

CHAPTER XI

GASPAR'S DEATH

On December 28 of the year 1837, around the 21st and a half hour, Italian time, (equivalent to 2:30 P.M.) of that same day, the Servant of God, Fr. Gaspar Del Bufalo died.

As far as I know, he spoke to Fr. Biagio Valentini and Fr. Giovanni Merlini, Missionaries of his Institute, in such a way as to let them know that his death was imminent. He had done certain things which in one way or another gave them the idea or made them feel sure that his death was near. As far as I can recall, it was Fr. Francesco Virili who told me that when the Servant of God was taken to make a visitation of his Mission Houses, in one or several of them he clearly stated that this was the last time that he would speak to them. To the best that I can remember, the Servant of God, if I am not mistaken, in 1834 or 1835 made several corrections in the book that was published dealing with the method of conducting Missions. Handing this over to Fr. Giovanni Merlini, he said to him certain words suggesting the idea that he would never again set his hands on it. A year or so before his death, if I am not mistaken, when I was making a retreat at the Gianicolo in Rome, he told me that Monsignor Albertini had told him that before dying he would withdraw from the main works of the ministry and would stay in Rome where he would leave all the matters pertaining to his Institute in good order. Therefore, from that time he stayed longer periods of time in Rome and spoke in such a way that indicated that he was conscious of his upcoming death.

Inasmuch as I could learn and insofar as I know, I must say that the Servant of God contracted an affliction in his chest as a result of the heavy labors sustained in the exercise of the works of the ministry. During the time that I spent with him, namely, each week during his final days, I always found him to be the same as I knew him from the beginning, virtuous and zealous.

On the morning of December 26th, I went to see the Servant of God. This was the first time that I found him laid up in bed. I reconciled him and he told me to make it known that he had made his confession and that he had the approval of his doctor that he could proceed to receive holy viaticum. His dispositions were virtuous and Christlike, hearty like those of the soul of a saint.

On the morning of December 28th, after I had celebrated Mass, around the 15th hour, I once again went to see the Servant of God. when I arrived at the entry of the house, the one who had helped him during the night came to let me in. There, at the threshold, that person, filled with stupor and religious admiration, out of the abundance of his heart, in just a few words said to me: "Oh what a great saint! What uniformity! He spent this entire night in prayer and in repeating texts" (I understood him to mean texts of the Sacred Scriptures). This fellow was a certain Bartolomeo, his helper. Then, I entered the sick man's bedroom. I drew close to his bed and I found him to be much more grave than usual. I heard his confession in preparation for the sacrament of Extreme Unction. With death assuredly near, with the most sincere disposition of

his heart, he made his final spiritual testament which truly came from a heart penetrated with love for God and zeal for the salvation of souls. I was not present when the most holy sacraments of the Eucharist and Extreme Unction were administered, but I do know that he received them. Then, when I left the Servant of God, immersed in a sea of the most beautiful dispositions for death, I went to various monasteries in Rome for good works. I had determined that I would return to see the Servant of God again on that same day at night. Since I was obliged to give a conference to a community of nuns, called the Turchine, when I arrived there at the monastery, I learned that the community was in their refectory. Those nuns wanted me to wait and in the meantime to listen to one or the other before giving the talk after their period of refreshment in common. Then, I went into the monastery of the Bambin Gesù. Upon leaving this place, suddenly coming to my mind was the idea that I should go immediately to see the Servant of God. This was around the ~" hour. Without the slightest hesitation, I went there directly and at the foot of the stairway, I encountered the Notary who told me that he had been with the sick man to add a codicil to his last will. Then, I went to the side of the infirm person and found him to be in his final agony. Next to me was the Very Reverend Giovanni Merlini. I recited the final prayers for the assistance of a dying person and the one who was dying was there in the most perfect tranquility. Such a gentleness shone on the face of the Servant of God, such a joyfulness, such signs of peace. Taking everything into consideration in a Christian way, I would have to say and I have repeated this often, he showed a willingness, so to speak, a desire to accept this agony for himself. So, after the time which I mentioned before, after about a quarter of an hour from my arrival, the Servant of God, sunken in the joys of Paradise, tranquilly and placidly died.

Speaking of the death of the Servant of God, I learned from the Very Reverend Fr. Biagio Valentini that on the last night that the Servant of God was alive, a niece of his Eminence and most Reverend Cardinal Sala, now of happy memory, a nun in Cori of the diocese of Velletri, saw Canon Del Bufalo in an apparition. She saw him vested in a surplice and stole and was singing psalms with his Missionaries. Finally, she saw him rising up from the earth heavenward and she heard a voice that said: *Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna*. This religious nun, outside of the usual, related in community what had happened to her that night. To this account, there was another nun who added: Today, Canon Del Bufalo will die, as *de facto* he did. Fr. Biagio likewise told me that a nun, I do not know who she was, but I think it was one in a monastery outside of Rome, at the time when the Servant of God died, was present in choir and she had a fainting spell in which she saw Canon Del Bufalo who was on his way to meet St. Francis Xavier.

The funeral rites and the burial

After the death of the Servant of God, I attended memorial services which are held in the church of Santa Galla for each of the deceased priests who, while living, dedicated themselves to the works of charity and zeal that are promoted by the Pious Union of the Clergy [585] in Rome. I saw a large gathering, more than the usual number of the clergy, who demonstrated their

uncommon esteem and veneration for the deceased. The Very Reverend Fr. Adriano Giampedi recited there, with great edification, a funeral eulogy in praise of the deceased. Generally speaking, I can say that everyone had formed a great esteem and concept of the Servant of God.

On one of the days of the octave of the Epiphany, after various things had taken place in Albano in veneration of the deceased, I was told several things while I was in the sacristy of the church of San Carlo al Corso. I think it was the Sunday within the octave of the Epiphany when Fr. Biagio Valentini came there. As far as I can remember, he told me that after the services were completed with the body of the Servant of God present, I think it was on the Saturday after his death, in the parish church of Sant'Angelo in Pescheria, in the afternoon hours of Sunday, placed in a ~ coffin, the body of the Servant of God was taken to Albano to be buried in their church of San Paolo. Once having arrived there, all or almost all of the community were present for viewing the remains. Upon opening the coffin, even though it was already four days from the time of his death, the bystanders sensed an acute odor so that those who did not know it might have thought that the body may have been embalmed, which was certainly not the case. This was likewise acknowledged juridically by the professional people present. Hence, that much greater was the feeling of religious admiration, esteem and veneration that was aroused toward these precious remains. An idea of his great sanctity arose and the thought was given to putting him on view in the church. With decency and with modesty, the professional men present diligently examined the body of the Servant of God. They found it to be in entirely good shape, even the internal parts, -I say this because that is how I remember that it was told to me - even though he had died from an illness that had devastated his internal organs, as was evident during the final days of his mortal illness when I believe that it might be said that he had spit out his lungs. While he was alive he had suffered from the sickness called scurvy, still when they opened the mouth of the Servant of God, keeping it thus for a period of around a quarter of an hour, it was noticed that there was no emission of a fetid odor of any kind. This, too, caused a further feeling of admiration and astonishment. Every part of the body remained perfectly flexible even to the point of having him freely in a seated position. I also heard that his tongue still retained moistness as though it were still alive. His shoulders, modestly uncovered, bore signs of what appeared to be vividly colored roses and were arranged in such a way as to give them the form of a cross. It made me think that God, in this man and in this way, wished to show that for his Servant, this was just a very small part of a reward for the very serious disciplining which Canon Del Bufalo, with a spirit of penance, out of love for God and the conversion of sinners, firmly practiced upon these overburdened shoulders.

I was told, likewise, that with these extraordinary signs that were religiously admired in the body of the Servant of God, his fame for sanctity was increased. Not only was he kept on view for more days to satisfy' the common devotion of the local citizens, but inhabitants from the nearby places kept coming to venerate the sacred remains of the deceased. The edified clergy of Albano, as a group, out of devout sentiments came for the celebration of the funeral rites that were held on Wednesday morning. The body was kept on view and with the arrival of the

seventh day from the time of his death, the devotion of the clergy and the people was seen as something that is usually shown toward one who is considered to have died as a saint. I particularly recall that the aforementioned Fr. Biagio Valentini told me that on one of those days or perhaps more, some graces were received. This got to be commonly known with every group of people that came and thus, instead of his reputation for sanctity diminishing, it grew, not only with the people but even with the clergy, both secular and regular, as well as prelates and cardinals, because those virtues which the Servant of God tried to keep hidden with a special effort God now made known and did so by the granting of graces and miraculous acts.

I heard that the body of the Servant of God, accompanied by the Archconfraternity of the Sacconi of San Teodoro in the Campo Vaccino of Rome, was transported to the parochial church of Sant'Angelo in Pescheria where the funeral rites were held and then the body was transferred to the church of San Paolo in Albano where further funeral ceremonies were held. In this regard, I remember that, not long ago, in speaking with the most illustrious and reverend Monsignor La Grua, Canon of San Pietro in Vaticano and Ponente of Segnatura, he told me that he, as a member of that same confraternity, devoutly enjoyed being a part of that group who with others lifted the body of the Servant of God carried him from the room where he had laid and brought him down, placing him then in the coffin. To the best of my recollection, it seems that he told me that the stairway leading up to the room was narrow and not very commodious, and that he thought that only with great difficulty could they bring the body down. I do remember well, however, that he said that with admiration and with ease they managed to bring the body down and that this remained vividly memorable to him as a notable circumstance.

As for the concourse of people who came to venerate the body of the Servant of God, I repeat what I said previously when I spoke of the reputation that built up after his death.

When I got to the church of San Paolo in Albano, I saw the gravestone for the burial of the body of the Servant of God placed in front of the altar in the chapel of San Girolamo, with a large painting of him, and of San Francesco Saverio with a movable painting of him. The shape of the gravestone was almost square-like, and of small size.

As regards the day of his burial, I am not able to be precise. But I was given to understand that he was entombed during the first week of the year 1838. In the area of the interment I have found nothing which indicates any sort of public or ecclesiastical cult. Likewise, I do not know of any place where anything is being done which indicates the aforementioned cult.