

CHAPTER V

THE GLORIOUS GOAL

His death

The Servant of God died in Rome in the house where he resided, the Palazzo Orsini on Monte Savelli, on December 28, 1837 at the twenty-first hour of the day. Dr. Mazzuchelli, now deceased, did not know the exact cause of the mortal illness so he did not make any final determination.

Around a year before his death, the Servant of God sent me his writings relative to some compositions that he had made for his companions while he was in school. In a letter, he wanted people to know that this was the final period of his life. Furthermore, he bid farewell to his companions in the mission houses as Fr. Gennaro Gamboa, our colleague, has informed me.

In regard to the circumstances that preceded his death, I must point out that already several years before, and I can say that it was almost always, he would manifest to me the thoughts that he had about death. During the latter years he did it even more clearly by showing himself to be in a hurry to get matters regarding his Institute settled quickly and by frequently repeating: "I will soon die; soon I will rid you of my burden. After my death, people will have very little to read since I am trying to get rid of as much as possible; I am preparing myself for the years of eternity" and other similar expressions. To an abbess of the venerable monastery of Santa Chiara in Priverno he gave the advice that she should take me as her spiritual director since he no longer would be available for her.

In reference to the immediate causes for his final illness, it seems to me that one must consider his lack of attention for his own health which he did for the greater glory of God. He exposed himself to making trips in violent rainstorms in order to fulfill the ministry to which God had called him. It was especially in enduring the hardships involved in the final missions that he conducted in Nepi and in Bassiano during the exercise of which he contracted his final malady. He returned to Rome in a weakened state of health, needing to undergo recuperation, get rest and especially to relax from his apostolic labors. Still, he was faced with the opportunity of more work when he was appointed by his Eminence, the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, to conduct a mission in the Chiesa Nuova. He did not elude that appointment nor did he worry about his weakened state of health, but simply resigned to the impulses of charity which, according to St. Paul, *urged him on* for the salvation of souls and the glory of God. He gathered together the strength that he had remaining and went ahead and preached that mission to the fullest benefit of the people.

When that mission was completed, the sickness grew even more serious and the convulsive coughing that he had contracted in Bassiano, kept increasing. In this state of his illness, he went to the mission house in Albano in the month of September of 1837. There, he felt his life slipping away from him. Even though, among many varied difficulties, he

experienced a demanding thirst, nevertheless during the night he would abstain from drinking so that he could celebrate the holy Mass early in the morning. Also, though he suffered greatly in reciting the Divine Office, he never set it aside.

Toward the closing days of November, he returned to Rome to his own private home. During these final days of his illness, one of the things that he said that he did not want done was to have any blood-lettings, since, as he would say, they would be useless and lethal. It happened, however, that the doctor, believing that they were necessary, ordered the bleedings and the Servant of God went along with that decision. With the arrival of the eve of Christmas, he became very, very weak and was ordered to bed. Once in bed, he expressed his desire to have the nativity scene of the Baby Jesus brought into his room.

He made his confession to Fr. Vincenzo Pallotti and then devoutly asked to be given holy viaticum and the holy oils by the local pastor. However, before asking for Extreme Unction, he wanted to consult with Fr. Giovanni Merlini, his colleague who had come from Albano, since the doctor had not ordered it to be done. This zealous friend of his, then, recommended his soul to God, urging him to unite his will to God's will. The Servant of God, with evident signs, showed his complete submission. Just a few moments before the death of the Servant of God, Fr. Vincenzo Pallotti came in and he continued the act of recommendation of the soul. After a few minutes, the Servant of God peacefully breathed his last like a small child. All of this information was given to me by Fr. Giovanni Merlini.

The funeral rites

Two days after his death, the Servant of God's body was transported to the venerable parochial church of Sant'Angelo in Pescheria where the funeral rites were held with the body present. It was handled by the Archconfraternity of San Teodoro, also known as the Sacconi.

After the body was left for open view with the special permission of his Eminence the Vicar until the following day which was Sunday, the body, dressed in the habit of the Missionaries, was enclosed in a coffin which was sealed with two seals, one, that is, of the parish church and the other of our Institute. Next, it was transported to Albano on that same Sunday by a special coach and secretly by myself and Fr. Giovanni Merlini. That was done because of a special faculty granted by His Holiness through his Eminence, Cardinal Falzacappa, the bishop of that city.

We arrived in Albano shortly before the first hour of the night and we went directly to the church of San Paolo where, with the entire community assembled together with the students, it was decided to open the coffin. After opening it, we found the body to be intact and exuding a pleasant odor. Then it was decided to leave it opened in the coffin itself. After these arrangements were made, it was placed in the church in an elevated fashion, but with the doors of the church still closed to avoid any disturbance. When the doors were opened at the usual time in the morning, very quickly word got around the city that the body of the Servant of God was on

view in San Paolo. Within a short time the church was filled with people, not only from Albano but from the surrounding towns.

On that same Monday morning, the first of the year, the Chapter wished to honor the Servant of God by appearing together with the Seminary and other priests from Albano to attend the sung *requiem* Mass and the recitation of the funeral homily by Fr. Giovanni Merlini. There were many tears in evidence and the veneration was both particular and universal. We decided that the burial would take place after the completion of the funeral rites. However, intervening were the doctor, Bassanelli and the surgeon, Deangelis, who, upon viewing the cadaver said that the cadaver appeared to be something unusual and that what they were seeing was not something natural. So, they asked that the body remain unburied for another day, and that is what was done. On the following Tuesday, with the body still on view, another funeral ceremony was held upon the request of the clergy. In the meantime, people kept coming, kneeling alongside the coffin and would provide themselves with some relic or other taken from the Canon, such as for example, wax from the candles that were burning around the coffin.

Despite the fact that members were put on guard to prevent any improper thing from happening, still there was one devoted lady who, under the guise of kissing the hand of the deceased Servant of God, attempted to bite off one of his fingers, but she did not succeed. Likewise, at that same period of time, a man who suffered from a fever for a year had come from Castelgandolfo to pay a visit to the body of the Servant of God. He took a small piece of the wax from the candles burning around the coffin and, after swallowing it, was immediately freed from that fever and on the spot regained the strength that he had lost. Because of his weakness, it took everything that he could muster to drag himself from his hometown to the church of San Paolo. Also, during this same area of time, there was a young man visiting in Albano who was afflicted with a venereal disease and who had lost all of his faith and religion. Out of mere curiosity, he went to see the body of the Servant of God as it was open to viewing. When he fixed his eyes on the body, he suddenly felt an unexpected movement of his soul to have faith in God. He noticed that on the body or nearby there was a handkerchief which he took and brought home with him. After washing it, he secretly took that water that he used to wash the handkerchief and applied it to the parts that were affected by that disease. He was totally cured. He then made a general confession and was restored to his practice of the faith. He made it clearly known that all of the remedies that had been given him by the medical arts for his diseases were completely useless. I point out, also, that his conversion was lasting.

Toward the evening of Tuesday, the Vicar General Monsignor Leuci, now deceased, the episcopal chancellor Paolo De Pietro, almost all of the Canons of the cathedral, various Capuchin fathers and our own members, assembled together. The body was transported from the church to a place set apart where an analysis of it was made. It was found to be flexible, it did not exude a bit of bad odor, in the mouth the tongue was red and softened with saliva, the vesicants without stench even though they were bathed in lymph. In short, looking at all of the members, they

appeared still to be alive. This autopsy was done by a doctor and a surgeon, mentioned before, and all the individuals that I listed previously. All was done legally and a record of it is kept in the episcopal chancery. One of the witnesses there wanted an experiment done by subjecting the body to a blood-letting, but it was not given approval. The reason for not doing it was that the Canon, while still alive, told me and others of his colleagues that we should be careful not to have blood-lettings be done on him, either when alive or after death. He was convinced that if that were done while he was still alive, the loss of even drops of blood would drain him of life and could be the cause of his death; and, after death, there would be no call for it. By experience I discovered that when it happened that he was to have a blood-letting in Rome, several times when his sickness required it, after surrendering just a few drops of blood, he suffered from a hoarseness in his throat, in fact, after one instance, as he himself told me, he lost his voice altogether. So, now, it was decided not to have that done to his body. It was at this time, likewise, that these professors, in order to make a more thorough examination that would remove any questions or doubts, wanted to check to see whether the body had been embalmed with the new methods available. Not only did they remain convinced that no manner of embalming had been used, but they noted that he was entirely clean even though he had not been bathed and his flesh was still fresh and intact, as though it were the flesh of a new-born baby.

After these actions, the body was returned to the church where it remained until the place of his burial was readied. When the place was prepared for his burial in that church, he continued to be on view until the eighth day, in the same position, but only privately, that is to say, with the doors of the church closed. After the place of burial was readied, the coffin containing his body was closed and in addition to the body of the Servant of God, they enclosed a tube made of tin metal in which a written memorial was enclosed indicating the identification of the body and the day of death. The coffin then was wrapped with a tape-like material and sealed with the seal of the Episcopal Curia and finally buried.

It must be noted that before the coffin was covered with the memorial stone, the stone-cutter who had offered his services for the burial, had suffered for many years from rheumatic pains, or lumbago. Mentally, he recommended himself to the Servant of God and to his surprise at that very moment he felt freed of his ailments and as far as I know he never suffered from that illness again.

In reference to the attendance of the people, I can assure you that as far as our missionaries were concerned, there was no effort at all on their part to arouse or promote the attendance of the people, and, in fact, all was carried out with the greatest caution and secrecy so that the transfer of the body from Rome to the church in Albano would not be known even by some of our own people. As for me, during the time that the body was left on view in the church of San Paolo, I paid a visit to the body of the Servant of God and, while kneeling before him, I begged his pardon for all of my failings and displeasing acts toward him during all the time of my life with him in the Congregation. I also asked him to obtain for me the grace of perseverance in the fulfillment of all my duties.

On the night of January 3rd 1838, with the church closed, he was buried in the chapel of

San Girolamo in the manner described above but somewhat removed from the altar step. Present at the burial were Fr. Giovanni Merlini, the stonecutter, the notary, namely, the episcopal chancellor, myself and one or the other who helped with the burial.

The sepulchre was square in form with a covering and frame in marble bearing on it the simple inscription of these words: *Gaspar Del Bufalo auctor Congregationis Missionis a Pretioso Sanguine Collegium Sacerdotum eiusdem Congregationis cum lacrimis heic posuerunt, Xistus Riario Sforza Abbas Commendatarius ad Colles Albanenses huic cyppo locum dedit.*” The body of the Servant of God still lies there.

Under the episcopacy of his Eminence [Alessandro] Giustiniani, the successor to his Eminence Falzacappa, the sepulchre was opened to see whether the seals were still intact. When they noticed that they had wasted away, the coffin was opened and once again the body was identified with proper legal forms and the seals renewed. The coffin, then, properly sealed with those of the present Curia was then returned to the same location.

I went there to pay a visit to the grave of the Servant of God, but privately, in order to ask him to help me in the office that was put on my shoulders as the superior of our Congregation.

The concourse of people to the grave of the Servant of God has been and continues to be an uninterrupted thing. Faithful come from nearby towns but also from the cities of Nice and Paris. They are people of every level and status and, to my knowledge, there have also been cardinals and famous leaders, including those who have special titles.

His reputation for sanctity

The Servant of God, while alive, enjoyed the reputation of being a saint in the Marche and in Romagna just like Blessed Leonard of Port Maurice did. This was true likewise in the Provinces of Marittima and Campagna. In Rome, he enjoyed the reputation of being a zealous man but it did not reach the degree of being a saint. However, in our Roman provinces he enjoyed the reputation of being a holy man by all the various levels of citizens.

After his death, the reputation for sanctity generally grew both in the places where he enjoyed it during his lifetime as well as where it was lesser such as in Rome and Albano where it gradually got stronger and persevering. In our own Congregation furthermore this concept of his holiness grew and they considered him as another Venerable Father Paolo, founder of the Passionists or as another Venerable Canon De Rossi whom our Servant of God resembled so much in life. I, too, while he was still living, looked upon him as an angel in the flesh and as a man who had consecrated himself entirely to a hidden life and a life of the spirit. After his death, that was and still is my thought, namely, that the Servant of God in life was one of profound and hidden humility, that he was one exalted by the Lord to the level of glory and even willed to show him to be marked by an accidental glory which is what is commonly looked upon as the sanctity that God himself disposed to constitute the sanctity that was attributed to him.

In support of this idea, after his death quite a bit was written, even in France, evident in

the many letters that have come to me from priests and other trustworthy people who had supplied me with information concerning prodigious signs that took place in their regions as a confirmation of the holiness of the Servant of God. Even in the public news media of France did they speak about this without our people cooperating with them in the least way except for the information dealing with the customary funeral rites that were held as usual for members of our Congregation and for the elegy that was given by one of our colleagues whose name is Fr. Cristoforo [Frioli] of the Precious Blood. There were other things said, but nothing that was contrary to his life, his virtue or reputation, as far as I know.

In addition to things that were written and things that were said, there were also some incidents that took place confirming the virtues and reputation of the Servant of God. These activities were associated with the interest that was shown everywhere in getting images and relics of the Servant of God.

I am not going to spend any time dealing with the rumors started by some people in Rome since I have spoken sufficiently in past sessions about this. I think that not too much weight is to be put on opinions about the Servant of God and his virtues that were uttered about him and his ministry by those liberals or by the leaders of the brigands, that I referred to before¹ since those calumnies, insults and persecutions put out by them should rather be an argument in favor of the honor of the Servant of God.

Both in the letters that I received and in the public statements made in France, mention is made of a number of astonishing incidents resulting from the intercession of the Servant of God after his death. One in particular was brought to my attention in a letter from Nice which was likewise confirmed by other letters and by the vocal affirmation given by the Father Rector of the school run by the Jesuits. It is backed up by the statement of the person who was healed and who wrote the following on October 7, 1842: “My father, on this October 7th, at this very moment, God has performed through the intercession of the Canon a miracle, as though he had risen from the dead. Oh my father, while I was praying with the young girl whom I recommended to him (the daughter of the Governor), we recited the Seven Offerings. I placed the holy picture of the Canon on the leg whose function she had lost. I did it as a kind of joke, without any faith at all. All of a sudden, she stretched out her leg and began to walk. She was cured. We are ten witnesses in all; amen. The doctors are present and they are weeping. Nice, October 7, 1842. I am healed. Francesca”.

In reference to this occurrence and my knowledge of it, the most reverend bishop of Nice and Provence wished to initiate the process as soon as he learned that the girl who was cured felt obliged to do so by an oath. Because of her profound timidity she did not dare to do this act on her own. So, with prudence she simply deferred any examination. This Francesca, who has been healed, belongs to the DeMaistre family. The testimonies given in relationship to the circumstances are preserved in the archives of our Congregation.

¹ Cf. Pp. 68-69 of the Italian work.

Fr. Giovanni Merlini wrote to me from Albano that he had gotten word that a certain Caterina Micucci of Castel Gandolfo, who had suffered for a year from an infection on her leg. The doctors had described it as a very serious form of a boil and very dangerous, despite the very effective remedies that they were applying. That being the case, the sick lady, after learning that the body of the Servant of God was there, went to the church of San Paolo in Albano where favors had been granted. But when she got there, she learned that he had already been buried. She received a piece of the clothing of the deceased and when she touched it to the malignant infection, within three days she was relieved of it and the wound healed. The testimony of the surgical specialists of Castel Gandolfo and Albano recorded all of the circumstances of the ailment and of the healing and these are preserved in the archives of our house of San Paolo.

Fr. Giovanni Merlini wrote again to me that a certain Antonio Palloni, a citizen likewise of Castel Gandolfo, for more than a year had been stricken with repeated attacks of epilepsy which later led to an apprehension of mind which gradually grew into a state of fixation. With a glass of water, he took a piece of clothing of the Servant of God and was cured. He no longer was subject to that infirmity, despite the fact that the death of his firstborn, who was to be the future support of the family, occurred. This misfortune could have provoked a return of the epilepsy, but he not only continued to enjoy the good health that he had obtained, but also continued handling his business with great care.

That same Fr. Giovanni Merlini wrote to me that a certain Clementina Bruciaferro, a widow, from the same town of Castel Gandolfo, had a son whose body was deformed and who was incapable of pronouncing a word. When she heard that the body of the Servant of God was transported to Albano, she, filled with the spirit of faith, took her son who was four years old into her arms and made her way with him to Albano. She approached the coffin in such a way that her son was able to touch the body of the Servant of God. Then, placing a relic on her son's body, she returned home with the hope of receiving the grace that she was asking for, namely, the perfect healing of her son. She was not disappointed for after eight days she had the delight of seeing her son walk about freely and to call out the names of his brothers and sisters. This report and the testimonies of the doctors in reference to this fact as related to me, are preserved in the archives of San Paolo.

Furthermore, a secular curate from Nepi wrote to me that in November of 1838, a certain Francesca Mariani, a widow, from that same city was attacked by a fierce inflammation of her lungs that could not be helped by any human means. Fortified with all the sacraments and assisted in making preparation for her death by recommending her soul to God, the people who were there at her side invoked the help of the Servant of God. Instantaneously she recovered her breath and her strength as a natural color returned to her face. She and the other bystanders then expressed their gratitude to her benefactor as she continued to enjoy perfect health. These notes are likewise preserved in Albano.

Other prodigious things have been reported to me of extraordinary happenings which I could relate in a quiet way since much discussion is needed to acknowledge in a full extension

all of the circumstances that accompanied them. I am of the opinion that these awesome things should be esteemed as belonging to the area of miracles, though the greater part of them are graces obtained through the intercession of the Servant of God. In my opinion, I distinguish between a miracle and a grace insofar as a miracle is something absolutely beyond natural forces and at times even contrary to the laws of nature or, in other words, the natural order of things. A grace is a more or less strengthly help which is granted along with natural powers.

I have nothing more to add.