should I put on them? I noticed the climate in that family and actually I was gathering ideas so that in the future my family would be like theirs».
(Isabel Bueno, Alvira's baby sitter)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- How much importance do we place on example? Let's reflect on the fact that every gesture we do carries a message, which reaches our children and the people around us.
- Small gestures of affection and attention, repeated often, can create in our couple and in our family an atmosphere that our children experience and that can be much more effective than many words.

4. TEACHING CHILDREN TO LOVE EACH OTHER¹⁶

«They both encouraged us to love each other very much as brothers and sisters. It is something that remains true to this day».
(Rafael Alvira)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- In what particular situation that we are experiencing, can we be witnesses to unconditional and generous love, even though it is exhausting?

¹⁶ *Ibidem*

5. ACCEPTING EACH OTHER'S WEAKNESS WITH A BIG HEART¹⁷

«My parents had a big heart. It's not easy. My father didn't like to correct his children, but he understood that if he didn't he would hurt us. He corrected us without offending us. To truly love, you must have heart. And the same was true with my father's students. They realized that he cared for them; they felt loved and were grateful». (Rafael Alvira)

«When they needed to correct us, they did it privately, with each one of us, so that we wouldn't feel humiliated in front of others. They always did it with a lot of care and in such a way that we really felt encouraged». (María Isabel Alvira)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- When we correct our children, let's take them aside and make them feel above all accepted and loved.
- Do we always look for the positive aspect of people, even our spouse?
- What other insights have made me reflect?



¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

6. PROMOTING FRIENDSHIP¹⁸

«My parents had many friends, and we became part of those families. They also invited our friends over often. They knew all of them. They would let them into our home and let them experience our family atmosphere». (Rafael Alvira)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Do we experience being a domestic church in welcoming both our friends and our children's friends into a family atmosphere?
- Let's reflect upon how our family knows how to be welcoming. What is our attitude when someone comes into our home?



¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

7. RESPECTING LIBERTY¹⁹

«My parents have always had great respect for our liberty. They never pushed us to make a specific decision. For example, at home they prayed the Rosary every day, but they never forced us to pray it with them. Even if they invited us to join them, they never imposed it on us or insisted that we participate» (Rafael Alvira).

«When I was considering which direction my life should take, I could truly think about it with the most absolute liberty» (María Isabel Alvira).

«Another wonderful point that all of us brothers and sisters agree upon is that they had incredible respect for our liberty» (Rafael Alvira).

«They had the great ability to teach us how to love and they made sure that everything was imbued with an atmosphere of love, trust and unity that you could truly touch and feel with your hands.

They inspired so much trust, they did things so naturally, that from the very first moment you felt free» (their son, Tomás, priest).

«When I met them, I had very young children and naturally I thought that they would be stick to me all their lives, after all, for me children have always been the most wonderful thing in my life. Tomás and Paquita, on the other hand, already had grown children, and I was struck by the joy with which they had left them free to follow their own paths» (The Arenillas, a couple of friends).

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- What does it mean, concretely, to leave our children free to realize themselves, to discover their vocation a little at a time?
- What does it mean, for me, to allow my spouse to be him/herself?

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

CONCRETE INSTRUMENTS OF HOLINESS

The fixed points of the Alvira family

Tomás and Paquita had a happy marriage. In every situation, even the most difficult or painful, just as in the most ordinary, **they knew how to see the positive side of life, because it was rich in the gifts given to them by God.** What tools did they use to achieve this happiness?

1. PRAYING THE ROSARY AND PARTICIPATING IN HOLY MASS²⁰

«At home we recited the rosary simply because at the end of the afternoon, at sunset, my father and mother would start reciting it».

«They went to Mass every day. After dinner or before, a time was set to pray the rosary, and I would tell the girls, “your father never forgets it even one night”». (Isabel Bueno, Alvira’s baby sitter)

«Paquita told me: don’t worry, you can pray while you work, you can be in the presence of God, you can look at Our Lady who is in your house. And when you are with this child, who you are rocking in the cradle, first of all you can think that he is a child of God and you can thank God for the children you have, also you can pray, you can do a reading, you can pray the rosary». (Guadalupe Rodríguez De La Barrera, a friend)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Do we talk to God throughout our day?
- Praying does not primarily mean asking God for something, rather leaving space for God to love us and for us to feel His presence.
- What does it mean, for me and for our couple, to «let God love us»?

²⁰ *Ibidem.*



2. CARING FOR YOUR SPOUSE, NEVER TAKE THEM FOR GRANTED²¹

My father complimented my mother and sent her flowers, whatever the celebration, and any anniversary was an opportunity to show her affection. And my mother did the same for my father». (María Isabel Alvira)

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- How do I show love to my spouse? I consider what compliment I could give my spouse today.

3. THE JOY THAT COMES FROM FAITH IN GOD²²

«One day at school, a little girl said to me: “listen, why are you always happy?”. I didn’t know what to answer and I realized that, deep down, the happiness I had was what I always saw at home and in particular in my parents: they were happy» (María Isabel Alvira).

Beside Tomás’s coffin, Paquita found the strength to respond to her friend’s embrace by saying: *«Chiari, he is already in heaven».*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- María Isabel remembers always seeing her parents happy. Today, what image of the family have we given to our children?

²¹ *Ibidem.*

²² *Ibidem.*

Let us conclude with these words, read by one of their daughters during their 50th wedding anniversary celebration, which summarize the legacy that Tomás and Paquita left to their children:

«Hence here, ladies and gentlemen, is the most beautiful love story ever recorded in the records of Spain and, consequently, even more unthinkable, beyond our borders.

*She, Paquita, the most beautiful flower of the ancient Kingdom, instantly bewitched Tomás, the most powerful knight of its famous capital. **Now, after 50 years**, after having generated nine splendid children, and after having been constant creators of happiness, **they are giving the most beautiful lesson, real and lived: that of a love that is always more youthful, passionate and enthusiastic**»²³.*



²³ *Ibidem*.

CONCLUSIVE REFLECTIONS

- How can Tomás and Paquita's example help our family?
- What message are they giving us at this time in our relationship as a couple and as a family?

IDEAS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

- I think of my family: what can I thank the Lord for?
- I reflect on how much the life of the Alvira family has inspired in me.
- I beg for the gift of the Spirit concerning one of my difficulties.

PRAYER FOR PRIVATE DEVOTION

*God the Father,
you have filled your Servants
Paquita and Tomás
with grace,
so that they might live in a Christian manner
their marriage and their professional and social duties,
send us the strength of Love
so that we may know how to spread, throughout the world,
the greatness of faithfulness and marital sanctity.
Grant that you may glorify your Servants
and grant me through their intercession
the favor I ask of you...
Amen.*

Our Father, Hail Mary, Gloria.

TO DEEPEN

Antonio Vázquez, *Tomás Alvira y Paquita Domínguez: La aventura de un matrimonio feliz*, Palabra, Madrid 2007.

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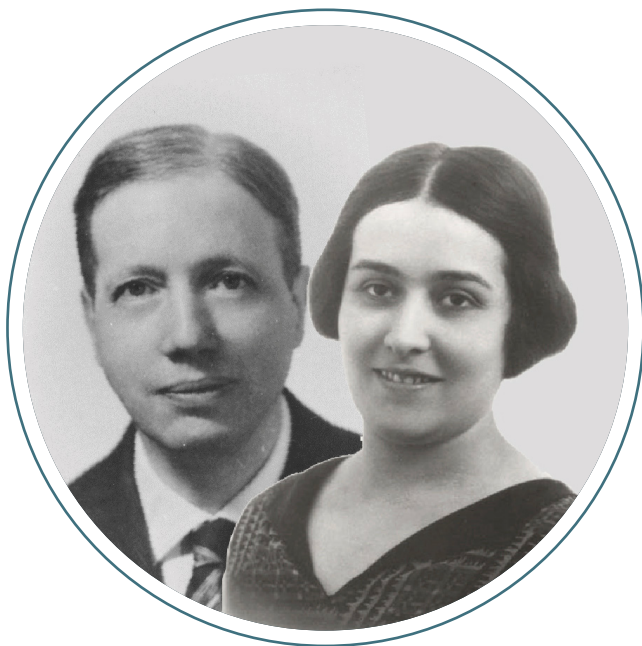
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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJY0IFcjoJY&list=RDCMUcwe2LtVhclgOLqRKjxKcCDQ&start_radio=1&rv=YJY0IFcjoJY&t=3 (en español –subtitled in several languages-)

PT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrjRigdS9Rs>

ES: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1gx9psPLi8>

Looking through God's eyes



SERVANTS OF GOD
ULISSE AMENDOLAGINE AND
LELIA COSSIDENTE



WHERE GOD SHOWS THROUGH

Ulisse and Lelia faced difficult and painful situations, entrusting themselves completely to Providence. Faith was the lens through which they read, interpreted and accepted small and large events in their family life.



BIOGRAPHY

ULISSE AMENDOLAGINE (1893 – 1969)

Ulisse was born in Salerno on May 14, 1893. After moving several times due to his father's work, the family settled in Rome.

In 1917 he graduated with excellent grades in Law and began working at the Ministry of the Interior, where he worked his way to become Prefect. The position he occupied was very delicate and many people asked him for favors. Ulisse maintained his professional and moral integrity, even in times of economic difficulty, in which help might have been valuable for his large family.

As a young man, the environment in which he grew up was particularly hostile to faith and the Church. *«His teachers and schoolmates challenged him to discussions and controversies about God, the meaning of things, and life after death. Ulisse responded by documenting himself, defending his ideas, and maintaining respect and friendship with everyone even after the most heated disputes»*¹.

Although not expansive and very reserved, his integrity and impartiality led him to be respected and well-liked by all.

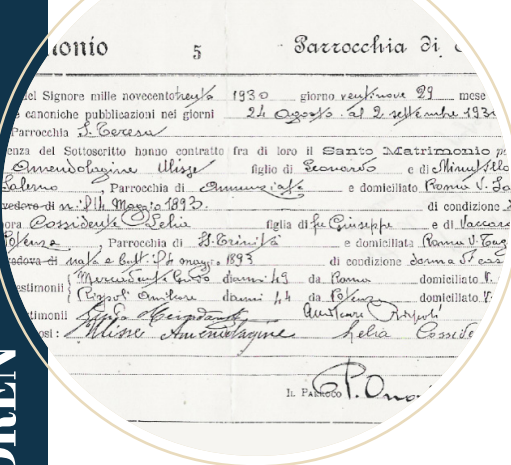
¹ Luca Pasquale, *Lelia e Ulisse Amendolagine. Una famiglia guidata dal Vangelo*, Velar, Gorle (BG) 2013, p. 11.

LELIA COSSIDENTE (1893 – 1951)

Lelia was born in Potenza on May 4, 1893, but soon, in order to follow her father's work, she moved to Rome.

Being from a wealthy family, before entering elementary school, she had a teacher who home-schooled her. Her studies continued until she earned her high school diploma. She taught for a year in an elementary school, then worked in a bank and finally in a library. Everywhere her presence was appreciated, and she was well liked by everyone.

She had an open, cheerful and very strong personality that, in life, would allow her to find solutions to overcome the most difficult situations.



ENGAGEMENT, MATRIMONY AND CHILDREN

THEIR MEETING AND MARRIAGE

As was the custom at the time, it was the respective families who agreed and proposed the engagement to their children. Lelia, who had already refused other candidates, was not sure and did not want to deceive Ulisse. He insisted, and he returned to her house. This time she accepted to meet him, she was fascinated and they soon got engaged. During their engagement, both were sincere, they clearly confided their thoughts in each other and shared the same desire to grow in faith and to bind their union in the Lord. They were married on September 29, 1930, in the parish of St. Teresa of Avila in Rome.

A DIFFICULT COEXISTENCE

Lelia «*knew that it would not have been easy for her to lead a family in which her in-laws, her own mother, as well as her intrusive sister-in-law Maria with her husband and son, initially all lived together*»². There was much stability to maintain, but «*with tact and without provoking breakups, Lelia and her husband found a way to explain themselves and to claim their autonomy*»³.

² Servi di Dio Ulisse Amendolagine e Lelia Cossidente (29/09/2014), <www.cattoliciromani.com>, parte 1.

³ Ivi, parte 4.

THE WAR

During the Second World War, Ulisse, opposed to the Fascist regime, did not agree to move to Verona, so as not to compromise himself with the government of Mussolini. He therefore found himself suspended from work and unpaid. The danger of being arrested forced him to leave his family and take refuge at the Roman Major Seminary.

Lelia was left alone to manage the house and the children, without the salary of her husband, the family's only livelihood. She lived in fear of retaliation from the Germans and even lacked the necessities to survive. She strengthened her faith in Providence and tried to find solutions to put together some money and save. She sold her silverware, her crystal glassware, a few gold items, and used the curtains to make clothes for her children. She sent many letters to reassure Ulisse and, together with him, rely on God.

In December 1944, the arrival of the Americans finally allowed the family to reunite and Ulisse resumed his work at the Ministry.



«Ulisse tackled his office work as a response to a vocation that required him to be constantly at the service of others. The seriousness with which he faced his work led him to refuse all the opportunities of which he could have taken advantage in order to overcome the economic difficulties of his family: every “gift” that arrived as a sign of thanks for a completed task was decisively refused»⁴.

THE FORCE FROM THE EUCHARIST

His son Joseph recalled that *«passing in front of a Church and entering was [...] the most natural thing. The presence of Jesus in any Church was as if He were awaiting our greeting. We looked at the Tabernacle, surrounded by lights and flowers, and we understood that it hid a mystery that we had to adore, it attracted us and we could not overlook it»⁵.*

THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN

«So then the atmosphere was always peaceful within those walls? Certainly not, especially when the children – all very lively – quarreled among themselves as is inevitable in any normal family. But this was another occasion to teach mutual respect and peaceful coexistence: in the evening, before the common prayer, the quarrels were forgotten and the contenders made peace»⁶.



⁴ Cf. Maria Concetta Bomba, *Due cuori innamorati in Cristo*, OCD, Roma 2006, p. 6.

⁵ Cf. Lelia e Ulisse Amendolagine (10/11/2018), <www.santateresaverona.it>.

⁶ *Servi di Dio*, op. cit., parte 4.

THEIR SAINTS' DAYS

Lelia carefully kept a notebook for each child, where she wrote down the most important events. On the cover, next to the name, there wasn't the date of birth but their Saint's day, which was always celebrated. *«In the Amendolagine household, it was customary to celebrate the name day with greater importance than the birthday»*⁷.

SUFFERING IN ILLNESS

*«Lelia had to face her Calvary and leave her family prematurely, in 1951. It caused deep pain that was however seen by everyone as a supernatural event. Lelia, at the end of her life, often loved to repeat the last words of the Hail Mary: “pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death...”. Ulisse died in 1969, after having courageously faced the ordeal of an illness»*⁸.

⁷ <https://centrostudiedithstein.myblog.it/list/i-coniugi-amendolagine/662612001.pdf>, p. 14.

⁸ <https://www.cattoliciromani.com/threads/56114-Servi-di-Dio-Ulisse-Amendolagine-e-Lelia-Cossidente>
Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

FAVORS

Many people, praying to Ulisse and Lelia, have attested that they received particular “favors”

Don Andrea Santoro, *fidei donum* of the Diocese of Rome, who was killed in Trebizond (Turkey) on February 5, 2006, left a signed document to the Vicariate of Rome, for a grace received in 2002. At the end of June 2002, there was a young parishioner - hospitalized in intensive care at San John's Hospital and declared in critical condition - for whom the intercession of the Amendolagines was asked with great faith. «*The next morning the health authorities declared him out of danger*»⁹.

Vincenzo and Emanuela, from the Parish of St. Andrew the Apostle in Rome, led a group in which they pursued the spirituality of «*mother Lelia and father Ulisse: we call them like this, very confidentially, because thanks to them we feel less fragile in the mission of spouses and parents - said Emanuela. We have seen a conversion in our children's behavior, and harmony and reconciliation in various difficult situations*»¹⁰.

⁹ *I coniugi Amendolagine verso la beatificazione* (27/05/2011), <www.romasette.it>.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

PEARLS OF HOLINESS

Where God's power emerges

*«Marriage is oriented to the holiness of the spouses: Ulisse and Lelia understood this very well. The living and fulfilling presence of God in their union was the secret of their mutual **faithfulness**, of their **strength** to face the daily struggle for existence, of their luminous **joy**.*

“Providence always helps” repeated Lelia in the most difficult and painful moments [...]. “Men have the Lord of the Universe within their reach but they do not take advantage of it” repeated Ulysses during the Eucharistic adoration.

*[...] Together they faced the dramas of war, persecution, poverty and illness, thus demonstrating that **where there was love, there were no obstacles or adverse forces that could hold them back**, in order to realize the small domestic Church.*

Their children saw and learned all this: more from deeds than from words, because authentic love is contagious!»¹¹.

¹¹ Cf. Cardinal José Saraiva Martins, Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, in

Luca Pasquale, *Lelia e Ulisse Amendolagine*, op. cit., p. 3.



EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE AMENDOLAGINE FAMILY

How God reveals Himself through their family events

1. THE UNITY OF THE COUPLE

*«In front of the children they pursued a single decision, without ever arguing»¹². In the letters to their children, we often read a reference to their spouse: **«As dad wrote you, as mom told you»¹³**. This confirmed their attention to always being united, even in educating their children. Their dialogue took place especially at dinnertime, which they ate together in the kitchen; when it was late and the children were already in bed, they took the opportunity to share their day.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let's reflect on the importance that our children see our unity.
- What image do we give of ourselves to our children when we eat lunch or dinner together?
- We might decide to set aside a time in the day to share experiences, exchange opinions, make decisions about our children. What would we give up to create this time for ourselves?

¹² *Ivi*, p. 20.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

2. THE PARENTS' EXAMPLE

«The power of example does what no recommendation, even a repeated one, is capable of creating: what is embodied in the lives of two parents is directly transmitted not by empty words, but by a testimony that shows, at once, the good, the beautiful, and the true that one intimately desires»¹⁴.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let's reflect on the importance of the messages we send to our children through our behavior.
- Which of my attitudes send a positive message and which instead send a negative one?

3. CONSISTENCY IN WORK

«The “family man” Ulisse was not very different from the one who sat in an important office of the Ministry of the Interior: he had the same consistency with his faith, that he had in public»¹⁵.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Reflect on how, at work or when attending circles far from Jesus, I am consistent with my faith.

¹⁴ Maria Concetta Bomba, *Due cuori innamorati in Cristo*, op. cit., p. 5.

¹⁵ *Servi di Dio*, op. cit., parte 3.



CONCRETE INSTRUMENTS OF HOLINESS

The fixed points of the Amendolagine family

1. ADORATION

«Men have the Lord of the Universe within their reach but they do not take advantage of it.... They think of other things, they are absorbed by their miseries»¹⁶.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Being in front of Jesus, in Eucharistic Adoration, is not easy, but it helps us to create room in us, so that the Lord can speak to our heart. Even a few minutes may be enough, the rest will be received as a gift from Jesus.

- It's not about *knowing how to pray*. There is no one prayer that is better than another. If a prayer expresses a relationship, then it is authentic.

- Let me pause for a moment now and talk to Jesus.

2. PRAYING AS A COUPLE

«Wanting to pray together every day, they purchased two kneelers that they placed in their bedroom»¹⁷.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- We might consider setting aside a small space, in our room, where we can gather to talk with Jesus.

¹⁶ Luca Pasquale, *Lelia e Ulisse Amendolagine, op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 13.



3. DOING GOD'S WILL

Ulisse and Lelia always referred to God, in both the small and big choices, always concerned to know how to do His will, even when it did not correspond to their desires, to their expectations. When their son Francesco, only 10 years old, asked to enter the seminary, their parents were not serene and, in asking for advice from their friend Monsignor Ronca, Ulisse expressed himself in this way: *«I understand very well, on the other hand, that it is not for me to judge such a thing and that the only thing I must do is to **submit myself completely to do the will of God**»*¹⁸.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Following God's will in the great decisions of life as well as in the small daily choices, requires constant dialogue with God, knowing how to address Him with simplicity: *Lord, what do you think? Lord, what should we do with this child? Lord, how can I respond to this person, how can I solve this problem?*

4. LIGHT IN FAITH

The two spouses have very different personalities, Lelia is optimistic and always cheerful while Ulisse is more meditative and pessimistic. What they have in common is **their faith**, experienced as *«**a light** through which all the events of the family [are] seen together and together discussed, interpreted and accepted»*¹⁹.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Faith leads us to desire seeing every occurrence as God sees it.
- How can we help each other to see what is happening to us with God's gaze?

¹⁸ Cf. Maria Concetta Bomba, *Due cuori innamorati in Cristo*, op. cit., p. 8

¹⁹ *Ivi*, p. 2.

CONCLUSIVE REFLECTIONS

- How can the example of Ulisse and Lelia help our family?
- What message are they giving us at this time in our relationship as a couple and as a family?

IDEAS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

- I think about my family: what can I thank the Lord for?
- I contemplate how much the life of the Amendolagine family has inspired in me.
- I beg for the gift of the Spirit concerning one of my struggles.

PRAYER FOR PRIVATE DEVOTION

*O Lord,
you wanted man and woman
united forever by the Sacrament of Matrimony,
a sign of your love for humanity,
through the intercession of Lelia and Ulisse,
spouses and parents according to your heart,
grant that serenity, harmony and
love reign in our families.
In the name of Jesus, we ask you for the grace
that we so desire.
Amen.*

TO DEEPEN

IT: Luca Pasquale, *Lelia e Ulisse Amendolagine. Una famiglia guidata dal Vangelo*, Velar, Gorle (BG) 2013.

IT: Maria Concetta Bomba, *Due cuori innamorati in Cristo*, OCD, 2006.

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VIDEOS (last visit on April 12, 2022)

IT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q07OwDShXew>

EN: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSgP4PCzUU>

**To grow in love -
always**



**SERVANTS OF GOD
EDUARDO ORTIZ DE LANDÁZURI
FERNÁNDEZ DE HEREDIA AND
LAURA BUSCA OTAEGUI**



WHERE GOD SHOWS THROUGH

Eduardo and Laura lived with the constant desire to “make each other feel good”. They were able to put aside their pride and pay attention everyday not so much to the vulnerabilities of their spouse rather to themselves, to make themselves more “lovable”. Their marriage was a journey of love, self-giving and the acceptance of pain, even physical pain, in the footsteps of Christ.



BIOGRAPHY¹

EDUARDO ORTIZ DE LANDÁZURI (1910-1985)

Eduardo was born in Segovia (Spain) on October 31, 1910.

HIS CAREER

Although family tradition steered him towards a military career, Eduardo chose to study Medicine. He graduated in 1933 and in 1944, after the Spanish Civil War, being acquitted of the charge of having participated in a conspiracy, he obtained his doctorate. He continued his university career and, in September 1958, he joined the new Faculty of Medicine of the University of Navarra and the University Clinic.

TRIALS AND CONVERSION

At the beginning of the Civil War, his father, with a military career, was arrested, tried and sentenced to be executed. Eduardo managed to negotiate his release, but his father refused. *«We stayed with him until after five in the morning, the hour in which he would be shot. [...] Many things could be said about that night in which [my sister] Guadalupe and I stayed with our parents: about my father's integrity in not accepting a pardon that would have turned him against his comrades [...] and about Guadalupe's courage that remained impassive, with her serenity, giving strength to my mother and of course to me»*². Eduardo would always remember those days as the most painful of his life; a deep religious crisis followed that led him to a conversion to God.

¹ Cf. Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri (04/03/2006), <www.opusdei.org>.

² «Meglio morire che macchiare la vita»: il coraggio e la serenità di Guadalupe (03/01/2019),

<www.opusdei.org>

LAURA BUSCA OTAEGUI (1918-2000)

Laura was born in Zumárraga (Spain) on November 3, 1918. She was the youngest of six siblings and everyone called her “Laurita”. Her family was very well known and respected in the village and Laura was soon noticed for her good qualities.

HER EDUCATION

Laura had a strong personality and from a young age she made some courageous choices; she decided to continue her studies until she graduated in Pharmacy and enrolled in a doctorate program. «*In her day, only 5% of women had an education like hers*»³. While studying in Madrid, she stayed at the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, a place that embraced modern ideas of that period and where Laura met the greatest names in 20th Century Spanish culture. The environment was not overtly against God, but it was indifferent to Him, and young Laura’s faith started to weaken.

³ Cf. *Laura ed Eduardo, un amore eterno* (18/04/2016). <www.opusdei.org>.



ENGAGEMENT, MATRIMONY AND CHILDREN

THEIR MEETING

«I met Eduardo in the fall of 1935. I had studied Pharmacy. I asked for a position at the Hospital del Rey in Madrid [...]. In the same hospital Eduardo worked as an internal doctor in the ward for contagious patients [...]. I frequently went to that ward to take blood samples, so we saw each other often [...]. One day, on March 4, 1936, Eduardo invited me to lunch»⁴.

«My mother reflected a little but then accepted the invitation [to lunch] but, in order not to feel too committed, she said, “well, Eduardo, I’ll come but each person pays for him/herself.” Then, of course, it was my father who paid. Once lunch was over, my father immediately suggested that she go to the movies, but it seemed too much to my mother and she told him no. This says a lot about her, because she was very independent and didn’t want to feel tied down»⁵.

⁴ Cf. Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri, <it.wikipedia.org>.

⁵ Opus Dei: Laura Busca y Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri, el poder transformador de un matrimonio (21/04/2015). <www.youtube.com>

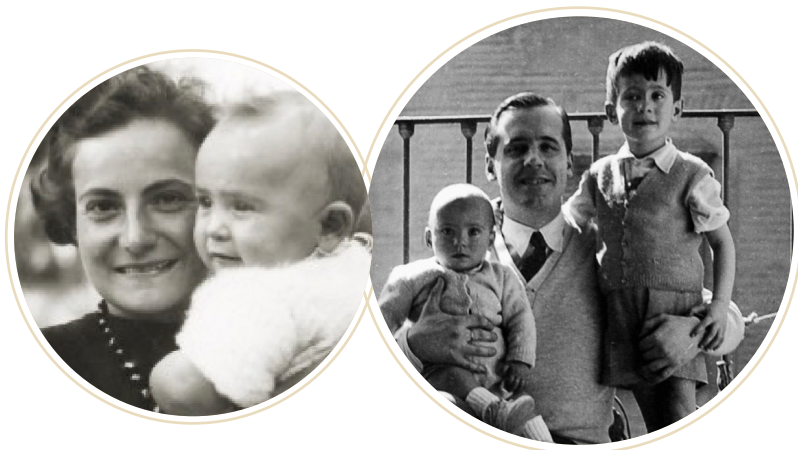
They got married on June 17, 1941 and spent several years in Madrid, where their first three children were born. In 1946, Eduardo was elected a member of the Royal Academy of Medicine in Granada and the family moved there. Here the other four children were born and, in 1958, they moved to Pamplona, to follow Eduardo who was called to work at the University of Navarra.

A FRIENDLY HOME

The children remember how so many people were always invited to their house, from friends to their father's colleagues, to his students; they often arrived with him for dinner, without telling their mother. Laura didn't make a problem of it, she didn't lose her smile, she would add a few dishes and then return to finish preparing dinner⁶.

THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Laura decided to give up her job as a pharmacist in order to devote herself entirely to taking care of her large family and allow her husband to be able to concentrate all his efforts on his work. For his part, Eduardo took an interest in and followed the lives of his children. *«[He was always there] when we needed something; he followed us in what we did during the week or on the weekend, he gave us pocket money. These things we always did with my father»⁷.*



⁶ *Opus Dei: Laura Busca y Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri, op.cit.*

⁷ *Ibidem.*

FAITH

The children remember their parents' deep devotion. They saw them prepare themselves before receiving Communion; they regularly went to confession. In the morning, father, Eduardo, would leave early to go to Holy Mass before going to the clinic. The parents prayed the rosary together late in the evening, but the children heard them and whoever wanted to, even if they were already in bed, could pray with them. *«They lived their devotion intensely but also very naturally»⁸.*

TWO DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES

Despite the difference in their personalities and ways of doing things, Eduardo and Laura lived an authentic love, which demanded constant attention in “making the other person feel good”. *«My mother undoubtedly consumed herself in order to please my father, but it is also true that she knew how to get on his good side and deal with him. They never fought, at least not in front of us children. We never saw them argue. [...] They loved each other profoundly and because of this the smallest display of affection was considered by the other as a great gesture of love»⁹.*

HARDSHIP AND ILLNESS¹⁰

A certainly difficult and painful moment for Eduardo and Laura was the internment of their third son, Eduardo, into a psychiatric facility due to the progression of his mental illness.

When the children were still young, Laura was diagnosed with a spinal disease that caused her severe back pain but that, at the same time, she accepted while trying not to burden the family.

Shortly after retirement, Eduardo was diagnosed with a tumor that had already metastasized and before long he found himself hospitalized in his clinic and was examined by his colleagues. He accepted his suffering, in which he felt united to the suffering of Christ on the Cross. He died on the morning of May 20, 1985, with Laura by his side and while repeating this prayer: *«Lord, increase my faith, increase my hope, increase my charity, so that my heart may be more and more like yours!»¹¹.*

^{8, 9, 10} *Opus Dei: Laura Busca y Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri, op. cit.*

¹¹ Cf. *Servi di Dio Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri Fernandez de Heredia e Laura Busca Otaegui Sposi* (18/02/2014), <www.santiebeati.it>.



WIDOWHOOD

Laura spent the period of her widowhood at home, always attentive to each person's needs. Her grandchildren remember how she was always ready to listen to them; when they came back to visit her, they were amazed at how she remembered their conversations, even if they were minor and unimportant things, said as children, but in this way their grandmother made them feel important.¹²

THE FIRST TESTIMONY OF HER HUSBAND'S SAINTHOOD

On December 11, 1998, Laura had the joy of attending the opening session of the Diocesan Process on the virtues of her husband Eduardo in Pamplona and, shortly afterwards, she became the first witness at the Process.

She died in an odor of sanctity, on October 11, 2000, after having endured the pain of her back disease for so many years without ever losing her smile.



¹² *Opus Dei: Laura Busca y Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri, op. cit.*

FAVORS

Many people, praying Eduardo and Laura, have attested that they received particular “favors”

It helped Beatriz¹³ very much to know that Eduardino, Eduardo and Laura’s third child was disabled. *«Sometimes I have moments of inner rebellion, instead of seeing this situation as an opportunity for holiness. All of us who are in this situation think that you have to live it in order to realize it. They have been through it and because of this I feel Laura very close. She teaches me that this son is a treasure and helps us all on our way to Heaven».*

Beatriz began placing a long-term intention in Laura’s hands: the future of her son Javier; then she learned that her husband had long been asking the same thing of Eduardo. *«He recites the prayer of the prayer card every day. For parents it is a permanent concern to think about the future of a sick child, when he becomes an adult and we will no longer be there. For the time being, we noticed his help in daily life. Our family is undergoing a transformation. We all have a special grace to be better, to be very united and to love each other more»¹⁴.*

¹³ «Beatriz Castillo is married and has seven children, the same as do Laura and Eduardo: six are alive but one is already in Heaven, having died shortly after birth. Javier, nine years old, is autistic».

¹⁴ Cf. *Laura ed Eduardo, op.cit.*

PEARLS OF HOLINESS

Where God's power emerges

«Laura and Eduardo shared 44 years of a happiness based on unconditional love, respect, raising their children, boundless generosity and understanding. Having lived their experience of holiness as a couple, they could serve as an example to many Christian spouses; therefore, it has been deemed convenient to present them together to the private devotion of the faithful, so that they may simultaneously have recourse to the intercession of Laura and Eduardo»¹⁵. (Msgr. Francisco Pérez)

¹⁵ Cf. *Unificate le Cause di canonizzazione di Eduardo e Laurita Ortiz de Landázuri*, <www.opusdei.org>.



EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE ORTIZ DE LANDÁZURI FAMILY How God reveals Himself through their family events

Let us offer some points for reflection, starting from the testimonies of people who, present at the closing of the diocesan phase of the Process of canonization of Laura, *«wanted to express their gratitude to Eduardo and Laura for their example of love, fidelity, donation and joy in married life»*¹⁶.

¹⁶ Cf. *Laura ed Eduardo, op.cit.*

1. TO LOVE AS CHRIST DOES

*«In our society it seems to be utopian, but evidently **forever-lasting love, all the way to Heaven, is real and can be achieved.** Marriage is three-way: the wife, the husband and God, and the conjugal **path is a path of love and giving just like that of Christ.** Laura and Eduardo achieved that»¹⁷.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- The love of Christ can carry spouses all the way to Heaven.
- Let's reflect on some aspects that strike us about the love story between Eduardo and Laura.
- Let us reflect on how, even in our daily lives, God's love can become concrete and be offered to others through our actions.

2. THE FAMILY FIRST AND FOREMOST

*«When I think about Laura's life, it leaves me in awe. For her, family came before everything else. Sometimes I don't know how to balance the demands of work and family. I have held management positions since I was young and **life has often forced me to make choices.** Some of it feels like it takes a toll on me because I have a large family. Each of us has to make our own decisions to reconcile our obligations, and Laura understood that she had to support her husband and manage a large family»¹⁸.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- What priorities have guided my and our most important choices?

¹⁷ Testimony of Inés Escauriaza. She works in the University of Navarra; she is married and has three small children. Cf. *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Testimony of Beatriz Castillo. Cf. *Ibidem*.

3. LITTLE EVERYDAY THINGS

For Inés, it is consoling to know that *«it is not necessary to bend over backwards, and that with the little everyday things one can achieve holiness. [Laura] knew how to always keep a smile on her face, to give herself to others with devotion, to sacrifice herself without being seen, to bear her sorrows in silence, to remain in her place. It can be done»*¹⁹.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- What “little things” can I do with love, every day?
- Which ones cost me the most but, with God’s help, I can accomplish?

4. OUR RELATIONSHIP SETS AN EXAMPLE FOR OUR CHILDREN

*«Eduardo and Laura lived the time of engagement with respect, fondness, commitment and liberty and this helped them build a ‘feeling’ that they later cultivated as a married people. They did not argue in front of the children and did not contradict each other. The love of the parents became a model for the children who came to desire a marriage like this»*²⁰.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let’s think about our relationship: how could we cultivate our “feeling”?
- What concrete actions, of love from one to the other, have our children seen in these days?



¹⁹ Testimony of Inés Escauriaza. Cf. *Ibidem*.

²⁰ Testimony of María Calatrava. Cf. *Ibidem*.

CONCRETE INSTRUMENTS OF HOLINESS

The fixed points of the Ortiz de Landázuri family



1. PUTTING ONE'S PRIDE ASIDE

*«We know that things aren't always easy. [...] When you're surrounded by diapers and whining, **the danger is to create illusions** with what's going on outside the home: work, social life, recognition, etc. Then you need to scale back your married life and your family; put aside your pride, talk, **put yourself in the other person's shoes, get over the nonsense**. It is charity in the highest sense, it is Love»²¹.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- I reflect on the “illusions” I may encounter outside my home that may be a temptation to me.
- «Talking, *putting yourself in each other's shoes, getting over the nonsense*». Is there anything that, right now, I can thank my spouse for or apologize to them for?

2. LOVING EACH OTHER DESPITE ANY FLAWS

*«Laura and Eduardo always strongly identified themselves with one another; they had learned [...] that they had **to love each other with all their flaws**, and not selfishly seek their own advantage, personal perfection, rather the growth of the family»²².*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Over the years it can become difficult to accept your spouse's or your children's shortcomings. Are there any suggestions that may be helpful for me, in the example of Eduardo and Laura?

²¹ Testimony of Beatriz Castillo. Cf. *Ibidem*.

²² Cf. *Ibidem*.

3. ONE'S WILLPOWER

*«Some things are not necessary, but the unity of marriage is a treasure that cannot be put at risk. In times when we do not have these feelings, when the years go by and we discover each other's faults, it is necessary **to rely on the willpower**, on the love for each other and for the children. Children who have parents that are not separated are already have half of their future secured. When you see the progress of a marriage like this, you realize that it is worth the struggle to achieve this unity»²³.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- From “feeling” like loving to “wanting” to love. Reflect on this transition, which can happen even in the small misunderstandings of every day.
- Share with your spouse a moment of joy in which you felt especially united.

²³ Cf. *Ibidem*.

CONCLUSIVE REFLECTIONS

- How can Eduardo and Laura's example help our family?
- What message are they giving us at this time in our relationship as a couple and as a family?

IDEAS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

- I think of my family: what can I thank the Lord for?
- I reflect on how much the life of the Ortiz family has been inspirational to me.
- I beg for the gift of the Spirit concerning a personal difficulty.

PRAYER FOR PRIVATE DEVOTION

*God the merciful Father
who granted to Your Servants
Laurita and Eduardo
the abundance of your grace
that they may practice the Christian virtues
in the fulfillment of their family and professional duties,
grant that I, too, like them
be an instrument of peace and joy in the world.
worthy of glorifying your Servants
and grant me through their intercession
the favor I ask of you...
Amen.*

Our Father, Hail Mary, Gloria.

TO DEEPEN

Hilario Mendo, *La fortaleza de una mujer fiel*, Palabra, Madrid 2009.

Esteban López Escobar y Pedro Lozano, *Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri*, Palabra, Madrid 1994.

Juan Antonio Narváez, *El doctor Ortiz de Landázuri. Un hombre de ciencia al encuentro con Dios*, Palabra, Madrid 1996.

Pedro Lozano Bartolozzi - López-Escobar Fernández, *Eduardo Ortiz de Landázuri: el médico amigo*, Ed. Rialp S.A., Madrid 2003.

WEBOGRAPHY (last visit on April 12, 2022)

All languages: <https://opusdei.org/it-it/article/eduardo-ortiz-de-landazuri/>

IT: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eduardo_Ortiz_de_Land%C3%A1zuri

IT: <http://www.santiebeati.it/dettaglio/92811>

VIDEOS (last visit on April 12, 2022)

ES (subtitled in several languages): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXEdKHG6lbo&t=580s>

A light in the darkness

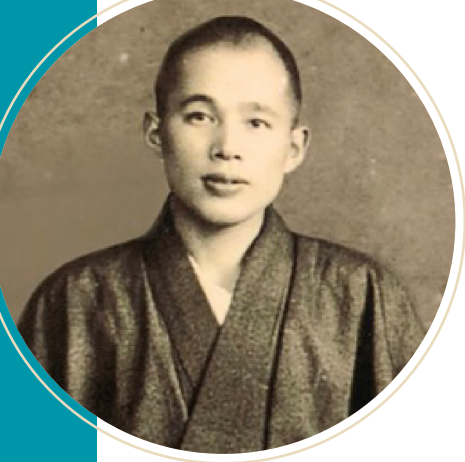


SERVANTS OF GOD
TAKASHI PAOLO
AND MIDORI MARINA NAGAI



WHERE GOD SHOWS THROUGH

Takashi and Midori support each other in making difficult and sometimes risky choices, but they made them because they felt they were corresponding to God's will. The happy ending of their story is finding that which never dies through love in the family and love toward others.



BIOGRAPHY

TAKASHI NAGAI (1908-1951)

The first of 5 children, **Takashi Nagai** was born on February 3, 1908, in Matsue (Japan), in a family of doctors.

THE CULTURAL SCENE

They were the years in which Japan, after reopening to the West, began the race towards modernization and progress. Takashi was fascinated by the rampant atheist and positivist culture, which promised new horizons and led many Japanese to distance themselves from their millenary traditions.

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

It is only in the presence of his dying mother that Takashi stops to reflect on the meaning of life and death. Being a medical student in Nagasaki, he was attracted by the Christian message and wanted to understand it better. He decided to ask for hospitality in a family in the north of the city, in the district of Urakami, known to be a Christian town.

THE WAYS OF THE LORD

He turned to the Moriyama family, descendants of the leaders of the community of the *Hidden Christians of Urakami*, the people who for centuries, in hiding, had kept the Catholic faith alive in their families¹.

In silence, the Moriyama family prays that the student they were hosting may encounter Christ in the sick people he cared for.

CHRISTMAS MASS

In 1932 Takashi was invited by the Moriyama family to attend Christmas Mass. It was a turning point, as he himself recalled: *«There were about 5000 people, all villagers, in total silence and they seemed so small in front of the immensity of that Presence. But is man so tiny in front of the Almighty? So fragile? [...] that which is strong and great is only the work of the Almighty»*².

¹ «For the people of Urakami days opened and closed in prayer. Thus their whole life consisted in praising God: their every thought, every word, every action and every sorrow. They often said short prayers while working». Cf. Takashi Paolo Nagai, *Ciò che non muore mai*, AmiciNagai 2022.

² *Ibidem*.



MIDORI MARINA MORIYAMA (1908-1945)

Midori was born on October 8, 1908 and was an only child. She became a schoolteacher and work caused her to move away from home.

CHOKATAS

The Moriyama family had inherited the title of “Chokata” (head of the calendar), that is, the leader of the community of Hidden Christians of Urakami. The task of the “Chokatas” was to remember the liturgical calendar, celebrate Baptism, read the readings, and teach the Catechism. Officially uprooted by the Japanese government, the Catholic faith survived in hiding, guarded and passed down within many households.

FAITH

Midori grew up in an environment where faith and total abandonment to God were instilled. From a young age she learned to pray in front of the Crucifix and, in prayer, entrusted to the Lord the young Takashi, whom she did not yet know, who was hosted by her family.

THEIR MEETING

The two young people met in December 1932, when Midori returned to her family for a school vacation. A sudden attack of appendicitis puts the girl's life in danger and her father called Takashi. It was evening and snowing. The young doctor carried the girl on his shoulders and took her to the hospital where they performed emergency surgery, saving her life.



ENGAGEMENT, MATRIMONY AND CHILDREN

THE WAR

In January 1933, when they had just met, Takashi had to leave for Hiroshima, called to fight in the war against China. The night before his departure, Midori knocked on his door, dressed in a kimono, bowed and gave him a sweater she had made, as a thank you for saving her life.

THE WORK OF GOD

Midori entrusted Takashi to Mary every day by praying the Rosary. She wrote to him often and sent him a copy of the Catechism. War was a terrible experience, but in the pages of the Catechism Takashi found the answer to many questions about the meaning of life. Reading the 10 Commandments made him feel mistaken about many of the choices he had made, but the Lord began to make His way into his heart.

THE CONVERSION

The war left a deep scar in young Takashi, who, though disoriented, realized that the Gospel was not understood through study, but through life experience.

BAPTISM

Takashi, although hindered by his family and aware that his choice would not aid his career as a radiologist, scientist and university professor, decided to ask for Baptism anyway.

MATRIMONY

In 1934 Takashi received his Baptism. The risks associated with his work as a radiologist did not prevent Midori from accepting his proposal of marriage, and they married in August of that year. Four children were born, two of whom died very young. Takashi was a good husband and a loving father, but his research work and the care of his patients led him to leave Midori alone in handling the upbringing of the children and the economy of the family, during the severe economic crisis that Japan was going through.

THE WAR

Between 1937 and 1940 Takashi was again called to fight against China, but this time he was sustained by faith and so he helped, as a doctor, both the Japanese and the Chinese, having informed his superiors!

THE ILLNESS

In 1945 Takashi discovered that he had gotten sick with leukemia because of his work as a radiologist. He was aware that he did not have many years of life ahead of him, but Midori comforted him and together they abandoned themselves to God, certain of His faithfulness.





THE ATOMIC BOMB

It was August 9, 1945, Takashi was on guard in the radiology bunker, Midori was at home, and the children were out of town with their grandparents. The second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, and the district of Urakami was the epicenter. Midori was swept away by the explosion and when Takashi managed to return home, he found only ashes, a few charred fragments of his wife and her rosary of melted beads.

A NEW LIFE

«[As] my gaze wandered over the boundless wasteland, I discovered with amazement within myself that I felt neither regret nor sadness for having lost everything. When I realized that what I was to seek was something that does not die, when I realized that I was to seek the Kingdom of Heaven and His righteousness, a new and great hope settled in my heart. In the search for that which will never be lost, I began a new life»³.

TAKASHI BECAME PARALYZED FROM LEUKEMIA

«In a makeshift camp on the windswept atomic wasteland, with two small children in my arms and my body no longer moving, I carried on with my luminous life». Takashi spent his time writing books, which quickly became famous and earned him a lot of money. He spent the last six years of his life offering his earnings for the reconstruction of the Urakami district: the gardens, the church, the school, the hospital, the orphanage.

³ Cf. Takashi Paolo Nagai, *Pensieri dal Nyokodo*, AmiciNagai, 2021.

A SOURCE OF HOPE

Hundreds of people were drawn every day to his camp, which became a welcoming home in the desolation of Nagasaki. Emperor Hirohito, Pope Pius XII, Evita Peron and other people from the world of politics and culture came to visit him or gave him gifts, along with a crowd of countless people.

God's love became visible in Takashi: this was the reason why so many people felt attracted to the humble doctor, sick and poor by choice.

DEATH

Takashi died on May 1, 1951. For his funeral, the city of Nagasaki stopped, church bells rang, and the sirens of the factories and the port sounded. On his tomb were the words he had asked be written: «*We are unprofitable Servants; we have done what we were obliged to do*». (Lk 17:10)

PEARLS OF HOLINESS

Where God's power emerges

«Midori lived **a great faith** day by day, a visible expression of her personal relationship with the Mystery, **which made her capable of accompanying Takashi on his path of conversion**. She lived a virginity of the heart capable of living a full attachment to everyone yet with a detachment inside and a total gift of herself, offering everything she could: her time, what she knew, her goodness, her continuous prayer, her whole life. And her death. Even the hope that Takashi, a widower, brought to the entire city and the whole world was the mature fruit and legacy of the **communion lived among them in obedience to the Father's plan**»⁴.

«A Saint is a truly accomplished man and we must recognize that, in a terrible historical circumstance, Takashi fulfilled his vocation well as a father, showing his children the not so easy path that awaited them as orphans, and as a doctor. He did this **through the Cross and a continuous work on himself**, in a profound poverty of spirit that led him to give himself totally»⁵.

⁴ Cf. Takashi e Midori Nagai, <www.amicinagai.com>.

⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*.



EVERYDAY LIFE OF THE NAGAI FAMILY

How God reveals Himself through their family events

1. WORK

Takashi became very involved in research work and the care of his patients. This caused him to leave Midori alone in managing the not-easy family economy and the education of their children.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Reflect upon whether there is anything in this moment that you are giving more effort and attention to with respect to your family. It could be a concern, a choice to be made, work, sports...

2. IN PAIN, BUT NOT IN DESPAIR

*«I told my wife that I had developed an incurable disease and had only three years to live, [...] to that wife who had fought so hard with me. [...] She hugged the child tightly and stood still to listen. After that [...] she got up, went to the little altar, lit a candle and **began to pray** to the Crucifix. [When she finished praying, she sat down in front of me and, **smiling, said**: “Whether we live or die, it is for the glory of God»⁶.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Do I know how to listen silently to a story of pain, or even simply a story about one's day, from my spouse or a family member?
- Reflect on whether, in your family life, there is anything in particular that you can entrust to the Lord in your prayers.

3. HOPE

*«My beloved wife was dead, my house and all my possessions burned to ashes. My health was already failing and I knew that soon I would no longer be able to work. All was lost, and yet...when I realized that what **I was to seek was that which does not die...** a great new hope settled in my heart»⁷.*

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Thinking back on the life of your family, in what situation can you say that “all was lost, and yet...”. In our hearts, let us thank the Lord for how He showed His presence, for how He guided us, for how He made us feel that we were not alone.
- Reflect: What am I looking for? What are we looking for?

⁶ Cf. Takashi Paolo Nagai, *Ciò che non muore mai*, op. cit.

⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*.

«*The first thing I think of, every morning, as soon as I wake up, is that **I am happy** [...] We should turn our lives into poetry. We should let the poet's attentive and admiring gaze delve beneath the surface and discern the beauty that lies hidden in everything and gives form to our every action and thought [...] A little boy's heart throbs in my chest [...] **The life of a new day awaits me**, true joy, in this two-meter-long bed which I cannot even get out of*»⁸.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Life is a gift, even when it is difficult. Reflect upon how I can welcome and live each day as a gift.

5. WHEN GOD SEEMS TO BE HIDING

«*I gathered in a bucket the remains that still seemed intense to me. Clutching the bucket tightly in my arms, I headed for the grave. **Why didn't I die? Why had Providence condemned her and saved me?** I walked clutching the bucket. [**My God, thank you** for allowing her to die in prayer. O sorrowful Mother, thank you for being close to my faithful Midori at the hour of her death... O good Jesus, our Savior, You who sweated blood and carried Your heavy cross and were crucified on it, **enlighten now with your peace the mystery of my and Midori's pain and death***»⁹.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- There are moments in which God's plans appear incomprehensible. Takashi and Midori were able to face these areas of darkness with confidence, because they were confident and totally entrusted themselves to God's will.
- The unity in which they supported each other was fundamental
- Prayer is like a child racing into the arms of his father or mother. I ask the Lord for the gift of such a trusting prayer, which knows how to bring a smile to my face, because I am certain that I will be heard.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Cf. *Takashi e Midori Nagai, op.cit.*



CONCRETE INSTRUMENTS OF HOLINESS

The fixed points of the Nagai family

1. PRAYER, ALWAYS

From the very beginning, the Moriyama family, lovingly welcomes the student Takashi and prays for his conversion.

During the war, Midori entrusts Takashi to Mary every day with the prayer of the rosary....

Midori died with a rosary in her hands.

As an atheist, Takashi is fascinated and attracted to see how Christians pray.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Am I able to pray?
- Do I draw any benefit from the way I pray?
- How can I make my dialogue with God a time of true listening?

2. WORKING ON ONESELF

Takashi accepted the cross of Midori's illness and death, not by withdrawing from the pain, but by working on himself, in order to make God's plan emerge more and more in his life.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- I reflect on my own journey of conversion: can I work on my limits? What, in particular, can I work on to make myself more amiable?

Takashi understood that the Church «*was a thriving reality that throbbed with a vital force*»¹⁰ and that «*everything there was dominated by love*»¹¹.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Reflect upon the power of love, which is revealed through one's actions, expressions and words. Love comes from God, and God alone, even through me, can reach out and touch the hearts of those I love.

4. LOVE IS DIFFUSIVE

A camp of a few meters, in a desolate place; a dying man, who cannot even get up. And yet it was from this very camp and from this very man that the overwhelming power of God's love was poured out, a love that knows how to welcome, listen, offer comfort and wipe away tears. And so many people were attracted by it.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- This is what holiness is: knowing how to let oneself die so that only God can emerge. It is a slow path, made up of small possible steps. Reading his story, Takashi may seem heroic and unattainable. In reality, his life was a slow journey of conversion, in which God became flesh, first in the Moriyama family, then in Midori.

- Reflect on our journey of holiness: the Lord gives us the strength to accomplish what he asks and calls us to at this time, with gentleness and mercy, even through those closest to us.



¹⁰ Takashi Paolo Nagai, *Ciò che non muore mai*, op. cit.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

CONCLUSIVE REFLECTIONS

- How can Takashi and Midori's example help our family?
- What message are they giving us at this time in our relationship as a couple and as a family?

IDEAS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

- I think of my family: what can I thank the Lord for?
- I reflect on how much the life of the Nagai family inspired in me.
- I beg for the gift of the Spirit concerning a difficulty I have.

PRAYER FOR PRIVATE DEVOTION

*O merciful Father
who never leaves Your children alone in the journey of life,
we thank You for having given
to the people of believers and to the whole world
Paul Takashi Nagai and his bride Marina Midori.
Midori, after having led her spouse to encounter You,
in the humble dedication to her vocation
showed him the way of perfect charity.
Together, in trusting abandonment to Your will
they have given a face to the good that Your Providence
knows how to draw even from evil and have become
a proclamation of hope and a witness of charity
for the wounded people.
After the death of his bride
walking in deep poverty of spirit,
in the atomic desert Takashi experienced
the tenderness of Your friendship and,
witness of grace and of the hundredfold,
he regenerated in his people the taste for life
and the courage to rebuild.
Grant to all of us
through the intercession of Your spouses,
the grace to respond to our personal
call to holiness
and grant us, if it is for Your Greater Glory,
the grace we implore (...)
in the hope that these spouses may soon be included
among Your saints.
Through Christ Our Lord.*

TO DEEPEN

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A Family in Heaven



SERVANTS OF GOD
CYPRIEN RUGAMBA
AND DAPHROSE MUKANSANGA



WHERE GOD SHOWS THROUGH

The extraordinary nature of this family's life is rooted in Daphrose's unwavering faith. What brings Cyprien to conversion is the strength his wife shows him in forgiving him and accepting his humbleness. The children witness the faith that their parents live so intensely and share it.



BIOGRAPHY

CYPRIEN RUGAMBA (1932-1994)¹

Cyprien was born in Cyanika (Ruanda) probably in 1932. He was a very intelligent child and his teacher recommended him to enter the Minor Seminary in Kabgayi.

EDUCATION

After finishing high school, eager to become a priest, he entered the Major Seminary. While studying existentialist philosophy, he eventually lost his faith and left the seminary.

LOSING HIS FIANCÉE

Between 1960 and 1962 Cyprien studied history and literature at the University of Bujumbura, then he moved to Belgium, to the Catholic University of Louvain. During these years he fell in love with Xavérine, a girl from his country. Their respective families came to an agreement and the wedding was held. In 1963, during the massacres in Rwanda, Xavérine's family was attacked and she died by drowning in a river. Cyprien fell into depression and for two years he took refuge in writing.

A NEW FIANCÉE

According to the local customs, the family looked for a second wife for Cyprien and the choice fell upon Daphrose, a young and beautiful girl, known to the family as the daughter of Cyprien's master and niece of his fiancée Xavérine. She was an excellent solution to honor the marriage agreement between the families.

¹ For all biographical information, cf. Jean-Luc Moens, *Famiglia Rugamba. In cielo danzando*, Ed. Velar, Gorle (BG) 2021; *Cyprien e Daphrosa Rugamba*, <emmanuel.info>.

DAPHROSE MUKANSANGA (1944-1994)

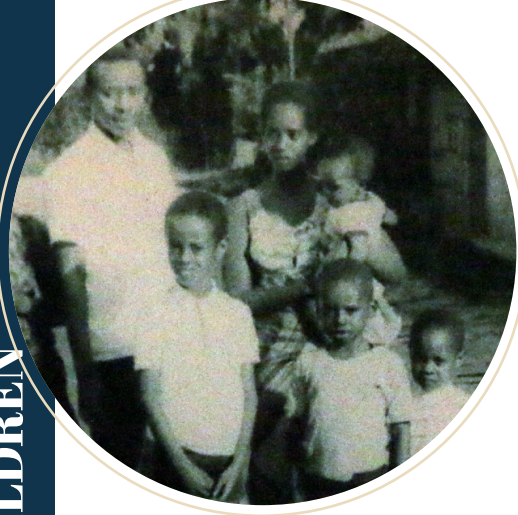
Daphrose was born on March 14, 1944, to profoundly Christian parents. In the family, prayer was part of the daily routine as was attending Mass.

EDUCATION

The young Daphrose attended high school at an institute run by the White Sisters. In 1962 Rwanda gained independence and soon after, in her region, riots and massacres broke out.

BEREAVEMENT

The Mukansanga family, along with many others, was deported. The father fell ill and died, and her sister was killed in one of the massacres.



ENGAGEMENT, MATRIMONY AND CHILDREN²

On January 23, 1965, the two of them got married. They loved each other, but Cyprien **was unable to heal from the wound** caused by the death of Xavérine, his previous fiancée and this put a strain on their relationship.

THE FIRST TWO CHILDREN

Daphrose got pregnant immediately, but little Joseph was born prematurely; he was baptized just before he died.

In 1967 Olivier, the second son, was born.

DISOWNMENT

It is not infrequent, especially in rural areas, that a woman is accused of practicing witchcraft and being responsible for bereavement and misfortune. False accusations of witchcraft fell upon Daphrose and lead Cyprien to repudiate her, taking her back to her family. The son, who in Rwandan culture belonged to his father, remained with him. Daphrose knew she was innocent. The humiliation and suffering she felt were immense.

² Cf. Jean-Luc Moens, *Familia Rugamba, op. cit.*

When the accusations proved to be unfounded, Cyprien took his wife back into the house, but was unable to recognize his mistake and apologize to her. He knew he was in the wrong and tried to maintain a polite relationship, but no more than that.

LOVING BEYOND MEASURE

Daphrose longed to forgive her husband and wanted to continue to love him. She prayed for him relentlessly. Cyprien had affairs outside of their marriage; and a baby girl was born, whom Daphrose welcomed into the house as a daughter. She accepted this additional humiliation and did not cease to pray for her husband.

HIS CAREER

Cyprien was a respected intellectual and his career won him numerous awards. In 1973, he was appointed Director of the National Institute of Scientific Research. He was the first Rwandan to hold this position.

CIVIC COMMITMENT

The studies he had completed convinced the scientist Cyprien that the people of Rwanda were one, there were no different ethnic or cultural roots rather a single people, intertwined by family ties.



HIS ILLNESS

In 1980, Cyprien, fell ill to the point of experiencing moments in which he was not self-sufficient. The doctors did not understand the origin of the disease and were unable to treat him.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Daphrose encountered a group of the Charismatic Renewal; her prayers increased and intensified until they gave her a strength that wasn't in her nature, thus allowing her to dedicate herself completely to her husband, despite her wounds, humiliation and a never-pronounced request for forgiveness.

THE POWER OF BEARING WITNESS

Cyprien, who was ill, saw that his wife had changed, her devotion, which he knew he did not deserve. He began to doubt: who gives her that strength? Could it be the God in whom she believes and prays incessantly?

He confided to a friend, *«I made her suffer and she showed me only love. My wife's God, one day I will pray to him»*³.

HEALING AND CONVERSION

*Traveling to Belgium to find a solution to his illness, Cyprien suddenly feels an unusual burning sensation and his disabling symptoms disappeared. His heart poured out the words and he composed a song about God: «this white sky where the King awaits me. If ever I am called, by grace, do not grieve. I will answer the call in joy and enter heaven dancing»*⁴. These are words that, later on, will prove to be prophetic.

³ *Ivi.*, pp.14-15.

⁴ *Ivi.*, p. 15.



LOVE PREVAILS

Cyprien acknowledged that what had happened was the fruit of his wife's prayers, and he experienced a radical conversion: «*change does not mean retracing one's steps, rather to totally lose one's bearings*»⁵. And so it happened: he asked Daphrose to forgive him and broke with the customs of his people, and was not ashamed to show signs of affection towards his wife in public: «*I lost too much time, I have to make up for it!*»⁶.

⁵ *Ibidem*

⁶ *Ivi*, p. 16.

ONE'S TALENTS AT THE SERVICE OF GOD

The Christian Cyprien knew that there were neither Hutu nor Tutsi ethnic groups, but only children of God.

His conviction becomes a battle to find ways and means to spread his message to every Rwandan: from the politician to the intellectual, to all the people. How could this be done? Cyprien used the gifts he had received from God, and so he wrote books, poems, composed songs and his message spread everywhere. He was aware that, in the climate of war between ethnic groups, declaring himself a Christian was very dangerous, but he persisted: «*We belong to only one ethnic group: that of Jesus*»⁷.

MARTYRDOM

On April 6, 1994, the Presidents of both Burundi and Rwanda die in an assassination attempt. This was the war. On the morning of April 7, a group of soldiers entered the gate of the Rugamba home and opened fire: they killed Cyprien, Daphrose, six of their seven children and a little cousin who was with them.

⁷ *Ivi*, p. 26.

THE PROCESS OF BEATIFICATION

December 2015: the cause of beatification of the Rugamba family opened.

October 2021: the diocesan inquiry was deposited with the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

PEARLS OF HOLINESS
Where God's power emerges

«Now they are there where all their desires aimed: with the living Jesus, with thousands of innocent Rwandan brothers and sisters»⁸. (Father Dominique Nothomb)

THE EVENTS ON THE NIGHT BETWEEN 6 AND 7 APRIL 1994

As soon as the gate was opened, the leader of the soldiers turned to Cyprien, *«So, Rugamba, are you still a Christian?»* Cyprien replied, *«Yes, I am very Christian. My dress for dancing is ready if the King calls me. I will enter heaven dancing»⁹.*

⁸ *Ivi*, p. 47.

⁹ *Ivi*, p. 45.



EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE RUGAMBA FAMILY¹⁰

How God reveals Himself in their family events

1. LOVE AND FORGIVENESS, DESPITE IT ALL

Daphrose lived the humiliation of repudiation and the pain of not feeling loved by her husband in silence and prayer. Even when she was welcomed back into the family, Cyprien remained tough and closed off. Their marriage was a façade, but Daphrose did not lose hope and continued, trusting, her abandonment to God in prayer.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- What does Daphrose's attitude evoke in me: she suffers a terrible injustice, her son was taken away from her, but she persevered in loving her husband, trusting in God's help.
- Think about how one reacts in the face of small daily disagreements, when we disagree with our spouse, when the attitude of some family member causes us pain, when we struggle to forgive.

¹⁰ Cf. Jean-Luc Moens, *Famiglia Rugamba, op. cit.*

2. TAKING IN ÉMÉRITA

Émérита is the daughter of one of Cyprien's extra-marital affairs. Daphrose took her in and loved her as much as did the other children.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let us reflect on how one is able to accept a spouse's mistake, their limitation, their weakness.

3. THE POWER OF CONVERSION

Daphrose's change when she encounters the Charismatic Renewal makes Cyprien reflect quite a bit. It was not the words rather the care she had for him that shook him and gradually brought him to God. The children were impressed by his conversion and so the whole family experienced the power of God.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- I reflect upon my ability to notice and thank my spouse for his or her positive changes, even when they are small things, details.
- I reflect on how a change of mine, even if small, can be an example that draws others toward good.

4. DIFFICULTIES DO NOT HARDEN THE HEART

Driven by her family's financial difficulties, Daphrose decided, very humbly, to go to the market to sell potatoes. She noticed that children were trying to steal what little she had and, instead of reacting, she tried to understand why they were doing it. She realized that they lived in the streets, they had no family and so she started the project for "street children".

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Love triumphed over justice. Reflect upon a situation that I or we are experiencing in which we suffer injustice. How can we allow love to win?
- In a moment of difficulty, Daphrose did not withdraw, rather she was able to open her heart and see other people's difficulties. Let us reflect on our attitude, personal and in the family, when it is necessary to face a difficulty.





CONCRETE INSTRUMENTS OF HOLINESS

The fixed points of the Rugamba family

1. THE PARENTS' PRAYER IS AN EXAMPLE FOR THEIR CHILDREN

Cyprien and Daphrose demonstrated to their children how for them prayer was an important and indispensable part of their day. Talking to God was not an “extra”, it was fundamental. In their own way, depending on their commitments but also on their age, the children follow their parents' example.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let's reflect on how our faith sets an example for our children, our spouse, the people we spend time with.

2. «CHANGE DOES NOT MEAN RETRACING ONE'S STEPS, RATHER TOTALLY LOSING ONE'S BEARINGS»

Cyprien's encounter with God prompted him to recognize his mistake and decide to radically change his life.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Reflect upon whether, at this time in your life, you are called to some kind of conversion. Is there something you need to leave behind because it hurts you, your couple or your family? It could be the way that I devote myself to my work, a friendship, a way of doing things, a thought, an attitude....

3. FAMILY NIGHTS

Cyprien and Daphrose decided to set aside a time each week for their children to be together and have fun.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let's reflect on the importance of weekly family time.
- We might consider setting a special appointment for our family. How can we “defend” this time from anything that might undermine it?

4. COUPLE TIME

Cyprien and Daphrose set aside time “as a couple” to *«grow in their relationship and deepen their Sacrament of Matrimony»*¹¹.

IDEAS FOR REFLECTION

- Let's reflect on the importance of having time for the couple.
- We may, depending on family needs, decide to have “couple time” on a regular basis.
- How can we “nourish ourselves spiritually”?
- How can we further explore the richness of our sacrament of marriage?



¹¹ *Ivi*, p. 34

CONCLUSIVE REFLECTIONS

- How can Cyprien and Daphrose's example help our family?
- What message are they giving us at this time in our relationship as a couple and as a family?

IDEAS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

- I think about my family: what can I thank the Lord for?
- I contemplate how much the life of the Rugamba family has inspired in me.
- I beg for the gift of the Spirit concerning one of my struggles.

PRAYER FOR PRIVATE DEVOTION

*Holy Father,
we pray to you for the beatification of the Servants of God
Cyprien and Daphrose.
Grant us always, as you did them,
an unceasing zeal for adoration,
a heart burning with love for You,
a concrete compassion for all those who suffer.
Help us to spend ourselves without measure
in the service of the evangelization
of families and the poor.
In communion with Cyprien and Daphrose,
we entrust to You
especially couples going through marital difficulties
and all those who are unable
to forgive their enemies;
make us instruments of your peace.
Through the intercession of the Servants of God
we dare to ask you,
according to your Will, the grace...
(a prayer is expressed)
Lord grant us the peace and grace
that we ask of you with faith.
Amen.*

TO DEEPEN

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Download the Film in all languages: <https://emmanuel.info/cyprien-daphrose-rugamba-film/>

FR; Rwandan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MlxHR1X3LWE>

PT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nEjav4mkII>

FR (subtitled in several languages): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYVhaLeZfqA>

EN (subtitled in Italian): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vniQsE2Rw>

PRAYER

Jesus, Mary and Joseph
to you, Holy Family of Nazareth,
today, we turn our gaze
with admiration and confidence;
in you we contemplate
the beauty of communion in true love;
to you we commend all our families,
that the wonders of grace may be renewed in them.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
faithful custodian of the mystery of salvation:
revive in us the esteem for silence,
Make our families cenacles of prayer
and transform them into small domestic Churches,
renew the desire for holiness,
sustain the noble toil of work, of education,
of listening, of mutual understanding and forgiveness.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph
we pray to you with confidence,
to you with joy we entrust ourselves.

Pope Francis

TIPOGRAFIA VATICANA

