



NOVENA TO SAINTS BARTOLOMEA AND VINCENZA
during the Vespers 9 -17 May 2022

1. DAY: TOGETHER in DIVERSITY

In the documents relating to the Processes and in other sources, the two Saints appear, first of all, together, in mutual relationship, one in need of the other, mutually complementary, thanks to their individual differences, each with her personal endowments and functions: together and distinct.

Card. Lldefonso Schuster, called them the «Lovere pair», and used to add the image coined by Gerosa herself: “God has laid his yoke on them both:

an eagle and an ox, to draw the cart of the Institute in the world”. To this we need to add another image that described Bartolomea as a searchlight that «cut across Gerosa’s life till her whole life’s path was made quite clear to her», a light which she then passed on to «so many sisters, giving them the same sure, clear guidance that she herself had received”.

Bartolomea thought out the plan, Vincenza did the building; one sowed the seed and sent down the roots, the other watered and tended the plant. In them there was realized what a spiritual writer has said: “In his designs of loving-kindness, God deals with us in such a way that each one of us is in need of another, and we find in others what we see lacking in ourselves. In that way we remain humble, we grow kinder, we make unity more clearly manifest” (*From “The Grace of the Origins”, cf. pp. 84 ff*).

2. DAY:

TOGETHER in SERVICE

Bartolomea and Caterina express in a letter to their Superiors their intentions regarding the “longed-for Institute”.

“We sincerely desire with all our heart to consecrate ourselves to God in works of charity, and with that end in view, we willingly sacrifice our weak person and the modest property that God has bestowed on us. ... If in any way you intend to agree to our desires, you have all our expressed intentions, and at the same time, we affirm that in this, too, we leave everything to your judgment. ...

We affirm with all sincerity that at this moment there is nothing we look forward to so much as the blessed instant in which we shall come together to consecrate ourselves wholly to God, and every moment of delay is most painful to us. We know we are likely to suffer much hardship, but we hope and trust that God will help us. We are happy about the

purchase of the house and we hope that God will help us to pay for it as well. We wish we could go to live in it soon” (*Mazza, VC II, 65*).

3. DAY:

TOGETHER in OFFERING

On 21 November 1832, Bartolomea and Caterina came together in the parish church of S. Giorgio, at the Altar of the Our Lady of Sorrows, to participate in the Mass celebrated by Fr. Rusticiano Barboglio, assisted by Fr. Angelo Bosio, who in the official report attested:

“When Holy Mass was over the two above-mentioned Caterina Gerosa and Bartolomea Capitanio departed from the church accompanied by the said Reverend Parish Priest and myself, and they directed their steps to the house, formerly “Gaia”, now Conventino. There, before a holy picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary placed between two lit candles, on their knees and with the utmost devotion, they made, through the hands of Mary, the offering of themselves and of their possessions to God and consecrated themselves entirely to the works of charity in service of the poor, in the manner most pleasing to God. These two persons alone, by love and sentiments bound more closely to each other than if they were blood sisters, started the holy Institute, and began in the said house, poor and bare. . . ., but they were that gospel mustard-seed which in a marvelous manner grew and spread.

This much I hereby attest and affirm in all truth and under oath, being myself not just a witness but greatly edified and moved by it all”.

(*Mazza VC II, 79-80*)

4. DAY:**TOGETHER in CONVENTINO**

Bartolomea narrates to her friends her first experience of the community at Conventino:

“...I finally find myself in the Lord’s Sheepfold, ... with two companions, ... My heart rejoices at it, and every day I feel happier and happier.

I have always thought of religious life as a real death to self. In actual fact I find it even more truly so. ... you must always comply with the ways of others, forget yourself for love’s sake, bear patiently and look cheerful, in short, to be as good as dead to everything so as to live of Jesus Christ alone and of his most Holy Will. It is a truly crucified life. But how sweet it is made by our loveable Spouse who graciously accepts the sacrifices of his Handmaids! I would not change it for all other joys, by which I mean not merely those of the world but even spiritual consolations, because what makes me perfectly happy is the certainty that I am doing the Will of God”.

“I have no fear because I am in the hands of God who loves me as a Father. I am incapable of even the slightest good work, but he can do all things in me, and I surrender myself entirely to him”.

(Scr I, 577-578, 572)

5. DAY:**TOGETHER IN COLLABORATION**

On the occasion of change of superior in the institute of “S. Chiara” at Bergamo, Gerosa informed thus the community:

“After consulting my Councillors, Sr. Angela Zenoni was deemed fit for

that office. I know I can count on your readiness to accept this arrangement. As Sr. Angela herself is also too delicate in health, all of you, her Sisters, will be expected to co-operate with her in what will be required of you.

You have there a vast field of work, so many opportunities of winning souls for the Lord. Keep up your usual enthusiasm and courageous readiness for hard work. May the right intention to please God be your guide, and that you may truly please God, let there be in you deep humility, unfailing patience and boundless charity. Let there be among you peace, gladness and a holy harmony in all things. Have compassion for one another, and if anyone of you commits some slight fault, cover it with the ‘mantle’ of charity.

How gladly I would hasten to your side and share in your toil if I had the health and strength for it! I do feel for you ... I eagerly look forward to the moment when I can call you here, one after the other, for a little rest”.

(Mazza, VG, 124-125)

6. DAY: TOGETHER in MUTUAL RESPECT

Notes dictated by Gerosa for Sr. Crocifissa Rivellini, the novice mistress.

“I most earnestly recommend this to you: when you are with the sisters, let them speak out freely: in that way you will be able to know them better and judge them aright. Take care not to use the same method for one and all in directing them: one will stand a sharp reproof and will hardly mind it; with another a meaningful look will be enough.

Young sisters like to see a smiling face around and cannot stand a severe look.

Bear in mind that human beings are not Angels, and there is much human frailty to be compassionately understood. If something is referred to you, reflect on the reason why it has been brought to your notice; don't believe it at once, but try to clear things, giving a chance to the persons concerned to explain if they so wish; in that way you can come to know better how things really stand.

Do all in your power that the sisters may love one another, taking the utmost care that charity be not broken: without fraternal love, our houses would be hell. Let young sisters have respect for the elderly; this will help to safeguard charity.

Instil a love for hard work: in that way they will not waste time on frivolous things.

“I most strongly recommend devotion to Our Lady. Our Lady helps her devotees in everything” (*Mazza, VG, 433-435*).

7. DAY:

TOGETHER in HOLIDAYS FOR REST

“Every year the sisters went to Lovere for a rest from their work or to be restored to health. Gerosa surrounded them with loving attention. She seemed to have nothing else to do except to look after them. She warmly welcomed them into the house and in those happy days that they stayed with her, she did her best to lift up their spirits and strengthen them in body as well. Many times, she personally prepared some refreshing drink in her room and made them take it. She was glad to see them enjoying each other's company in a simple manner; she herself would join them, and tried to think of suitable ways and means to keep them cheerful.

Her sweet and affable ways induced the Sisters to open their hearts to her with an unbounded trust, and as a gentle mother, she would listen to them, encourage them or correct them according to their need.

But when she was forced to let them return to their own communities, she would redouble her care and attention, offer them this and that thing, open cupboards to see and check if there was anything, they needed or liked to have. She would then repeat words of kind encouragement and advice”.

Sr. Felice Bonotti affirmed, “There was no affectation or pettiness in her; her attentions were genuine and coming from a warm, loving heart; and when we had to come away from her, she felt it so badly that it almost drove her sick” (*Mazza, VG, 268-270, 336-337*).

8. DAY: ALL TOGETHER towards ‘HARBOUR’

Mother Bosio attested: All were of one heart and mind because of Gerosa’s affability. She expressed what was in her heart and explained the circumstances of the Institute; she welcomed advice from everyone, and for that reason all formed one body, participating equally in the decisions and the destiny marked out for the religious Family” (*unpublished letter*).

Gerosa spoke of this Family to these first sisters in this manner: “The Institute is like a boat that takes everyone (on board) to the harbour: it equally carries those who are engaged in important offices and those who have no particular work to do. At nightfall all have equally worked: those who have been here (at Conventino) as well as those working in establishments here and there.

The merit lies not in the duty itself, nor in doing this or that thing, but in doing everything gladly and in obeying promptly. All of us are equally useful to the Institute: both the sister who weeds the kitchen-garden and the sister-teacher”.

“May the Lord grant you the grace of making good use of the time of your life so that you may all together one day praise Him in Heaven”.

(*Scandella, VG, 119,137*)

Public opinion also helped in getting the Processes of canonization of Bartolomea and Vincenza underway. The two causes went on separately, up to the beatification stage to the great satisfaction of the sisters who «saw them at last shine both together: B. Capitanio, the patron of the poetry (one who conceived the idea of the Institute), and V. Gerosa, the patron of its prose (one who realised the idea) ».

We can say that from this point onwards the two causes kept overtaking each other, and all the time they were accompanied by opinions highlighting the impossibility of B. Capitanio being raised to the altars without V. Gerosa.

The Institute has always thought of them together, inseparable and therefore it is even more meaningful and providential, that they were glorified at the same time. It was as if “the two different lights were made to merge in harmony”.

Thanks to the mystery of the communion of the Church that our Saints continue to walk by our side on our life’s way, helping us to believe, to hope and to love, and reminding us, when the journeying is hard, that we are never alone.

Their canonization does not only hold them up to our view as exemplars of Christian living, but also confirms us in this trust and in this hope.

(from “The Grace of the Origins”, cf. pp. 82 ss)