

THE BEATITUDE OF BEING SECOND
FR. JAMES CAMISASSA
CO-FOUNDER OF THE CONSOLATA MISSIONARIES

Fr. Giuseppe Mina, IMC - Sr. GianPaola Mina, MC

(An abridged translation)

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INTRODUCTION

A number of years ago, in a House of the Consolata Missionaries, under a large picture of Fr. James Camisassa, one could read the words: "I have not worked only for myself, but for all!"

With these words Fr. Camisassa introduces himself also to us, today. He truly worked very hard and disinterestedly also for each one of us, so that in our turn we may work in freedom, for nothing else than the Kingdom.

We think that these pages, written by a brother and sister by birth (both Consolata Missionaries) and intended first of all for the Consolata Missionaries (Sisters, Brothers, and Fathers), may also be of interest to other people, especially the many friends and sympathizers who in their way are also part of our Missionary Family. Today there is an increasing number of people who delight in coming to know a priest capable of living his ministry in a true spirit of service and with a universal missionary dimension, i.e., for the good of all people, near and far.

Fr. Giuseppe Mina, IMC
Sr. Gian Paola Mina, MC

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Chapter 1
ON A BRIGHT TRAIL

Two priests of the archdiocese of Turin

No friendship exists if no friends exist; and friends exist for the joy of being together, communicating with one another, and sharing joys and sorrows, ideals and doubts.

Here are two priests walking along the streets of Turin: two friends with one destiny.

One of them is Fr. Joseph Allamano, the future founder of the Consolata Missionaries, born at Castelnuovo d'Asti (now "Castelnuovo Don Bosco") on 21st January, 1851.

The other is Fr. James Camisassa, born at Caramagna Piemonte on 27th September, 1854, the fifth of six children of a poor rural family. He is the son of Gabriel Camisassa and Agnes Perlo. Fr. James will be living and working with Fr. Allamano for 42 years, passionately sharing the destiny and apostolic achievements of his friend.

Genuine friendship will be the sun of their life together. Special circumstances will strengthen such a bond, so as to give the warmth of a family. Three nephews of Fr. Camisassa, three brothers (Philip, Gabriel and Louis Perlo) will later be attracted by such a warmth, become Consolata Missionaries, and play important roles in the Missionary Institute (Philip and Gabriel became Bishops -- Philip was also the first successor of Fr. Allamano -- and Fr. Louis, too, carried out important tasks for the Institute).

The following pages will speak about Fr. Camisassa. However, Fr. Allamano and all his work will also be mentioned as they were an essential part of Fr. Camisassa's life.

A Singing Boy

As a young boy, little James was noticeable in school celebrations for his quickness and brightness in dialogues, poems, and songs. He was short, but his voice was beautiful, his eyes bright, and his smile sweet. His Parish Priest, Fr. Bernard Appendino, liked him very much. Putting his hand on the boy's head, he used to say, "Little James is short, but he is an eagle." And the little fellow in quick and unexpected ways would run away from him.

All people liked James. Of very good memory and vivid intelligence, he sailed through elementary school without any problem whatsoever, showing that he was quite gifted for studying. His parents, however, could not afford to send him for further studies. So, he was employed as an apprentice by his god-father, Joseph Becchio.

James entered the rather dark blacksmith's workshop with joy, as if that had been his dream. Later on in life, Vice-Superior General of the Consolata Missionaries, he would remember with pleasure the years spent in that workshop. James worked with fire and anvil, and used to accompany the hammer's beats with his resounding singing voice. The first time he managed to make a horse shoe all on his own, he smiled with satisfaction. His god-father was very happy to have him as an apprentice. He would later say, while shaking his head in approval, "I never had anyone else like him: so hard-working, so industrious and intelligent."

The boy learnt how to earn his daily bread and to do a bit of everything... He toughened himself for the hardships of life, and enjoyed the happy atmosphere reigning among people who were poor of material things but rich of trust in God and availability to His will.

At Don Bosco's "Oratorio"

Young James worked, sang, and had no worry about his future: he seemed to think of no other option for himself. But his eldest sister, Anna Maria, who was 16 years older and his god-mother, did not feel the same way. She was not at peace: such a good boy, pious and intelligent, had to go on with further studies and not remain in a blacksmith's workshop.

She was a dressmaker, a quite capable one. She would work many extra hours, make sacrifices, and save all she could, in order to pay for his brother's further studies. Their parents, too, were happy to contribute what they could so that her desire, which down deep they shared, could be fulfilled.

When James came to know that his parish priest had managed to gain him admission to the Salesian "Oratorio" in Turin, he was disturbed... His heart was divided between the sorrow he felt at leaving his family, and the joy of being able to go for further studies, about which he had not even dared to think for a long time.

In October 1868, at fourteen, he left Caramagna and went to study in that warm environment where young people enjoyed Don Bosco's presence. He experienced an up-surge of those energies of his that had remained dormant for some years. He was firmly committed to make the best of the chance offered him. He worked very hard and made up for the time lost. In three years he managed to complete a course that would usually take five years.

Gifted with a beautiful voice, he became a member of the "Oratorio"'s choir, directed by Fr. Cagliari, a future missionary in Patagonia and eventually a Cardinal.

The choir-director liked him quite a bit, and got him involved in several performances because with such a voice applauses were sure to come. Young James, however, realized that his participation in the choir, which implied moving to many places, was detrimental to his studies. As a consequence, he withdrew from the choir to the understandable regret of its director.

The environment in which James lived was quite suitable to open him also to attractions of a spiritual nature. In his heart, good and available, he started experiencing a clear desire to become a priest. Don Bosco, who used to think that this call was addressed to many young men, was eager to help them discover it: he promoted priestly vocations as if through contagion by his very presence. Some of the young men called to priesthood remained with him; others went to diocesan seminaries.

James Camisassa was one of the latter. On 22nd October, 1871, in the Parish Church of Caramagna where he had been baptized, he received the clerical habit (the black cassock) from his parish priest, Fr. Bernard Appendino.

The Journey to Priesthood

James was 17 years old when he entered the Turin diocesan Seminary at Chieri (not far from Turin).

Philosophy studies were quite congenial to his clear mind and clear way of thinking. Fr. Lorenzo Sales, IMC, would write in this regard, "In this kind of studies,

this young man with an attentive, deep and reflective mind, found himself at home. His results were excellent. Of blameless behaviour and exemplary prayer life, he gained the Rector's trust. In fact in his second year of Seminary life he was appointed a Prefect."

During his holidays at home, James found it natural to remove his clerical cassock in order to help his father with farm works. He was also willing to help again in his god-father's blacksmith's workshop, where he acquired experience with many artisans' tools, an experience that would be very useful to him later in life.

In 1873 he entered the Metropolitan Seminary of Turin for his Theology studies. The years spent in this Seminary sharpened his mind and endowed it with the knowledge needed for his later life. He whole-heartedly committed himself to the studies that prepared him to meet the demands of priestly life.

His Superiors had a good opinion of and trust in him. Also here, on his fifth year, he was appointed a prefect. It is always difficult to perform such a role among people of the same age; however, it seemed that young Camisassa was quite successful with it.

The Seminary Rector, Canon Joseph Soldati, having noticed James' clear and good hand-writing, entrusted him with the task of making copies of letters, essays, etc.

Also the Bursar, Canon Peter Montefameglio, often asked for James' help in his work. Young Camisassa was quite willing to give up recreations and even some rest in order to help, but he never neglected study time and, even more so, prayer time: this was the time for adoration and growth in listening to the Spirit who formed God's friends and prophets.

Meanwhile Priesthood was getting nearer. On 26th May, 1877, he was ordained a Deacon and on 15th June a Priest in the Cathedral of Turin by Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi. The solemn celebration of his First Mass at Caramagna was a source of joy for all: himself, his parents, brothers and sisters, and all parishioners.

When the celebrations were over, he went back to study for his doctorate degree. One more year of intense work led him to obtain his degree in Theology. All his lecturers were present when he presented his dissertation, and he was so brilliant that everybody applauded. He obtained the highest grade, and his professors were so enthused by his performance that they would have liked to find some better expression than the usual formal "probatus est" (he is approved -- as a doctor in Theology). It was the 8th August, 1878.

Caramagna

After his priestly Ordination, Fr. Camisassa's visits to Caramagna became fewer and fewer, even if he always remembered with pleasure the village of his birth. Any time he happened to return there, people approached him to show their affection; his former class-mates were proud of him: they knew he had important things to care for in Turin. At times some people felt embarrassed, but he made them feel at ease by greeting them first and calling them by name.

Later on, when he would be involved in caring for missionary work in Africa, he would propose to some people from his village the possibility of going to Kenya and organize and care for farms and other cultivations: unfortunately, World War I intervened to stop all plans in this regard...

Where his heart really found rest, however, was near his parents. He had a kind of veneration for them. Unable to be often with them, now and then he sent them something so as to help them a bit with their daily living. At Christmas and Easter he never failed to send his father some bottles of good wine.

His parents, from their home, kept up with what he was doing and what people used to say of him. They both died in their eighties: their sober, austere way of living seemed to have kept them always healthy, without any need for doctors and medicines. The father was the first to die: all his children were present (including Fr. James). From then on the mother, whose health condition was already serious, kept speaking softly and tenderly with her children about death with a very profound faith. Comforted by prayer and Sacraments, she died in a truly Christian way. She wanted to be dressed as for a feast-day, as for a wedding. Fr. James gave her a final blessing after she died in his arms.

After his parents' deaths, his visits to Caramagna became even fewer than before. What had attracted him more than anything else was no longer there, and his work in Turin became ever more demanding. In 1919, however, he helped with starting Catholic Action in his home-parish. The parish priest, faced with something new, was hesitating, but Fr. Camisassa encouraged the young people to go ahead; so, this apostolic association was established in the parish. He had not quite forgotten his birth place, and his words had some weight there...

Rules of Life

The young Fr. Camisassa lived according to "Rules of Life" that he had himself composed, and imposed on himself. They consisted of 340 hand-written lines contained in an old, worn-out exercise-book, evidence that it had been frequently used. Fr. Igino Tubaldo, IMC, wrote about it: "It is a very meaningful document: it helps us to understand what the seminarians of that time were advised to do, but also and especially it leads us into the intimate part of this priest's heart, who in a simple and sincere way examines himself and strives to eliminate all that is negative in him."

Here are some thoughts from it:

"The first step towards holiness is a very strong desire to achieve it. In fact, as it takes constant effort and sacrifices, only a truly ardent desire can give our will the required energy."

"Remember: you must achieve holiness by practising humility, with attentive and constant commitment. Rely only on God. Watch your egoism that tends to steal what belongs to God. Faithfulness to the present (is essential). What you undertake to do and you do for God is never little (or unimportant)..."

He certainly was not soft with himself when he dispassionately described himself as follows: “Reflection and experience have led me to realize that I am naturally rash, fickle, restless and superficial. Negative effects of this are the following:

i) getting carried away by the first thought, project or idea that comes to my mind;

ii) inconsiderate hurry to finish what I am doing, in order to start doing something else;

iii) as my thoughts succeed one another at an incredible speed, everything remains only half-done, imperfect, bearing the marks of rashness and inconstancy. Do something to reform yourself...!”

It would be interesting to go through the detailed programme that young Fr. Camisassa proposed to himself for every day, every week, every month and every year, in order to become the kind of person he wanted to be, i.e., “a holy priest before both God and people”.

Here are some points on which he insisted:

“Listen and answer with gentleness and calm, in order to overcome shyness and not to fall into pettiness. My behaviour, my way of acting should always be gentle, serious, sincere. I must be spontaneous, not dominated by shyness. I will be reserved, cautious and also rather slow when requested to give advice, especially if I have to speak about other people...”

“My behaviour must be modest, free from anything that comes from superficiality and dissipation. My walking must not be hurried; my gestures must be pondered; my eyes must see, but without staring at people...”

“Above all I must pray: in time of calm, storms and discouragement pray! You will grow and become better in proportion to your perseverance in prayer.”

His concern about exterior things (like walking, etc.) may seem outdated today. What certainly is not outdated is the spirit that animated it: the desire of being always ready and available to the calls of grace.

His mention of shyness may also somehow disconcert: how could a man like him be shy, a man capable of facing anything and anybody in a controlled, spontaneous and sincere way? Yet, he was shy; his effort and commitment helped him to behave the way he did.

He was also concerned with humility, his decreasing, considering everything as relatively small in comparison with absolute values.

“I shall try to consider external things as small, as nothing, as fleeting fancies in comparison with God. Yes, Lord: I want to think only of you. Grant me, Lord, the grace to do everything as it pleases you.”

He would summarize his way of acting with the following sentence: “When doing anything, one should not be concerned with the time taken to do it, but with doing it perfectly.” Many years later, when Fr. G. Gallea, IMC, pointed out to him that it was not worth spending so much time in repairing something as accurately as he used to do, Fr. Camisassa answered that time was never wasted when it was used to do things well. The Latin saying, “Age quod agis”, i.e., “Do (well) what you do”, had become his motto, not only as an expression of human wisdom, but also and especially because “everything that is done for God must be done well”.

He spoke, acted and prayed in a way that showed his awareness of the Spirit's presence. Fr. Lorenzo Sales, IMC, wrote that "his 'Rules of Life' were constantly in his mind. He faithfully followed them to the end."

A Saint?

Would Fr. Camisassa succeed in perfectly translating into practice his programme of life in regard to God and people?

It is not easy to answer such a question. People who lived with him acknowledged his rare gifts, his bright mind and generous heart, but acknowledged also weaknesses. There were moments of tension and contrast in the carrying out of his various duties. He himself, in fact, had very severely analyzed and described himself in his "Rules of Life". This allows us to understand his long struggle in order to achieve self-control and advance toward perfection, even if, judged from the outside, he may seem to have never totally succeeded in doing that. In life there are always clouds that come to darken even the best and brightest plans, the strongest and most sincere resolutions... Fr. Camisassa, however, had always been a man and a priest on the way to holiness.

Fr. Igino Tubaldo, IMC, (in his work on Fr. Joseph Allamano) refers some opinions of people who knew Fr. Camisassa and saw him at work. They all agree in saying that he was "a great organizer", a man of "deep and vast knowledge, and of wonderful and tremendous action", a "very intelligent man", "extraordinarily active and industrious; his work was his life", "one who never ceased studying very hard", an "exceedingly enterprising man of great technical ability", a man who, according to a banker, "would have been a great Minister of Public Works". Others said that he was a "serious, thinking priest, with a kind of serene smile", or "a man of deep thoughts, few words, and a declared enemy of time wasted", "contrary to making a show of anything".

His own "Rules of Life", however, end with a passionate statement: "I want to think only of you, my God, and to work only for you!" And Fr. Lorenzo Sales once heard Fr. Camisassa, in his late years, saying, "I am quite comforted by the thought that I never did anything for myself, but only for God's glory". This is what really matters...

A Letter, a Destiny

Having completed his preparation, young Fr. Camisassa was eager to dedicate the whole of himself to pastoral ministry and preaching. He was well qualified for this. Besides his gifts and his training, he had an ardent and sincere desire to serve God and the Church. His time for priestly work had arrived. He had completed the required two-year course in Moral Theology at the Metropolitan Seminary and was getting ready to go to Pecetto Torinese as an assistant parish-priest.

But, all of a sudden in September 1880, he received a letter from the young priest who had been his Spiritual Director in the Seminary, Fr. Joseph Allamano, who unexpectedly had just been appointed Rector of the Consolata Shrine. Such a letter

upset all Fr. Camisassa's dreams. Surprisingly, Fr. Allamano had received permission from Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi to choose for himself somebody who could help him at the Shrine as a Financial Administrator and Bursar. When he had mentioned Fr. Camisassa, who was 26 at that time, the Archbishop told him that he himself could contact Fr. Camisassa about it.

The letter was not found among Fr. Camisassa's documents, but it was found in draft form among Fr. Allamano's notes. Here it is:

"Dear Father Camisassa,

This letter will surprise you. In fact, I wish to inform you of something that still seems unreal even to me. Our Most Reverend Archbishop has appointed me as Rector of the Consolata Shrine to succeed Canon Rovetti who is retiring and going to the Cottolengo House. Everything I told our Archbishop in order to excuse myself from undertaking such a task was useless. I had to obey and accept. I hope and pray that obedience, which dissolved my doubts, will also dissolve the difficulties I shall have to face. As someone very dear to me, you are the first to hear of this news.

However, this is not all. Also the office of Administrator/Bursar of everything connected with the Shrine has become vacant. Our Archbishop invited me to look for someone whom I liked for such an office, and I mentioned your name. Please, do not consider only the "Bursar" part of the office. The Archbishop agreed to broaden the office and give you more co-responsibility. And, please, do not say that you are incapable of such a job. The good Lord will make up for everything, for both my and your lack of competence. The Archbishop has agreed to my request, and another priest is already in his mind for Pecetto...

The two of us, working together, will do something good: we shall exercise charity with the old retired priests who are living at the Shrine, and we shall do our best to enhance devotion to our dear Mother, the Consolata. Besides this, in this office you will have a chance to exercise your priestly ministry by both preaching and hearing Confessions, even more than at Pecetto. I am sure you will imitate your former Spiritual Director in promptly obeying your Superior, so that I will have the fortune of sharing my new work, as well as its many hardships, with someone I like very much and from whom I have received in the past many signs of affection.

This letter of mine is absolutely private. I just wanted to prepare you for what you will receive from higher up... I will move to the Consolata Shrine in the first days of October (1880) and I hope you will take office together with me.

Looking forward to your reply, I beg you to accept everything as a sign of my appreciation and love for you.

Devotedly yours in O. L. Jesus Christ,
Fr. Joseph Allamano

Together on the Path of God's Will

It may be useful to mention that Fr. Allamano, ordained a priest in Turin on 20th September, 1873 (when 22 years old), was immediately appointed as Assistant Rector

in the Metropolitan Seminary of Turin, and young Camisassa began his Theology studies there in that year. That is how the two of them met: one at the beginning of his priestly ministry, the other in his first year of Theology Seminary.

Fr. Allamano, in spite of the “crowd” of over 100 seminarians, did not fail to notice that young man from the countryside, a bit lost in that huge place, but outstanding for his bright intelligence, serious in his studies and any other commitment, available and capable for all kinds of works. Young Camisassa, in his turn, immediately liked his Assistant Rector and admired him: his great dedication to prayer, his care for the young seminarians, and his studying as well. Fr. Allamano, in fact, was preparing for his doctorate degree in Dogmatic Theology.

Three years later (in 1876) Fr. Allamano was appointed Spiritual Director of the Seminary, a role that was much more important than the previous one. He had to care in a special way for the spiritual direction and formation of the seminarians, as well as of the newly ordained priests who were taking the required two-year course in Moral Theology. Fr. Allamano and young Camisassa now met more often than before and, the communication between them went to a deeper level: that of spirituality and prayer. It was certainly the stimulating guidance of Fr. Allamano that led the newly ordained Fr. Camisassa to compile his “Rules of Life”.

The two of them were different: Fr. Allamano, a thin young priest who had to be always on the alert for his weak health; James Camisassa, a rather short and stout young man, full of vigour and strength. However, they soon came to like and appreciate one another; unaware of their common destiny at the Consolata Shrine, they were dreaming of becoming parish priests. Yet, the two of them, in spite of some hesitations and doubts, agreed to work in the House of Our Lady Consolata.

A “bursar”? When the news became known, someone told Fr. Camisassa, as if pitying him, “Was it worth studying so much to end up ‘peeling potatoes’?” Fr. Camisassa’s serene answer was, “Nothing is humiliating if done out of obedience!” This was authentic faith, a source of great peace.

Faith and obedience to his Archbishop moved Fr. Allamano, only 29 years old, to accept to be the Rector of the Consolata Shrine and, there, be at the service of Our Lady Consolata. Faith and obedience to his former Spiritual Director moved Fr. Camisassa, only 26 years old, to accept to go with him at the Shrine, no matter what kind of work he would do there.

Two “destinies” converged into one, in the name of Our Lady Consolata. On 2nd October 1880, Fr. Allamano took over his new office at the Shrine, well aware of the troubles he had to face there: years later, talking about that day, he would say, “I almost felt like dying...”

We do not know if Fr. Camisassa, on joining him the next day, was any happier. He was certainly sustained by great trust. He was walking along Fr. Allamano’s path, and both of them together were walking along the path of God’s will, a bright, luminous path, full of hope, in spite of the “darkness” in which they moved their first steps there.

Chapter 2

A SHRINE, A LIFE

A Shrine at the Centre of a Life

The origins of the Consolata Shrine in Turin go a long way back in time. A kind of “golden legend” surrounds it.

At the beginning of the 11th century, Arduin, marquis of Ivrea and king of Italy (955-1015), in a dream had a vision of Our Lady who promised to heal him if he built three chapels dedicated to her. The king built them: one at Valperga, another at Crea, and the third one in Turin. In this chapel, originally dedicated to Our Lady of Graces and built next to the church of St. Andrew (1014), the icon of Our Lady Consolata was later placed.

After a number of years, the city of Turin went through very sad times and was reduced to very bad conditions. During all this turmoil, the icon of Our Lady Consolata got lost. It took an extraordinary event to rediscover it. A blind man from Briançon (in France), Jean Ravacchi, following a vision he had, led people to the place (in Turin) where, under the rubbles, the picture of Our Lady was found. Fr. Sales wrote: “It was the 20th June, 1104, when at the presence of the Bishop of Turin and a crowd of faithful people, following the indications of the blind man, the miraculous picture was rediscovered. He, full of faith, knelt with devotion in front of the icon and recovered his lost sight.”

After this miracle, devotion to Our Lady Consolata grew stronger and stronger. Not only the chapel of Our Lady was re-built, but also the church of St. Andrew next to it, and later also other buildings were erected.

However, with the exception of special moments of troubles (e.g., a war in 1706, and a cholera epidemic in 1835), as time went by, the devotion to Our Lady Consolata subsided.

In 1880, when Frs. Allamano and Camisassa went to the Consolata Shrine, there were four old Franciscan Friars who took care of it. Next to it, in the buildings of the Pastoral Institute (which had been closed because of theological disagreements) there were some old retired priests.

Frs. Allamano and Camisassa brought new blood to the Shrine. They found alternate convenient arrangements for the Friars and the retired priests who were there, and obtained permission from the Archbishop to re-open the Pastoral Institute for newly ordained priests, so that the whole life of the Shrine was renewed by plenty of young blood. The newly ordained priests were of great help in all the celebrations and services provided by the Shrine for the people.

Fr. Sales wrote: “Religious services at the Shrine improved tremendously. In the morning there was a Mass at every hour; there were priests available for the

Sacrament of Penance at any time; Holy Communion was distributed any time it was required; liturgical services were well performed; the buildings and everything in them were kept spotlessly clean; a priest was always available in the sacristy for any need of the people; order and scrupulous punctuality were kept in everything; furthermore and above all there was an atmosphere of prayer and holiness of life. People did not take long to realize that the Consolata Shrine had become once again what it was supposed to be. There were always many people at the Shrine, even on weekdays.

In 1883 Fr. Allamano was appointed Canon of the Cathedral, and he, in his turn, officially appointed Fr. Camisassa as his Vice-Rector at the Consolata Shrine. In those first three years of working together, Fr. Camisassa had proved to Fr. Allamano that he had made the right choice. Fr. Camisassa responded fully to all the expectations of Fr. Allamano by supporting him faithfully in the delicate and complex work of renewing the life of the Shrine. They came to better know their differences, but also their ability to work together in harmony. Gradually Fr. Camisassa became the “alter ego” (another himself) of Fr. Allamano, a very gifted “alter ego”, but so humble as to obey in everything the directives of the Rector, his superior.

At the Consolata Shrine Fr. Camisassa had also the chance to manifest his spirit of prayer, and exercise his priestly ministry. Every morning, after his meditation and a fervent celebration of the Eucharist, he went to the “confessional box” where he took care of numerous penitents. His deep theological preparation enabled him to deal with them in an understanding and efficacious way. He certainly did not have to regret the pastoral work he could have done at Pecetto: there was much more of it at the Shrine!

Fr. Allamano gradually introduced him to work also in the Pastoral Institute, first as an assistant-lecturer and then as a Lecturer of Moral Theology and Canon Law. Needless to say, Fr. Camisassa succeeded brilliantly in this work, so that everybody was happy with him.

First Works of Restoration at the Shrine

On Holy Saturday 1883, Archbishop Gastaldi went for his visit to the Shrine (as he did on every Saturday of the year). As soon as he went out of the Shrine and looked back at it, he exclaimed, “It looks awful!”. The Rector (Fr. Allamano), who was next to him, commented, “It truly does, and... I would like to do something about it. In fact I already have a plan...” The Archbishop encouraged him to go ahead with it.

The next day, 25th April, Archbishop Gastaldi suddenly died. However, relying on his approval and encouragement, Fr. Allamano began the works of restoration to the exterior of the Shrine, according to a plan prepared by the architect G. B. Ferrante. Everything had been examined, discussed and decided together with Fr. Camisassa who undertook the supervision of the works as they would proceed step by step.

A balcony that was running all around the large dome, making it ugly-looking and preventing the view of the beautiful architectonic design by Guarini and Juvarra, was removed, and so were also certain projections of the roofs onto the lower walls. Good-

looking stone-slabs were used to cover and protect many walls (or part of them), for the window-sills, and at the base of the walls. The whole building was surrounded by artistic and solid metal rails. All the roofs (including the one of the dome) were renewed. The cost of all these works came to 125,000 Italian Lire, which was quite a large amount of money at that time.

1883-1885 were two very busy years, as the works of restoration had to be carried out without neglecting the usual activities of the Shrine and of the Pastoral Institute. Fr. Camisassa manifested his genius in supervising the works. With him at his side, Fr. Allamano was serene: he knew that no detail would escape Fr. Camisassa's attention and, therefore, the works would be carried out to full satisfaction.

When the time came, Fr. Allamano joined together the celebration of the completion of the exterior restoration with that of the 50th anniversary of the Consolata's special protection for the people of Turin during the 1835 cholera epidemic. It was a new growth of devotion to Our Lady Consolata: her devotees realized that Frs. Allamano and Camisassa were truly zealous, pious and dedicated priests who stimulated them to grow in love and devotion to Mary.

Enlarging the Shrine

The restoration of the exterior of the Shrine was only a first step. The difficulties and hardships they had to face helped Frs. Allamano and Camisassa to see how much they could do together. So, they started thinking not only of restoring the interior of the Shrine, but also of enlarging the Shrine itself.

The practical knowledge that Fr. Camisassa had acquired about construction works allowed him to greatly contribute to the planning of the envisioned works. The fundamental problem consisted in finding a way of enlarging the Shrine, so that more people could fit in it.

Canon Cappella related that, on the occasion of feasts, Fr. Camisassa was always happy to expose the Blessed Sacrament for Benediction. After the celebration, he used to tell the priest in charge of the sacristy and his assistants what had become a refrain of his: "It is too small, absolutely too small! People cannot breathe in there. That is why many people stay outside." And he always reached the same conclusion that the problem of enlarging the Shrine had to be faced, naturally with the help of capable architects.

Fr. Camisassa kept reflecting on and studying the problem, until he came up with a brilliant idea: without touching the interior of the Shrine, the outside areas on the two sides of it could be used. That would enlarge the area of the Shrine and at the same time allow people to see the icon of Our Lady Consolata from any side.

The plan was examined and discussed at length with Fr. Allamano. Then they called the architect, Count Carlo Ceppi, who carefully examined every corner of the Shrine, but did not see any way out. To Fr. Camisassa who was with him he said, "Dear Canon, what can we do? We are choked from every side: the square, the

sacristy, the Chapel of Graces, the bell-tower... There is no space. It is impossible.” At this point Fr. Camisassa pointed to the apse where the large altar stood and said, “Dear Count, up to 1706 the altar was right under the main arch but, to please Duke Vittorio Amedeo II, architect Juvarra opened up the wall and succeeded in brilliantly doing what we now admire. Why can’t we do the same by opening chapels on the sides of it?” Count Ceppi reflected a while and then said, “You are right. It is possible. You made me see the light where I could see only darkness.”

Whoever today looks at the interior of the Shrine with the chapels at the sides of the main altar can hardly realize how brilliant Fr. Camisassa’s intuition had been, and how much it had influenced the architect.

Fr. Allamano was happy: finally there would be more room in the Mother’s House for her devotees.

In 1898 the plan for the works was ready in all details. Fr. Camisassa looked after everything: calculations, tests on the ground, search for the materials needed. Fr. Allamano wanted the best marbles for the interior of the Shrine, and Fr. Camisassa went to the quarries and dealt directly with artists, technicians, builders, etc.

But... his presence, his brightness and his know-how became a source of tension: the architects did not feel as free as they would have liked to be. Count Ceppi was the first to withdraw from the works; the same was done later on by the architect G.B. Ferrante (the one who had directed the works on the exterior). Finally an agreement was reached between Fr. Camisassa and the architect Vandone, who would lead the works to completion. Through all these difficulties, Fr. Allamano meekly and tactfully did his best to help one person understand the other, and to maintain the harmony needed, so that the works could proceed according to common satisfaction.

The enlargement of the Shrine required a lot of money. When Fr. Allamano was told that a million Italian Lire (a huge amount of money at that time) would not be enough, he answered, “If one million is not enough, we will spend two or even three millions, as many as are needed, provided that Turin may have a Temple worthy of its Patroness, the Consolata.” The Consolata devotees approved the works being done and contributed to the expenses with a generosity that was moving.

Fr. Allamano remarked, “It is the Consolata herself who is building her house: the graces she grants people attract their offerings, to which she responds with more graces. Day by day we see the spreading of God’s mercy. Yes, it is the Consolata who is building a house for herself.” “*We* see” he said, meaning himself and his Vice-Rector, Fr. Camisassa; they could see that the seed they had sown amid difficulties and suffering was budding forth and producing flowers and fruits.

The works succeeded beautifully in achieving what had been planned. Fr. Sales wrote, “The old church of St. Andrew, decorated with marbles and golden ornaments that put into evidence the old paintings on the vaults, became like a royal vestibule that led through a few steps into the inner parts of a royal palace...” And Fr. G. Gallea, IMC, pointed out that Fr. Camisassa wanted the gold-plating executed with a technique that would allow cleaning when necessary. Beauty, devotion and practicality were merged together to make the Shrine a place where it was easy to pray.

In 1904, on the occasion of the 8th Centenary of the finding of the Consolata icon by the blind man of Briancon (1104), the completion of the works of restoration and enlargement was celebrated. Frs. Allamano and Camisassa, helped by the other priests at the Shrine, organized the solemn celebrations that drew to the renewed Shrine in Turin such great crowds that the chronicles of the time defined as “extraordinary”: a true triumph of Our Lady Consolata. Pope Pius X himself sent some gifts together with his special blessing.

Fr. Camisassa made sure that everything worked out properly in all details but, as usual, he remained behind the curtains. Nobody noticed his presence. However, he rejoiced very much at seeing such a triumph of Our Lady Consolata and the fulfilment of the desires of his great friend, Fr. Allamano. All the difficulties and troubles faced during the works were forgotten. All the strenuous work done remained a secret, written only in God’s sacred books.

A Man who believed in Printed Paper

In 1899 the Consolata Shrine, as if out of a need, began publishing its magazine, “The Consolata”. Today, when we receive so much printed stuff, one more periodical publication would go unnoticed. Not so at that time: it was a vanguard novelty.

Fr. Allamano entrusted the publication to Fr. Camisassa, who would rightly be seen as the “founder” of the magazine. As he had chosen the best materials for the restoration of the Shrine, he started doing the same for the magazine. He chose the best printer he could find; the plates for printing photographs were prepared by a firm from Vienna (Austria) that was using the most advanced techniques, so as to obtain very good pictures; consequently, the look of the magazine, even if modest, was pleasant and cared for, in the least details. The editor’s office initially was Fr. Camisassa’s room. He personally and very accurately went over the proofs and covered them with marks and comments. He did not miss the least error, and was very careful about the lay-out: his precision was the reflection of his clear mind. He carefully chose people to write articles and, in most cases, personally wrote the editorials, some of which were master-pieces.

The purpose of the magazine was clear: to spread further and further Marian devotion among the people in a style that suited them, and so make them aware of and share in what was happening at the Shrine. Together with this, there was the purpose of reaching people who were far away, especially those who had emigrated abroad, with a message of consolation. The magazine also made known the favours and graces received by people from Our Lady Consolata, and very discreetly made known the names of the benefactors.

A devotion that was sober, warm and practical permeated the magazine. The number of readers grew quickly: in 1904 there were already 19,000 subscriptions. This showed that a convincing message, expressed in a convenient way by someone who communicated the best of himself to the readers, could be quite appreciated. Fr. Sales wrote, “We should carefully examine one by one the 284 issues of the

magazines published under Fr. Camisassa's supervision in order to understand how right he was in his choices. He poured himself into those pages, and filled them with the characteristics of his energetic personality and clear and balanced views. His aim was perfection, also in this work."

Fr. Camisassa had brilliant intuitions. In the very first issue he inserted the following notice, that would be periodically repeated: "Our readers are kindly asked to inform us, if possible, of the following: i) if in their towns or villages there are churches, chapels, oratories or altars dedicated to Our Lady Consolata; ii) if there are associations, icons, statues or paintings of Our Lady Consolata, tell us also how long they have been there; iii) if there have been, recently or at any time in the past, miracles or special favours attributed to the intercession of Our Lady Consolata..."

Surprisingly there were people who answered the above invitation even from the Americas: centres of Marian devotion and renewal would grow in Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Texas. The news coming from abroad stimulated the local people, so that "The Consolata" magazine became the source of many good works.

Fr. Camisassa, who at first organized the distribution of the magazine by hand in the city of Turin, at a time when people were not used to receive printed material, experienced also refusal. Slowly, slowly, however, his kind way won most people over. When people did not renew their annual subscription, after some time he stopped sending the magazine. "It is not right to force people to receive it", he used to say. "We should not force it into the hands of people who do not want it."

The Consolata Shrine, that had been increasingly becoming a centre of deep spirituality, found in the magazine a means of spreading it near and far. Later on, when the Consolata Missionaries were founded, they found in the magazine a very good way, unintentionally prepared, to keep people informed of their work and spread their missionary enthusiasm.

A small magazine, born in the shadow of the Consolata Shrine, became a seed of hope. Fr. Camisassa had great faith in that seed entrusted to printed paper, and did not spare hard work in order to make it grow.

A Priest

In the programme of life that Fr. Camisassa, as a young priest, had set for himself, he had stated his firm determination: "I want to belong totally to God."

In his spiritual life he did not manifest any particular devotional attitude: having given himself to God and become his priest, he whole-heartedly embraced God's cause; everything else became a natural consequence of this. To keep under control his many-faceted temperament, he committed himself to be continually present to himself and to God in anything he would be doing: "Age quod agis" (do well anything you do). "His faithfulness to the present became a wonderful witness to his union with God" (Fr. D. Fiorina, IMC).

This faithfulness was constant and persevering to the end: “Fr. Camisassa was a great priest not only because of his vast knowledge and many abilities, or because he was a fine theologian and moralist, but also and especially because of his great virtue” (Fr. G. Barlassina, IMC). His many and always increasing activities, and the night hours that extended his working time did not weaken the intensity of his spirit, of his interior life. In everything “he was always a priest and only a priest” (Fr. Sales).

Today better than in the past, guided by the teaching of Vatican II on the relationship between action and contemplation, we may reflect on and understand Fr. James Camisassa. Action founded on contemplation means doing what God wills and manifests through the signs of his will. “I always do what pleases the Father”, Jesus said. Fr. Camisassa’s activity, especially after the Consolata Missionaries started working in Kenya, consisted in constantly searching for the way of doing well the many humble works that filled his days: writing letters, preparing material to be sent to Kenya, climbing scaffoldings to inspect constructions, accompanying the bureaucratic “iter” of a document required, deciding about plastering the walls of a room, etc. All these practical things, however, were not a source of distraction for him.

In 1892 Archbishop David Riccardi appointed him Canon of the Metropolitan Cathedral and hoped that the new Canon could find a source of both spiritual and physical profit in the quiet time dedicated to the Liturgical Prayer in common. In all truth, Fr. Camisassa experienced a need for those spiritual oases that are the Hours of the Divine Office. On 7th July 1892, he officially joined the group of Canons to which Fr. Allamano belonged since 10th February 1883. From this time on, the two friends, already so strictly united in the work at the Consolata Shrine, became even more united in the Church’s prayer of praise, encouraging each other to be faithful to a service that required time, but filled the heart with spiritual joys.

Fr. Camisassa, in fact, was always calm and relaxed during the Canons’ praying of the Hours in common. He who does what is God’s is always with God. What we do becomes distracting in as much as self-centredness comes in. Works done out of God’s love do not prevent or interrupt one’s conversation with God; in fact they prolong it.

Fr. Camisassa lived God’s Word; it was nourishment for him. He had a real taste for Holy Scripture, which was a constant subject of study and meditation for him. He was often heard saying, “How I enjoy Holy Scripture!” The Consolata Sisters realized this when he explained to them with passion the Letters of St. Paul; so did the Consolata seminarians when he told them, “If something troubles you, read a Psalm and all troubles will disappear.” Liturgy forged his prayer and taught him the kind of knowledge in which a priest, a man of God, must be rich.

On a sheet of paper there are about fifty lines of handwriting that go back to 1877, the beginning of Fr. Camisassa’s priestly life. They are “Reminders” that were to help him “pray the Scripture”, as we say today. The Divine Office, an encounter with Christ and his Church, should not be a burden which we try to get rid of as quickly as possible, but “the thermometer of the holiness and perfection of a priest”, he wrote. And he ended his reflections by saying, “The prayer of the Divine Office is for a priest

a source of unending consolation. Just the thought of going to sing God's praises fills him with fervour and love".

The available written testimonies about Fr. Camisassa's celebration of the Eucharist state that he was attentive and aware of the mystery he celebrated. Fr. Sales wrote, "Every morning he rose at 5.00 a.m., made his meditation, and then with great devotion celebrated Mass." This is what he did for all his life. Three days before his death, after having been bed-ridden and unable to celebrate for some time, in the morning he asked to be helped in vesting for the celebration of Mass. To everybody's astonishment, he succeeded in celebrating clearly and distinctly the whole Mass and then, exhausted, fell back on his bed. It was his last Mass, during which, together with Jesus Christ the High Priest, he offered his own "sacrifice".

What Fr. Allamano said after Fr. Camisassa's death is quite in keeping with the above: "Somebody told me that, not long before his death, Fr. Camisassa had said, 'If I had to live my life all over again, I doubt I would do anything different. Thank God, I have always worked with purity of intention, for the greatest glory of God and my own sanctification.' He must have said this as it came from his heart, otherwise he would not have said it."

Fr. Camisassa was a priest who aimed at decreasing, by "considering as nothing" all external things. He strove to live constantly trying to do everything for God alone. Every day he prayed, "Lord, grant that I may do everything in such a way that it pleases you." That is how he wanted to do everything, no matter how great or small it was. Here lay the secret of his fortitude in the midst of trials and misunderstandings. If a priest considers the things of this world as "vanishing phantoms in the sight of God", he roots himself in the Eternal, and this explains his life's faithfulness.

A Teacher and a Scholar

By appointing Fr. Camisassa as a Canon, Archbishop Riccardi did not mean only to invite him to give more time to prayer in his life (if there were any need), but also and especially to reward his service in teaching the young clergy.

After the re-opening of the Pastoral Institute at the Consolata Shrine (October 1882), Fr. Camisassa was at first assistant-lecturer and then Lecturer of Moral Theology and, for some time, also of Civil and Canon Law. A doctor in Theology since 1878, on 15th June 1887, he was appointed by Card. G. Alimonda as one of the seven members of the Board for the new Faculty of Civil and Canon Law. In 1895 Pope Leo XIII approved the Statutes of the Faculty and, consequently, the members of the Board as well as the students who graduated could use "lawyer" as their title. By looking at some of the documents prepared on various occasions by Fr. Camisassa, one may easily notice his knowledge in matters of law and the strict logic of his thinking and arguing. In 1899 Canon Camisassa became a member also of the Board for the Faculty of Theology, and on 10th April 1901, Card. A. Richelmy appointed him a Synodal Judge for the Archdiocese of Turin.

In 1900, overwhelmed by all the work for the restoration of the Shrine and the preparation for the new Missionary Institute, Fr. Camisassa withdrew from teaching, to the regret of all concerned; he did it in his quiet way, but he suffered because of this: for him teaching meant giving the best of himself. Available testimonies speak of his great abilities and gifts as a lecturer and scholar, in contrast to the kind of life that he lived, full of responsibilities of a totally different kind.

Fr. Sales wrote, "In an examination required for a special responsibility in the Diocese, out of six candidates Fr. Camisassa came out first and, according to Card. Alimonda, 'far above all others'." Canon Roetti on this occasion said that Fr. Camisassa's work could have been published as presented, without any need of corrections or improvements of any sort.

It is said that the famous moral theologian G. B. Bertagna thought that Fr. Camisassa could have had textbooks of his own in any field of theology easily published, and that Professor D. Dervieux said, "As a lecturer he was gifted above common standards; he had truly mastered his subject, knew it through and through, and could get it across even to the least gifted of his students."

Mgr. Baima said of him, "Everybody admired him for his profound intelligence, and because he was a man of counsel, learnt and holy. His personality could be summarized as follows: a man of faith. Faith was his greatest virtue; it forged his judgements and reasoning, perfected his knowledge, and made his lectures in Moral Theology extremely valuable for the young priests."

Canon N. Baravalle stated that "Fr. Camisassa had the rare gift of making the studying of Moral Theology (which at times can be arid and boring) pleasant and interesting, thanks to his great clarity of thinking. He was clear and precise, even concise in his explanation, in order not to bury the main ideas under a lot of peripheral ones. The conclusions he drew, so clear and precise, made his students feel at ease with the life-situations they would have to face."

Fr. Borda-Bossana mentioned the "thick exercise books" on which Fr. Camisassa kept his notes, taken mostly from his favourites authors: St. Alphonsus Liguori, Fr. (now Saint) Joseph Cafasso, and others. These thick exercise books, even if neglected, are now safely kept in the Archives of the Consolata Missionaries.

In a way it was a pity that Fr. Camisassa had to leave teaching, a work that he liked so much and was quite capable of performing. However, all the activities at the Consolata Shrine and the preparations for the Missionary Institute claimed all his time, as well as his technical abilities and experience. With a great spirit of faith he gave up teaching and part of his heart with it. But Mission is such a great work that he would never regret having abandoned his brilliant career as a lecturer in order to work in the shadow of the Consolata Shrine and of Fr. Allamano. He firmly believed in Fr. Allamano's missionary vocation; consequently he chose to remain and work with him, so that God's work could become "gigantic". All his life and his heart were centred on the Consolata: her Shrine and her Missionary Institute.

Chapter 3 THE PATHS OF MISSION

Birth of a Missionary Institute

When Fr. Allamano started thinking of a missionary institute, he often talked at length about this with his inseparable “Vice-Rector”, Fr. Camisassa. The latter fully agreed with Fr. Allamano’s missionary plans; he admired his daring dreams, and foresaw that he himself would be personally involved in missionary work, thus realizing his priesthood to the full. Fr. Camisassa not only accepted to collaborate, but made his own his friend’s plan, and would be close to him throughout the whole of this venture, of which none of the two could see all the implications at that time. It was a great and difficult risk to face, but they would face it together, as one heart and soul, because that was God’s will. There was no hesitation: in the name of Our Lady Consolata and mutually supporting each other, they began this new journey together. It is characteristic of friendship to share everything without counting the cost, and together risk everything for the same ventures.

They divided the various tasks between themselves. Fr. T. Gays, IMC, wrote, “While Fr. Allamano with fine tact began sounding the competent Church authorities, Fr. Camisassa began studying Africa in all its aspects: the continent itself, its geography, regions, climates, environments, etc. Pouring over various maps, he could envision the rivers and all other characteristics...” Above all, he was interested in people, people who were waiting for Christ. Fr. G. Gallea, IMC, wrote, “It was Fr. Camisassa’s task to study the ways of access to the African continent; all the available books written by explorers became familiar to him: Stanley’s, Peters’, Bottego’s and others’. From that time on, any new publication on Africa came into his hands, and he studied, examined, took notes, and shared and discussed everything with Fr. Allamano. He became like a captain who prepared the strategy for a battle, with all the details needed to win it, and then presented his plan to his general.”

It should be kept in mind that all this work did not take place during times of holidays or quiet, but while the works of restoration and enlargement of the Consolata Shrine were in full swing. There were days when Fr. Allamano, frustrated by the many difficulties his missionary plan had to face, was tempted to give up. But “close to him, was his faithful Vice-Rector, solid as a rock, docile as a child, humble as a truly just man. He fought with so much passion as if the plan were the fruit of his brain” (Fr. T. Gays).

So, in 1891 Fr. Allamano was able to send to the competent Vatican Offices (in Rome) a draft of a “Rule” for a missionary institute. Naturally, Fr. Camisassa had given his valuable collaboration in preparing it. The Vatican Offices, usually slow in approving new ventures, this time were surprisingly quick. Everything was all right, and they wanted to see the plan become a reality soon. Fr. Allamano, however, preferred to wait. He did not want to proceed without the backing of the Church in Piedmont, and he knew that the Bishops in Piedmont were not yet ready for it.

Almost ten years went by. In 1897 Archbishop Riccardi died. The new Archbishop, Card. Agostino Richelmy, was a former class-mate and a friend of Fr. Allamano. The time seemed ripe for the foundation of the Missionary Institute, but... in January 1900, Fr. Allamano became so seriously sick as to be near death. Miraculously he recovered and, without wasting time, in April 1900 he presented to the Cardinal an official request for the “foundation”.

Nothing changed in the daily programme of the two friends, Frs. Allamano and Camisassa. Every day they went to the Cathedral to pray the Divine Office with the other Canons, and devoutly, calmly and attentively they prayed the One who had kindled so much fire in their hearts to spread this fire near and far.

The Year of Mission

1901: year of the Consolata Mission.

Having received the “go-ahead” from the Cardinal, Fr. Allamano started thinking of a house for his missionaries. He had been given as an inheritance a house on the street called “Corso Duca di Genova” (now “Corso Stati Uniti”) in Turin, and he asked Fr. Camisassa to see how it could be transformed from a boarding house for girls into the first house of the Consolata Missionaries. It would eventually be called “Consolatina” (little Consolata).

The works of adaptation started immediately and went on at a very good pace. The Chapel was provided with an entrance from “Corso Duca di Genova”, and on the entrance arch were inscribed the words of the prophet Isaiah that summarized the purpose of the new Institute: “Et annuntiabunt gloriam meam gentibus” (They shall proclaim my glory to the peoples).

On 18 June 1901, Card. Richelmy, assisted by Frs. Allamano and Camisassa, at the presence of many friends and sympathizers, blessed the Chapel, which was also to be open to people from outside. During the homily, the Archbishop warmly invited the people of Turin to support the beginnings of the Missionary Institute that would extend beyond the oceans the boundaries of the Church in Turin. One of the future missionaries (a priest), assisted by two young laymen, celebrated the Eucharist there for the first time. Then the people present were invited to visit the house.

The July 1901 issue of “La Consolata” magazine described the house as follows: “Wholesome, pleasant, and comfortable in its simplicity, the house offers to the young priests and laymen who are preparing for missionary work the peace, quiet and recollection that are required by study and prayer. The small, well-ventilated, white-walled and neat bed-rooms, the big dining-room, the narrow corridors and the study-rooms, everything gives a sense of simplicity, strength and saintly joy.”

The house was soon inhabited by the first group of young priests and laymen who were preparing for missionary work by studying languages and other useful subjects, and by praying and living together. One of them wrote, “Dr. G. Boccasso and his University assistant, Dr. Colla, are teaching us medicine at the “Consolatina”; for nursing practice we go to Dr. Anglesio at St. John’s Hospital; Dr. Zoppi teaches us

basic eye-care; professor Tua is teaching us how to read and draw maps, and also natural sciences; for English classes we go to the Berlitz School of Languages on the street called “Via Roma”. We also have workshop practice of carpentry with Mr. Caneparo: we learn to make many useful things with simple tools, like hatchet, saw, etc. And we also practice horse-riding at the Martinetto...” It is obvious that, from the very beginning, the training offered to the future missionaries was characterized by a useful practical sense, so dear to Fr. Allamano and so congenial to Fr. Camisassa.

How serious the preparation offered was, may also be seen by considering the kind of teachers provided: Frs. Allamano and Camisassa did not take just anybody, but chose people well-qualified, knowledgeable and trustworthy.

Fr. Allamano’s days became increasingly busier, but he always found ways of meeting the young people preparing for mission, and he took care of them with a passion that is proper to saints. The organization and practical aspects were left to the creativity of Fr. Camisassa who, once more, showed how well he could handle them.

First Departure

The first group of Consolata Missionaries was soon ready to leave for Africa. They were Frs. Tommaso Gays and Filippo Perlo, and Brs. Celeste Russo and Luigi Falda. They were all quite young: Frs. Allamano and Camisassa had confidence in young people!

The ceremony of the “missionary mandate” with the giving of crucifixes to those who were leaving took place in the Chapel of the “Consolatina” in the presence of relatives and a few friends. Card. Richelmy himself wanted to preside, and Frs. Allamano and Camisassa were at his side. The celebration deeply touched everybody: it was the beginning of a new venture that at that time was quite complex. On 8 May 1902, before leaving Turin, the four missionaries went to say “good-bye” to the good Card. Richelmy who had played such a great part in the foundation of the Institute. He was touched, and said very little. Before giving his blessing, he asked everyone present not to say anything about what he was going to do, and knelt down to kiss the feet of the four missionaries: a biblical gesture, full of humility and of trust in Isaiah’s saying, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who proclaim the good news!”

It was Fr. Camisassa who accompanied the young missionaries to Marseilles (France). He attended to all their needs with loving care, so as to make the departure easier for them...; he even took them to visit the zoo. In the morning before embarking, they went to celebrate Mass at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Guard, where there is a beautiful view of the sea. It was the 10 May, 1902. When the time came, they went on board of the “Oxus”, a German ship for long sea-journeys. Fr. Camisassa had a look at the cabins that had been booked for them, to make sure that everything was in order. At the first signal for departure, they gathered in prayer and Fr. Camisassa, deeply touched, blessed them. Then he left the ship and remained on the jetty until the ship started moving.

How many times would he repeat what he had just done, which was a cause of suffering for him? He did not know... He could dream of Africa and somehow see it through the eyes of those who were going there. Fr. Philip Perlo, a nephew of Fr. Camisassa, remembering all that his uncle did, and how he did it in preparing their departure, wrote: "One could see that Africa was his ideal, his passion. Often he manifested his missionary heart with enthusiastic expressions about missionary work. When, in the evening of very busy days, he was tired, the word 'Africa' was enough to give him new strength and to make him forget his tiredness." He would say, "I, too, am going with them, through them." His heart was truly going with them every time he accompanied some of them to embark!

Equipment for Departing Missionaries

In the last decades of the 19th century a good number of missionary groups had gone to Africa. For many of them, however, because of insufficient preparation and equipment, the contact with Africa proved fatal. To make sure that this would not happen to the Consolata Missionaries, Fr. Camisassa had been in touch for a long time with the Italian Consul in Zanzibar and with the Holy Ghost Missionaries, next to whom the Consolata Missionaries would work; he studied and learnt from the experience of explorers, too. Based on all this, he prepared excellent equipment for the departing missionaries, especially for the very first group.

Fr. T. Gays wrote, "All we have been provided with is of excellent quality, because it has to last for a long time and has to fit different climates. We have been given a black and a white cassock, kaki suits, cotton and light wool shirts, good underwear, large handkerchiefs, a raincoat, a mantle, stout leather shoes, a sun helmet, a walking stick and a jack-knife. Naturally, we have been given a portable altar, complete with everything. This was prepared according to practical criteria studied by Fr. Camisassa himself. Besides all this, we have been given cooking equipment, a well stocked First Aid Box, a small "library" with spiritual and other books and with the Codes of Italian and British Laws, a good tent and folding beds... Also some scientific equipment has been provided: a sextant, a barometer, a maximum and minimum aneroid thermometer, a camera and material for developing film and printing photographs to be published on "La Consolata" magazine, etc." Fr. Gays concludes his list as follows: "We also have all kinds of needles and threads and various kinds of scissors; pens and ink, pencils, writing paper, etc." The last things mentioned were to remind them of being faithful in writing letters and keeping diaries.

Frs. Allamano and Camisassa certainly did all they could, so that their missionaries would be properly equipped for the new and difficult situations they had to face.

Shipping Equipment to Africa

In the first weeks of June 1902, the four missionaries on the Oxus, after a brief stop at Zanzibar, reached Mombasa (Kenya) and disembarked. They went to Nairobi by train, from there to Limuru, and finally, with a memorable and long journey on foot,

they went as far as Tuthu, in the Kikuyu region. At Tuthu, a beautiful mountain area on the slopes of the Aberdare, about 2000 m. above sea level, they were kindly welcomed by Chief Karoli who had been waiting for them.

While the missionaries were finding their way through the forest, Fr. Camisassa, in Turin, did not delay in contacting various firms that would provide the machines needed at Tuthu to start a saw-mill that would produce wooden boards and beams needed to build the first mission centres in that area of the Country.

A large belt saw, a plane machine, a mortising machine, a large drill, and a Pelton turbine were manufactured in such a way that all the disassembled parts could be carried on men's shoulders. In fact, the only way to reach Tuthu was in caravan, on foot, with the help of some mules. Fr. Camisassa increased his knowledge of mechanics: together with the firms, he studied the problems, and proposed imaginative and creative solutions. He made sure that everything was solidly packed, so that nothing could get spoiled by the banging the goods would undergo when disembarked. Together with the machinery, he sent very clear, precise, and detailed technical drawings, as well as instructions on how to re-assemble the various parts of the machines. Everything was considered, even bolts and screws. He was aware that anything missing or not clear could paralyse the re-assembling and the usefulness of the machines.

In the following years, using the same methods, he sent to Kenya the first electricity generators, a threshing machine, grinding mills, and machinery needed to treat coffee berries and beans. Later on he also sent a complete printing press and the other machines needed to print the first monthly paper printed in Kenya, the "Wathiomu Mukinyu" (True Friend) in Kikuyu. The man who provided all this while burdened by the works at the Consolata Shrine, the "Consolatina", "La Consolata" magazine, and the building of the new Mother House, certainly was a "true friend" of the African people!

Like any other activity, missionary work requires a lot of background activities carried out by people who do not appear and remain unknown. Fr. Camisassa, a man who could have become famous by lecturing and publishing books on Theology, accepted, as he had accepted to be Fr. Allamano's Vice-Rector, to burden himself with all the hidden work required to provide the ever growing missions with all they needed.

Fr. G. Barlassina, IMC, wrote: "It was in supplying all the material needed by the missions that Fr. Camisassa showed his concern and love for them. The shipments were master-pieces of organization. Nothing escaped his attention: the needs of churches, houses, communities, as well as individuals. Everything was either made on order, or carefully searched for and selected, after examining, comparing, etc."

Around 1910, Fr. V. Dolza, IMC, started helping Fr. Camisassa in his work. However, until the moment of his death, the latter continued to make sure by himself that every single thing sent to the missionaries was the right one. First at the "Consolatina" and then at the new Mother House, Fr. Camisassa always worked, expertly using the needed tools (saw, hammer, pincers, etc.) for long periods of time,

until everything was properly packed and fixed in the various containers used for shipment. He adopted and adapted for himself the saying of St. Martin, “I do not refuse work”, especially when this work was for a purpose that filled his heart.

Note-book and Drafts

Having noticed that Fr. Camisassa kept a note-book on his bedside table, somebody dared to ask him the reason for it. He answered, “When I awake during the night, some good ideas come to my mind, and I make a note of them, so that I will not forget them. At times I fill a few pages with such thoughts...”

In the silence of the night, Fr. Camisassa finalized projects, decided what had to be done first, looked for solutions to problems that had arisen, planned what needed to be done the next day, etc. As the years went by, the amount of time taken up by letter-writing kept increasing. In order to take care of all the letters, he was forced to use more and more time. All the official letters to Vatican or Government Offices were drafted by him. Fr. Allamano looked at them, made some occasional comments and, when finalized, signed them. The Archives of the Consolata Missionary Institute contain all these well thought-out drafts, with a number of abbreviations, all of his own. Also the work required by financial administration and book-keeping took place at night.

Fr. G. Barlassina remarked, “We knew that the days were always too short for Fr. Camisassa. He kept on working till mid-night and beyond. Then he went to bed, but I do not know how he could sleep with all the thoughts and worries that were on his mind. Some bright ideas came to him during the night, and he jotted them down on his note-book. That’s the kind of man he was!”

The New Mother House

The “Consolatina” became soon insufficient to accommodate all the people who came to prepare themselves for mission. Frs. Allamano and Camisassa talked at length about this, and in 1905 they started looking for a suitable place where to build a new House. They found some land they liked on “Via della Circonvallazione” (now “Corso Ferrucci”) and bought 12,000 square metres of it. All around there were only meadow-land and vegetable gardens. Now it is a central part of the city of Turin. They asked the architect Ruffoni to prepare a plan for the new House, that had to be plain, capable of accommodating about 200 people divided into various communities (professed Brothers and Fathers, Novices, and Students), and open to further expansion...

From the financial point of view, the situation was difficult: the ever growing missionary work in Kenya required large amounts of money... Frs. Allamano and Camisassa gave all they had of their own, burdened themselves with further restrictions, and above all they had a great trust in Divine Providence. At a certain point, Fr. Allamano felt some scruples and spoke about them to the Prefect of “Propaganda Fide” in Rome: “I am afraid that the architect has prepared a plan that is

too big. Will we be able to fill the new House?” Card. Gotti answered, “Go ahead with it; do not worry. We must not tie Our Lady’s hands.”

These words re-assured him that he was following God’s will; so, in 1906 the works started, and the main part of the building was completed in 1908. During this time, Fr. Camisassa went every day from the Consolata Shrine to the construction site. He climbed scaffolds to check the work being done, examined all the material used (sand, bricks, cement, etc.) and, as usual, checked everything from the foundations to the roof: pipes and appliances for gas, water and electricity; window frames, door locks, etc. Architect Ruffoni, with some annoyance mixed with admiration, used to say, “With him I have to give in at all times!” As it had to be expected, there were also some frictions, due to his constant and minute checking; however, there was nothing as serious as what had happened during the works of restoration at the Shrine. Masons and all others realized that he was not just a priest like most of the others: he was quite competent in a lot of things, and for this reason they respected him, and very much appreciated his praises for their good work. Everybody knew that Fr. Camisassa was quite demanding, but not for his own satisfaction; he was such because that building had to be used for training missionaries, had to be a home for apostles and, consequently, everything in it had to be cared for, even the least details.

Also Fr. Gallea, IMC, wrote about the way Fr. Camisassa used to oversee the various works that were going on: “I had just arrived at the Institute, and the seminarians were painting doors and windows. As I started helping with this work, Fr. Camisassa came behind me, looked at the way I was doing it, and asked me if anybody had ever taught me how to paint doors in such a way that the brush marks would not remain visible. Then he took the brush from my hand and gave a light first coat of paint. After this, he told me, ‘You will give the second coat tomorrow, drawing the brush in the opposite direction. When you finally give the third coat, do it from top to bottom: you will see that there will be no brush marks left’.” Fr. Gallea concluded, “I learnt that there are different ways of doing the same work, but in the Institute everyone had to learn to do everything perfectly. And when, on a certain day, a lecturer from the Giaveno diocesan Seminary (where I had come from) asked me, ‘What is the Vice-Rector doing at the Institute? Is he teaching Theology?’, I answered him that he was not, but that he was teaching us to do well everything we were doing.”

Dialogue

After Vatican II, this word has become a kind of “magic” word, used in all situations, among all kinds of people, at times without realizing that the first one to dialogue with us was the Lord himself. Dialogue is God’s way, and Jesus became a master of it.

Also Frs. Allamano and Camisassa dialogued with one another, for 42 years, and without getting tired of doing so. Dialogue became for them the source of strength and capability for friendship, which sustained them in their life together. After lunch, as they took a cup of coffee in Fr. Allamano’s office, they talked; they communicated to one another the various events, great or small, out of a need to have the other person’s

opinion; they aimed at discovering God's will in everything and, as we would say today, the signs of the times. They had promised to always tell one another "the truth in charity", and they did so. After supper, they met again to reflect on what had been done during the day, and to plan for the next day: nothing formal or rigid; everything went on in that atmosphere of clarity, search and joy that derived from their working and living together.

Years went by; their hairs became grey, but their dialogue never ceased; it continued throughout all their activities and the very different roles that each of them performed. They usually spent two hours a day in dialoguing. These two priests, who were so worried about wasting any bit of time, did not consider a waste the time spent in clarifying ideas, searching more deeply into problems, reaching conclusions. Their meetings were a source of peace for Fr. Allamano: he knew that the man next to him was sincere and capable of challenging him when necessary, but also attentive and faithful in carrying out his decisions as if they had come directly from God. In fact, what they did together was to search for God's will.

The Man behind the Scenes

Fr. Camisassa was never "on stage", as an actor. He was, rather, "the man behind the scenes", ready to do at a sign from the "director" whatever had to be done.

In 1903 Fr. Philip Perlo was appointed Superior of the group of Consolata Missionaries in Kenya. In 1904 all those missionaries assembled at Fort Hall (now Murang'a) to reflect on their work and to plan for the future. The plan of work devised by that "Conference" (as it came to be known) proved to be quite appropriate and effective, so that in the following years the results of missionary work were quite good. This led into a problem. Initially Fr. Allamano had accepted a condition given by Bishop Allgeyer and his Holy Ghost Missionaries, i.e., never to ask the competent Vatican Office to entrust to the Consolata Missionaries that area where they started working. However, as a consequence of the development achieved, Fr. Perlo felt the need to have that area, so that the Consolata Missionaries could continue working there with the method that gave such good fruits.

Frs. Allamano and Camisassa realized the seriousness of the situation, and felt that something had to be done... They informed Card. Gotti, the Prefect of "Propaganda Fide", about the situation; he asked them to write a report clearly describing it, so that he could submit it to the next Plenary Meeting of "Propaganda". Following an outline drawn up together with Fr. Allamano, Fr. Camisassa wrote a full report (55 pages!) in his own clear and logical style, whose conclusion was the felt need to separate from the Apostolic Vicariate of Zanzibar the "Mission of Kenya", making it independent and entrusting it to the Consolata Missionaries. Card. Richelmy, in his own handwriting, added his recommendation for the request.

In 1905 Fr. Camisassa himself went to Rome to present the report, and also to meet Pope Pius X, who told him words of encouragement. On 14 September 1905, the Plenary Meeting of "Propaganda Fide" accepted the request presented, and by means

of a decree established the independent “Mission of Kenya” to be entrusted to the Consolata Missionaries. Fr. F. Perlo was appointed Superior of the “Mission”.

Four years later, seeing the great development achieved, “Propaganda Fide” raised the “Mission of Kenya” to the rank of Apostolic Vicariate (decree of 12 July 1909), and named Fr. Filippo Perlo as its first Apostolic Vicar. His Ordination as Bishop took place in the Consolata Shrine, in Turin, on 23 October 1909. At the end of the celebration, Frs. Allamano and Camisassa (the “director” and the “man behind the scenes”), deeply moved, knelt in front of the new Bishop for his blessing.

A Missionary Family

All members of Bishop Perlo’s family, through Fr. Camisassa, gradually became involved in the work of the Consolata Missionaries. Fr. Camisassa’s gratitude to his sister Anna Maria lasted through all his life: she understood his call and supported him on his way to the priesthood by sacrificing herself; she even delayed getting married for this. Only at 32 she married Antonio Perlo, of the same town (Caramagna). They had five children: Philip, Gabriel, Luigi, Margherita and Agnesina. All three boys became Consolata Missionaries: Philip (1873-1948), who had first intended to join the White Fathers, but then joined the Consolata Missionaries and became the first Apostolic Vicar of the “Vicariate of Kenya”; Gabriel (1879-1948), who also worked in Kenya for 22 years, then was sent to Somalia, and became Bishop of Mogadishu; Luigi (1884-1970), who also worked in Kenya, and then was entrusted with other tasks of responsibility in the Institute.

Fr. Camisassa, who certainly played some part in his nephews’ vocations, involved also his two nieces in working for the missions. Margherita, a nursery school teacher at Caramagna, went to help her uncle first at the Shrine, and then as Secretary and Book-keeper for “La Consolata” magazine, thus relieving him of a lot of work. As the work grew, also the younger sister, Agnesina, was asked to help and she did it, interrupting the Teacher Training courses she had undertaken.

Finally, also Fr. Camisassa’s brother-in-law, on his retirement, moved to Turin, followed by his wife as well, and became involved in various tasks in order to help the good “Vice-Rector”: collecting and delivering goods, dealing with Post Office and Banks, etc. The whole family was attracted by Fr. Camisassa to work for the missions, not for the advantages he could have from this, but because he was convinced that working for the evangelization of peoples was a great privilege, a grace, for everyone.

Caring for Missionary Brothers

The Brothers have always been an integral part of Fr. Allamano’s missionary project. They had to evangelize by contributing to the development of peoples, mostly through their manual work, by being close to the common people, and by being living examples of a life totally given to Christ. They were considered “indispensable” for missionary work, as Fr. Allamano stated.

Fr. Camisassa had a special liking for the Brothers, and dealt with them in a friendly way; and they liked him, too. They were aware of his technical know-how, and consulted him when it was opportune. He supported them also with spiritual advice, in order to help them being faithful to their vocation, which could be quite demanding at times. Some of his letters to Br. Benedetto Falda, who went to Kenya at a very young age and had to work in particularly difficult situations, were spiritually very nourishing, and also very helpful for the practical work of the Brothers.

Here is one of them:

Turin, 8th March 1904

Dearest Brother Benedetto,

Yesterday I received your letter dated 3rd February. You cannot imagine how pleased I was to hear that the work at the saw-mill is going on well and that you are happy with your work. Be sure that it is an authentic apostolate, like that of the priests who preach. All your work manifests to the Kikuyu people the dignity that belongs to human work, and stimulates them to learn and do what you are doing to improve their conditions.

I am telling you these things because I want to strengthen yours and the other Brothers' belief that you are authentic missionaries, even by working as carpenters, masons, farmers, etc. All you have to do is to work with a spirit of faith, willingly, happily, in harmony with one another, and remembering at all times that the good Lord sees you as you aim at giving good example.

With a spirit of faith: Knowing that God sees you, do everything as if Jesus himself were right next to you, so that he could see whether you do everything well, and praise you.

Willingly: as if you were never tired; never wasting time!

Happily: always with a smile on your lips, not being sad. Even if at times you are sad, do not let it show. Especially never deal harshly with the African people.

In harmony: dealing with one another with great charity, helping one another; in a word, being one in heart and soul, true brothers in the Lord Jesus.

Good example: The local people may perhaps be rather simple, but they see, observe, and are led to do what you do. Your example will probably remain impressed in their minds for the whole of their lives. Please, be careful not to scandalize anyone! When I speak of good example, I mean also little things, like not losing patience, being always gentle and kind, etc. Always give good example in everything!

I realize I started preaching to you. However, I do not mean to upset you; I only want to help your being good, living and working as true missionaries. How many things I would like to tell you, Benedetto, as well as the others, as I did when we were here together.

Before ending this part of the letter, I wish to inform you that Fr. Rector (Fr. Allamano) was very happy when I let him read your letter: he was pleased to hear that you are happy with your work, that the local people like you and have begun helping you at the saw-mill. This is good because, if they like you, they will listen willingly to some good words you may tell them. Even very few words, if said with faith, make you an apostle, by means of your work and good words.

Now I wish to say something about the saw-mill. From what you told me, I realize that you have been producing better works than before. However, I think it is urgent to install the large circular saw (over 1 m. in diameter): on its own, it will easily do all

the work you have been doing with the belt-saw, which will thus be available for other jobs.

Did you receive the parcel I sent you by post, containing 24 m. of saw-belt, and the leather rings for the fly-wheels? I also sent another parcel to Limuru, on 24 February, containing other spare parts; another one I sent, containing leather belts for the machines. Another thing I sent you is a high quality mineral oil. There is also a better quality, more expensive.

Please, when you install the mortising machine, be careful: make sure that the belts will make the tools rotate in the right direction; if they rotate in the opposite direction, they are extremely dangerous: they act like flying bullets! Follow the drawings here enclosed, and make sure that everybody is aware of the above. Soon I will send you the drawings for doors and windows, together with wooden models.

The members of your family, at home, are all very well. I personally gave your letter to your dad.

Give my best regards to everyone who is with you at the saw-mill. Keep well.

Very affectionately yours,
Fr. James Camisassa

In the first part of the letter, all the affection and care for the young Brother (only 22 at the time) who is far away appears quite clearly. In the second part, instead, we see a man, who has experience of machines and is aware of possible dangers, talking to a working partner. It is a letter of a person who is truly a missionary, and is convinced that Mission is made up of proclamation, witness of life, sacrifice, and hard work.

Chapter 4 **ALL FOR MISSION**

Visiting the missions

Ten years after the beginning of the Consolata missions in Kenya, the missionaries who were working there requested a visit from their Founder, so that he could not only to see what had been done, but also to clarify and specify a number of matters that were urgent at that stage of the missions' development.

Fr. Allamano also had a very great desire to meet his sons, to see with his own eyes what they had done, but the work at the Shrine, the two Institutes, and his other commitments in the diocese, together with his health problems, kept him away from them. So, he decided that Fr. Camisassa, his very faithful collaborator, would go on an official visit to the missions, with full powers to see, consider, and decide what was needed.

Fr. Camisassa left Turin on 8 February 1911 with the intention of returning in November of the same year. However, the problems of the missions would keep him in Kenya much longer. He was back in Turin only on 26 April 1912. He spent in Kenya 14 months of a very intense life.

In the various missions, he was welcomed not only by the missionaries, but also by the local people, the chiefs, and the elders. On his very first stop, at Limuru, he wrote in his diary, "I meet men, women, and children. The elders spray their hand with saliva and shake their hand with me, as a sign of great respect. The young warriors look at me without fear; I notice a great sense of familiarity with our missionaries. Ten years after their arrival in Kenya, the good fruit of their work can be seen. Usually, the local people tend to shun the presence of Europeans, but they welcome the missionaries".

Bishop Perlo, his nephew, accompanied Fr. Camisassa in a first quick visit to the various missions: Ichagaki, Gaichanjiru, Fort Hall, Kaheti, Gikondi, Karima, Tuthu, Nyeri. Everywhere there were great crowds to welcome the "great visitor", first among all, the catechists, the newly baptized, and the catechumens. He felt as if he had known them, as a consequence of having read the letters and articles of Bishop Perlo and others. He knew the difficulties of the various missions, the names of the chiefs, catechists and first Christians. He saw the organization of the various missions, the teaching of the catechumens, the little schools, and orphanages. He was moved and he exulted for what had been achieved in a few years: "All is God's grace, Our Lady Consolata's gift, fruit of our Founder's daring faith and of the missionaries' sacrifices", he commented on various occasions.

He was greatly enthused by the development of the farms, the coffee plantations; he appreciated the daily increasing contribution of the local people; he was happy to see the people's interest about the new cultivation's systems introduced by the missionaries, and he became convinced more than ever that the ways of evangelization had to pass through human promotion, as Fr. Allamano, with prophetic intuition, had wanted.

When he reached Tuthu, the first mission started by our missionaries, he felt as if he were dreaming: a well established workshop in the heart of the forest; the machines that he had sent, well placed and functional; the wooden houses that he had seen in the missions had been prepared there. The 400 m. long canal, dug out of various kinds of rock in order to lead water to the turbine, made him burst into an enthusiastic expression: "Very good! It's a marvellous work!"

Fr. Camisassa, however, had not gone to Kenya just to see things, but to meet the missionaries: the Consolata Fathers and Brothers, and the Cottolengo Sisters who were there. For this reason, individual and community meetings were planned to evaluate life, works, methods, and to reflect on the general situation; Spiritual Retreats were planned as well.

It must be said that, in seeing people and things, Fr. Camisassa was influenced by his nephew, Bishop Perlo, whose very rich personality, talents and abilities coloured everything. As a consequence, even missionaries who were suffering because of a very austere style of life that the Bishop himself lived and was imposing on the others, did not have the courage to share that situation with the Co-Founder. Only much later

Fr. Camisassa came to realize what had happened.

However, he was not so greatly influenced as not to see situations that needed to be improved. He used strong expressions to clarify, correct, and admonish when necessary: he had been authorized to do so when the Founder sent him to Kenya.

Fr. Camisassa clearly and diligently recorded everything, in order to inform Fr. Allamano. His letters, 8 to 10 pages long, followed one another. He pointed out weaknesses and deficiencies, but he also noticed, “the good that was being done, which was a lot”. He assured the Founder, “The results are consoling, as I will be able to tell you orally later; it is clear that Our Lord is blessing the work, and that, after all, he is the one who directs the ship...”

While Fr. Camisassa was in Kenya, the Meru region unexpectedly opened up to the Gospel. He joyfully informed the Founder on 16 July 1911: “Dearly beloved Father, I am writing to you again, after only three days, in order to give you the good news that we have finally obtained permission to open a mission in Meru. Our Lady Consolata has blessed us again, and we wholeheartedly say *Deo gratias!* Let’s hope that everything will go well. In a few days, Bishop Perlo and two other missionaries will go to select a place and begin some initial work. I would like to go with them, but the Bishop is afraid that the hardships of a beginning, like living in a tent, etc., may not be good for my health. We shall see...”

Meru is in the North-Eastern part of Kenya, with a population of about half a million; the people are simple and good, and the land is very fertile and intensely cultivated. Frs. Cagliero and Saroglia, who have just returned from there, say that it is an earthly paradise, even better than Kikuyu-land”.

Eventually, Fr. Camisassa visited the Meru region after a hard caravan journey of 450 km. during which he was marking on a map suitable places for future missions. He returned full of enthusiasm, and he offered appropriate suggestions for future work, both in Meru and in Kikuyu-land: prudence; goodness in relating to all, including our separated brethren; patience, faith, and courage for both an apostolate of presence and of action.

Together with Bishop Perlo (because of his pioneering experience), Fr. Camisassa also studied the possibility of entering Ethiopia from the North of Kenya, via Moyale, in order to reach the Galla people, knowing that Fr. Allamano still had to heart that idea.

They worked out some fairly detailed plans that Fr. Camisassa intended to present to Rome on his return to Italy. On 11 December 1911, he wrote to Fr. Allamano, “I have written a confidential note to Mgr. Bonzano, kindly asking him to help Fr. Luigi Barlassina to find and send to me soon a map of Abissinia with the latest divisions of Vicariates there. Please, see if at the Institute they have *all* the maps attached to Bottego’s book, plus the one that was attached to Card. Massaia’s book and, please, send them *all* to me *as soon as possible*, to Limuru... Having studied well the possibility here, together with Bishop Perlo, it would be convenient if you could meet me in Rome (I will disembark at Naples), so that we may present concrete proposals to Card. Gotti...”

Technical implications of Fr. Camisassa’s letters

Of the time spent in Kenya by Fr. Camisassa, there remains 44 very long letters, full of information, plans, and observations about places and local culture, and also questions about technical or practical matters.

Here are some excerpts.

“I would be interested in knowing from the Visetti or Nigra people if and how it is possible to make soil mix and adhere to cement so as to make concrete-blocks (for building) that will not fall apart... Also, what could be applied to a wall built with unbaked bricks so that it will not absorb water and remain hard and smooth?” (29 November 1911).

“I was happy to know that the sample of clay I sent was found very good for bricks and roof-tiles: these are as needed as daily bread... Two priests, or Brothers, who will be coming to Kenya, should go to Pianezza to learn really well how to bake clay... I will send another sample of clay, which is probably also suitable and has the advantage of being at hand, on the surface, and not down deep as the previous one...” (4 August 1911).

“One or two Sisters should study Electricity, because soon we shall need electric plants and equipment, whose surveillance would be better entrusted to the Sisters, as the Pope has entrusted to Sisters the Astronomical Observatory of the Vatican. I said ‘surveillance’, because the repairs shall have to be performed by Giuseppe, who should immediately begin to take a course for electrical fitters, for which it is easy to find books, material, and clarifications from the industrial professional schools of Turin...”

“Talking about Brothers, it would be very useful, indeed necessary, if one of them could learn to work stones (cut and shape them), and even more to build walls Biella-style, like the side-walls of the big canal at St. Ignatius’. The kind of stone we have here is sandstone, which is soft enough to be cut and shaped with the tools I provided five years ago. The Brother should acquire experience in making flat surfaces, angles, squares, trapeziums, etc. This is something that one learns only by doing. You could have some rough pieces of stones, like the ones we put into the foundations, and choose the softest kind with which the Brother should practice making the suggested shapes... He could also practice making rough walls (Biella-style) behind the refectory at St. Ignatius Shrine... You could have some of the masons from Gisola or Lanzo to teach him...” (31 July 1911).

These excerpts give an idea of the dynamism of Fr. Camisassa, all concerned about offering the missionaries in the field concrete and useful services.

Even if on a long journey, far away from Turin, he would not forget the work he left behind. When Fr. Allamano asked him some questions, he answered quickly and precisely. He felt involved in a special way with the publication of “La Consolata” magazine, of which he was the editor. He once wrote, “I have received the March (1911) issue of the magazine. *Deo gratias* for the good work...” And later, “I have received the May issue. Tell Miss Carnino that the main article is excellent. The title of the article about the Duchess’ visit, however, is not really appealing...” (16 June 1911).

As his absence from Turin became longer than expected, Fr. Luigi Perlo, who had been left in charge of the magazine, started worrying about not having enough material to publish. So, he turned to Fr. Allamano for help. When Fr. Camisassa heard about it, he wrote, “Fr. Luigi tells me that you are worried about having enough material for the magazine. I cannot understand this, because I have already written, telling them that, after they finish the articles on Our Lady of Varallo (mission of Ichagaki), they should start publishing the story of Muchiri. The original needs to be properly re-written, but it contains good information about Kikuyu customs which the readers should find interesting...”

“In order to provide more material, I am sending you an article by Br. Benedetto... Also this needs some polishing before publication... Furthermore, I think that “Eco dell’Africa” has published a letter from Bishop Perlo and an article from Fr. Bellani on the situation of famine experienced by the Kikuyu people from the time of my arrival here until four months ago... These could also be used...”

I am sending you also three letters from Fr. Rosso about Baptisms; at least two of them are quite suitable for publication. I am also sending all the diaries I collected during my staying here: even from them something could be taken... I know that Fr. Luigi does not have time to do all the work, but he should ask Fr. Sales for help, as I have already suggested to him, or at least Miss Carnino...” (probably written in December 1911).

In his letters about the magazine, he also emphasized that, besides the main article, there should be other topics of interest to the readers, especially timely topics, to be published before they became old.

The above shows the varied ability of Fr. Camisassa: a valid moral theologian, a man gifted with sound technical insights, he had acquired experience also in the field of journalism!

An exchange of correspondence

The time spent by Fr. Camisassa in Kenya gives us the chance to discover the profound bond that existed between himself and Fr. Allamano. One wanted to keep the other informed of everything. This gave rise to an exchange of correspondence that overcame the distance. Postal services by sea were slow but faithful. Every time a ship left Mombasa, there was a letter for Turin, and similarly every ship that left Italy for Kenya carried a letter for Fr. Camisassa.

To the 44 letters written by Fr. Camisassa, correspond the 19 letters written by Fr. Allamano. All letters show the openness and familiarity that existed between them, together with respect and propriety. The two of them were happy to inform one another of the various happenings.

A few short excerpts from Fr. Allamano’s letters show their friendship, openness and mutual trust.

“The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith remembers you. They have sent 1930.75 Lire for your travelling expenses...”

“In the April issue of our magazine, there is mention of a donation of 500 Lire from a Mr. Rossi (from Milan)...”

“Last Friday, the mother of Fr. Baravalle died. He was called home by a telegram, and he just managed to reach there and see her dying at 8.00 p.m. He is quite distressed...”

“Soon I will continue the work of revising the Rules for the Institute...” This topic was often mentioned in their letters, as it was also the topic of Fr. Camisassa’s talks to the missionaries in Kenya.

Fr. Allamano shared everything with his “Vice-Rector”. For instance, there was a worker at the Shrine who was rather lazy. Fr. Allamano wrote, “What do you think? We have patiently put up with him..., but we may have to dismiss him”.

“I have received from Rome a subsidy of 125 Lire as a donation for Bishop Perlo. I will send a “Thank You” note...”

Only a month after the departure of his friend, Fr. Allamano wrote, “I am missing you more and more, even if all people here try to help and console me...”

When a rather long time had gone by without any letter from Kenya, he wrote, “Have you already been infected by that disease which seems to be proper to missionaries, i.e., the one of not writing?” And, after he had at last received a letter, he replied with exuberance, by using no longer the usual “Dear Father”, but “Very dear and dearly beloved Father”.

All kinds of news were exchanged between them, serious as well as not so serious ones. “Fr. Bianciotto has asked to be admitted to Perpetual Vows. And Fr. Saroglia? I let you decide about them”. Once, Fr. Camisassa asked Fr. Allamano about his thinking on some matters; the latter replied, “Now that you are there, you decide: you are the Superior now”.

About something that had to be done quickly, Fr. Allamano wrote, “They have compelled us to build a sidewalk around our Mother House in Via della Circonvallazione (now Corso Ferrucci). There was no way to postpone the work. I would have liked you to be here to see, but we had to do it right away.”

“I am writing before going to St. Ignatius’. At the moment we have 21 young men whose formation is going on well. We are waiting for two more. The seminarian from Alba went back home. The others will begin their Spiritual Retreat on the 20th of this month (September 1911)...”

“I am closing the letter because I want to post it. My health is good, and I was happy to hear that yours is good, too. I am consoled by the fact that you will return soon, but I would not want you to shorten your visit of one single day, if it is for the good of the missions...”

“On 15 February 1912, Fr. Biancotto and Brs. Giacomo and Bartolomeo have left for Kenya. You will see them there. Fr Bertagna is at home and keeps asking to be allowed to go back to he missions, telling everybody that he came back home only because of family problems. What do you think? Please, let me know...”

When the time of Fr. Camisassa's return arrived, Fr. Allamano wrote, "I am sorry I will not be able to go to the port to meet you on your arrival. Travelling is no longer my cup of tea. Your absence, that has become long, has been heavy for me. Come back soon! In fact I hope this letter finds you already on your way back. Best wishes for a good journey. Let us pray..."

As it has been already mentioned, it is good to notice how their very long and fraternal friendship always co-existed with mutual respect. This never changed: it was like this till the end.

Goodbye to Kenya

As a conclusion of his visit to Kenya, Fr. Camisassa condensed his impressions and sentiments in a letter sent to the Missionaries before leaving. Here is a rather long excerpt from it:

"My visit to the main missions of your adopted Country is ended. It was a forcedly short visit, but it was long enough to leave in my mind and heart an indelible impression. I could have expected your very cordial welcome, knowing well your affection for me, a poor co-operator with that saintly man whom all of us are fortunate to call with the dear name of 'Father'. What more deeply impressed me was the spontaneous, general and massive participation of the local people in welcoming me, beginning with their chiefs, who at times travelled long distances to come and welcome me. Those truly innumerable crowds and the expressions of benevolence I could see on their faces was something much greater than any optimistic expectation of mine.

I knew from Bishop Perlo's reports that your presence and work among these dear Kikuyu people was yielding consoling results, but I never expected to find what I saw in these days. It is very clear that Our Lady Consolata has blessed you and your work, so that I may somehow make my own St. Paul's expression, 'I give thanks to God through Jesus Christ, because the faith is proclaimed in the whole world!'

Let us, therefore, thank the good Lord and our Most Holy Mother, and let this be a stimulus to proceed ever more readily and generously in our work of spreading the Gospel among these people, each of you in the situation and with the means assigned to him/her by obedience. I have already informed of this letter's contents our venerable Superior, and I am sure that both he and our brothers and sisters in Turin were happy to hear this."

Fr. Allamano was more than happy about Fr. Camisassa's report and wanted to fully share his sentiments by means of a Circular Letter written soon after Fr. Camisassa's return.

"If the happy and long-awaited return of our beloved 'Vice-Superior' was a moment of joy for me and for all of us in the Consolata Institute, a greater consolation was given me by the good news that he has been sharing with me in long conversations, about the general situation of our missions and especially the good spirit that is animating you as religious and missionaries. I thank the Lord for this and, together with our dear 'Vice-Rector', I thank you once again for the festive welcome

you offered him, and for the docility in accepting what he felt he had to tell you for your greater good”.

A visit to the missions is always a grace; it is like being immersed for a short time in that atmosphere of hope that characterizes the Acts of the Apostles. Fr. Camisassa came back from Kenya rejuvenated: he was more optimistic than he had ever been about the future of Mission, and was more convinced than ever that it was worth to sacrifice himself in the background so that others could freely give the whole of themselves to evangelizing people. As he was the “deputy” of Fr. Allamano, he was also somehow the deputy of each missionary to whom he offered all his work and service so that “Christ could be proclaimed”.

“Operation Ethiopia”

In April 1912, on his way back from Kenya, Fr. Camisassa stopped in Rome for a few days. He did so for two reasons: to inform “Propaganda Fide” about the situation he found in the missions, and to ask that a new Apostolic Prefecture among the Galla people of Ethiopia be assigned to the Consolata Missionaries.

Cardinal Gotti listened with pleasure to everything, and then asked that an official petition be prepared for the desired Prefecture, to be presented to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

Fr. Camisassa reached Turin on 26 April and, after having taken care of some most urgent matters (among them the publication of “La Consolata” magazine), he started working on the required document. Fr. Allamano was happy to finally see an opening for his dream of missions in Ethiopia and, therefore, he encouraged his friend to work on the document so that it could reach Rome before the Summer holidays. Fr. Camisassa started to work on it with the same intensity, precision, and incisiveness that he had used when he had prepared the one for the missions in Kenya. He studied previous documents, maps, reports, etc., and worked so hard that the official petition was ready and sent to Rome as early as the 16 May 1912.

In the document, it was mentioned that the desired territory was part of a Vicariate cared for by French Capuchins under the leadership of Bishop Andre’ Jarosseau. However, the territory was so vast that the Capuchins were present only in a small part of it, and the Galla area was still free. It was pointed out that the Consolata Missionaries could take care of it because, besides the 27 Fathers working in Kenya with Brothers and many Sisters, in Italy there were 10 young priests and 32 Sisters ready to go on mission.

Bishop Jarosseau, however, did not agree to the request, because the Galla area was very important for his Vicariate.

Cardinal Gotti suggested that a proper reply be prepared for Bishop Jarosseau, and so Fr. Camisassa started working on a very careful and respectful one. He replied to all the points raised by the Bishop, prepared maps with the borders of the desired Prefecture clearly shown, and concluded saying that the request was all in favour of the spiritual welfare of the Galla people.

The new document, which consisted of 300 neatly-typed lines, was signed by both Fr. Allamano and Fr. Camisassa, and sent to Rome on 28 September 1912. In Turin, confident prayers were lifted up to the Lord...

On 28 January 1913, the Apostolic Prefecture of Kaffa, as requested by Frs. Allamano and Camisassa, was officially established, and Mgr. Gaudenzio Barlassina (who had been working in Kenya since 1904) was appointed as the Apostolic Prefect.

However, the new Prefect will manage to enter Addis Ababa in incognito, on a mule, only four years later. He pointedly wrote, "Nobody was waiting or desiring me there, and I was well aware of this. All I could foresee was cold and refusals." This coincidentally was quite well-timed, in union with the Baby Jesus at Bethlehem: it was, in fact, the 25th of December 1916, Christmas Day!

Caring for the Missionary Sisters

The need to have Sisters collaborating in their missionary work was felt by the Consolata Missionaries in Kenya from the very beginning. Fr. Allamano first turned to the Sisters of St. Joseph Cottolengo. The first successor of the Saint, Fr. Giuseppe Ferrero, agreed to send some Sisters to Kenya. The first eight Cottolengo Sisters departed for Kenya on 25 April 1903, and in the following years other groups of Sisters went there. However, after a number of years, the Cottolengo Institute felt that they could not continue to provide more Sisters. Fr. Allamano at first did not feel like founding an Institute of Sisters, but at the pressing invitations of Card. Gotti, Card. Richelmy, and especially of Pope Pius X, he eventually decided to found an Institute of Missionary Sisters, also named after Our Lady Consolata.

On "La Consolata" issue of February 1910, a very simple announcement appeared on p. 26, informing any young lady who might have been interested in joining, to contact the Superior of the Consolata Missionary Sisters (in Turin) at Corso Duca di Genova, 49. The "Consolatina", which had been the first Mother-House of the Missionary Fathers and Brothers, became the first Mother-House of the Consolata Missionary Sisters, too.

Only on "La Consolata" issue of October 1911, a more detailed information appeared about the Consolata Sisters who were to "collaborate with the Consolata Fathers and Brothers in the work of evangelization of non-Christians". The article stated, "The Institute welcomes good young Christian ladies, in good health, between 15 and 25 years of age, who desire to work for their own sanctification and dedicate themselves totally to missionary work among non-Christians".

The Sisters' number grew quickly so that, at the end of 1912, the "Consolatina" became too small for them. They moved into an empty part of the Mother-House of the Missionary Fathers and Brothers. After having searched for some other place for the Sisters and not having found a suitable one, Fr. Allamano entrusted Fr. Camisassa with the task of studying and preparing a plan for building the Sisters' Mother-House on the Northern part of the land that had been bought in Via della Circonvallazione (now Corso Ferrucci).

However, the building, for which Fr. Camisassa put to use all the technical experience he had gained, had to face long delays, because of World War I, during which, at a certain time it was requisitioned for military purposes. Only in September 1922, the whole community of the Sisters was able to settle in their new Mother-House (next to the one of the Fathers and Brothers).

Fr. Camisassa did oversee not only the building of the Sisters' House; he also accompanied them with great discretion, probably at Fr. Allamano's request, caring for their personal and community needs, beginning with their religious habit, so that it could be properly good-looking and rather modern, as the Founder desired.

In the Consolata Sisters' Institute, Fr. Camisassa is still vividly remembered because of what the first Sisters said and wrote about him. They remembered him

as a priest of a greatly sensitive heart, intuitive, who, without interfering in the role of Fr. Allamano as founder, teacher and father, knew how to be present with solicitude and discretion in the many practical circumstances of everyday life, in order to encourage, support, counsel, and provide.

The testimonies abound.

Sr. Giovanna Beltrami wrote, "I remember his great goodness towards everybody, especially towards us, Sisters. With us he was not only fatherly, but motherly as well. Very precise and accurate in his works, he wanted us to be like him: nothing had to be done hurriedly; he often told us, 'Age quod agis; do well what you do, and do it for the Lord'".

"Very obedient to the Father Founder, in any situation he would tell me, 'Do as Father said'. Humble and disinterested, he did the good in a hidden way: he did not want to be praised. On the occasion of my departure for Kenya, he came to the railway station and, even if quite deeply moved, he wanted to come on to the train to properly settle our luggage, and to give us some practical advice. Then he left in a hurry, to hide his emotion. A great surprise of ours was that, when the ship stopped at Catania for a few hours, we received a telegram from him, granting us a dispensation from the law of abstinence on Fridays, in case no meatless meal was available."

"He certainly could think of everything and foresee any difficulty; he did not want us to suffer for the lack of something necessary. He loved all of us, and always used words of encouragement with all. His charity, humility, and self-concealment were part of himself".

Sr. Giuditta Barone wrote, "When the times for the reception of our religious habit arrived, he would make sure that nothing was missing. Having noticed that my shoes were not good, he said, 'No, no; these shoes are not fit for that day. The shoes must match the new habit. A bride that goes to the altar must be all good, especially a Lord's bride...' Once I had been entrusted with a work that was not valued: it was hardly considered. Fearing that I might have felt sad about it, he called me and said, 'Remember that it is not the work that degrades the person, but the person that ennoble the work. What is important is not the work, humble or eminent, but God's will!'"

He knew how to take care of everything. Sr. Elisabetta Pellerino remembered the following fact: "Once I was blowing with all my breath on to the charcoal in a flat

iron- box in order to make it burn nicely. He saw me and said, ‘You are only wasting your breath that way. This is how you should do it’, and he showed me how to do it with less effort and greater success.”

To a Sister in charge of the kitchen, he once said, “Pray the Rosary when your work does not require much attention but, when the oven is hot, pay attention to what is cooking: ‘Age quod agis’”.

To a Sister whose veil was not neatly arranged, he said, “Fix your veil properly. To care for oneself is not lack of humility.” To another one he said, “The qualities that make an authentic missionary are not the exterior ones, but the interior, the virtues practised first in the Mother-House and then in the missions.” To a novice who was discouraged he said, “Do not ever lose courage! The good Lord sees your efforts, and he will help you. Think often of the ‘ad quid venisti?’ (for what reason did you come?) of St. Bernard. You came to serve, not to dominate”.

The available testimonies are many: they reveal a priest with a profound spirituality, a fatherly heart and an open mind, and a man with experience of life and of any kind of work.

Sr. Fernanda Gatti wrote a little “biography” of Fr. Camisassa, consisting of eleven type-written pages. She emphasized in a special way his concern about a good educational and technical training of the young Sisters. Following Fr. Allamano’s directives, he organized for them courses in Religious Studies, Catechesis, and Ethics, together with courses in Mathematics, Languages, Housekeeping, Nursing, Tailoring and Gardening: all in view of the missions and missionary life. “He had mission in his blood,” a Sister once said. All agreed in saying that he had to be credited with the further education of the Sisters, an education geared to life, so that they would be missionary women capable of evangelical encounters and witness.

Sr. Michelina Abba’ said, “He harboured a very high esteem for our Founder, so that, when he was present, Fr. Camisassa existed no more: as much as he could, he would withdraw, disappear...”

Fr. Allamano was happy to see that Fr. Camisassa had a special care and concern for the Sisters. He himself, more than the Sisters (who were perhaps too young to notice certain things), perceived and appreciated the support Fr. Camisassa was giving them. In fact, when he died, he told Sr. Michelina, “By losing him, you lost everything!” “You, our father, are still with us,” she replied. “No, no,” he insisted: “You do not know, but he was all for you...,” with a particular emphasis on the word “all”.

Chapter 5

A NEW BEATITUDE

War

Kenya was involved in World War I since 1914, because of the British-German conflict for their African colonies.

In Kenya, the British authorities forced local young men to become “carriers”: in a Country practically without roads and vehicles, all weapons and provisions had to be carried on people’s shoulders in very exhausting caravans that wore people out because of the load-weight, the hot weather, disease, and moral discomforts.

Small military hospitals were set up in many places, and there was a great need for personnel. Bishop Philip Perlo, at the request of the British Governor of Kenya, allowed a number of Fathers and Sisters to leave their mission work, in order to go to the war areas, where their presence and service turned out to be inestimably precious. Some of the local people said, “At home, in our villages, we were not so sure about the foreign missionaries. But now that we see them sacrifice themselves, next to us, in these terrible circumstances, now we understand and experience that they truly love us.”

When Italy joined the war in 1915, also the Mother-House in Turin started feeling the consequences: seventeen young missionaries were called up for military service. Soon afterwards, food became rationed: 150 grams of bread per person per day; and what kind of bread...: bran, or worse!

In this time of suffering, Fr. Camisassa was closer than ever to Fr. Allamano, who was very concerned about the missionaries in Kenya, those who had been called to the army, and the very young ones who remained in Turin, but without sufficient food. The “Vice-Rector” (Fr. Camisassa) was doing the impossible, in order to see that the young seminarians and the Sisters would have at least the bare necessities.

In 1917 a large part of the new Mother-House was requisitioned and turned into a military hospital. The Sisters’ Mother-House (which was still under construction) was also requisitioned and turned into a military depot. Some people advised Fr. Allamano to send home the young seminarians, but he did not want to. Fr. Camisassa used all his inventiveness to find room for everybody in the uppermost floor of the building and in the attic.

Fr. Allamano had been watching Fr. Umberto Costa for some time: he liked his virtue, his fidelity, versatile intelligence, and apostolic fervour, and he had great hopes for him. He appointed him as Prefect of the seminarians. But in a few days, on 16 January 1918, he died, to the great sorrow of everybody. Fr. Camisassa was entrusted with the task of collecting testimonies, in order to write a biography.

At the front, the seminarian Eugenio Baldi, 22 years old, died. News of deaths was arriving also from Kenya. Fr. Allamano kept repeating, “Let’s pray for peace, for all the suffering people, for our soldiers, for the dead, for the prisoners of war! Let’s trust in the Lord, no matter what...”

Fortunately Fr. Camisassa was always next to him, and this made things easier: “a friend in need is a friend indeed”. A profound understanding existed between them! Fr. Camisassa gave the whole of himself, simply and humbly, because he knew that it was what the Lord wanted of him.

In November 1918 the war ended. In April 1919, 35 young missionaries returned from the front, in small groups, at times in bad shape, but always happy to come back.

Some of them had lost some of their “clerical” ways but, under the loving gaze of the Founder, they soon got back to their “style” of life and to the rhythm of prayer and study wanted by the Founder. On 7 September 1919, after the singing of the “Te Deum” (hymn of thanksgiving), the regular courses of studies, at the various levels, were resumed.

“Operation Tanganyika”

The victory of Britain over Germany forced the German missionaries who were working in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) to leave that country. Bishop Perlo was invited to send some of his missionaries to take care of at least some of the flourishing missions that the Benedictine Missionaries of St. Otilia had to abandon. So, at the end of 1919, four Consolata Missionaries went to Tanganyika to take the place of some of the Benedictines in the area of Iringa.

Rumours started circulating of a possible division of the very large “Vicariate Apostolic of Southern Zanzibar” (as it was called), of which Iringa was part. Bishop Perlo informed Fr. Allamano about this, thinking that the Consolata Missionaries could possibly take care of a part of that Vicariate. Fr. Allamano invited Fr. Camisassa to find out something about it. Fr. Camisassa wrote to Card. Van Rossum, the new Prefect of “Propaganda Fide”, saying that, if there were a need for new workers in

Tanganyika, the Consolata Missionaries were ready to go there.

For a number of months there was no reply: total silence! But then, all of a sudden, a request: Card. Van Rossum wrote, “The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith intends to divide the Vicariate Apostolic of Zanzibar into four Prefectures, and would like to entrust to the Consolata Missionaries the one of the Ugogo and Uhehe tribes (Bantu people like the Agikuyu)”. Fr. Allamano immediately and joyfully replied, “Your Eminence, for me and my Institute your voice is God’s voice. It is, therefore, a personal consolation for me to cordially accept your request”.

There were still some matters that needed clarification in regard to the borders and the name of the new Prefecture, which Frs. Allamano and Camisassa would have liked to call “Apostolic Prefecture of Iringa”. A formal request was needed and, therefore, Fr. Camisassa quickly prepared it, accompanying it with maps and opportune observations. The document was signed by Frs. Allamano and Camisassa, as Superior and Vice-Superior respectively, of the Consolata Institute. This was the last official document that Fr. Camisassa prepared and sent to Rome.

On 3 March 1922, “Propaganda Fide” issued a decree which established the Apostolic Prefecture of Iringa, and named Fr. Francesco Cagliari (a strong man at the Tuthu saw-mill) as the first Apostolic Prefect. Frs. Allamano and Camisassa were, naturally, very happy about it.

A missed Patent

What was wonderful about Fr. Camisassa was the fact that, whether he was dealing with “Propaganda Fide” or with technical matters of human promotion in the

missions, he was convinced till the end of his life that he was always serving the great cause of Mission.

At the beginning of January 1919, Fr. Giuseppe Gallea was called to the Consolata Shrine by Fr. Camisassa, who told him that, during his visit to Kenya, he had realized the great need for a tractor suitable to work on sloping grounds (like the sides of small hills). He had enquired about it both in and out of Italy, but without any success. Therefore, he himself had started studying how to make one, and had succeeded in inventing one which, according to some technical experts, would work. There remained the need to obtain a patent for it.

Fr. Gallea, who narrated the above, went on to say that Fr. Camisassa intended to obtain the patent in Fr. Gallea's name (he was looking ahead!). For this reason, they went together to the Patent Office in Turin, where Fr. Camisassa dealt so competently with the matter that Fr. Gallea felt he was like an experienced engineer of the "Fiat" factory. As a result, on 31 March 1919, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce released a first Certificate of "Patent for a tractor for sloping grounds, characterized by the fact that the wheels may be moved vertically up or down, so as to keep the tractor always in a horizontal position, no matter what the slopes of the ground are." The final Patent was dated 30 May 1919, No. 52, Vol. 493 of the Registry.

Having obtained the Patent for Italy, it was now necessary to obtain one for the rest of the world. To this purpose there was an Office in Germany, which issued a Patent (No. 379926), dated 6 January 1920.

Unfortunately, the political troubles that started in Italy and resulted with the taking power by the Fascists, and the increased work and weakening health of Fr. Camisassa prevented the utilization of such an invention, so that, at the end of the period granted for its utilization, the Patent became void. However, the invention was later used by other people for other kinds of machinery, including armoured tanks.

Declining

The tremendous amount of work performed during the war in order to care for all the various needs, even if imperceptibly, had undermined Fr. Camisassa's health. A disease that had been spreading in those years and causing deaths, the so called Spanish epidemic, affected him, too, threatening his life. He survived, but his look and his gaze showed that his strong constitution was weakening.

He entrusted Fr. Lorenzo Sales with the work of "La Consolata" magazine. With the help of seminarians he re-organized the photo-archive, and prepared new transparencies, so that Fr. Sales could show to the people of Italy the missions' needs.

At this time, the workers' strikes and vindications of their rights prevented "La Consolata" to be published on time, as it had always been done. This fact led Fr. Camisassa to buy all the equipment needed to print the magazine, fulfilling in this way also the desire that he and Fr. Allamano had been cherishing, i.e., to have Brothers and Seminarians involved in printing. The "IMC Printing School" was thus born which, besides printing the magazine, would later print also pamphlets, leaflets, and

other material for mission animation. Fr. Camisassa would not see all this, but he prepared it.

Toward the end of June 1922, a severe and sudden collapse led him to death's door. Fr. Allamano, aware of the situation and very sorry for it, said, "He has always been working; he is worn out by his hard work as if he were 90 years old; believe me! Our Lord has always blessed him. He has been successful in everything; he has been top in everything. He has lived for God! Yes, let us also live for God; that will be enough!"

The above, and other similar words, spoken by Fr. Allamano in those days, were a precious and sincere commendation of his sick friend. Everything else was forgotten in those days of anxiety and suffering. In the minds and hearts of people there was the bright remembrance of Fr. Camisassa's unconditional dedication to the service of the Church, as a very humble priest who followed the guidance of Fr. Allamano, in which he saw the expression of God's will, with the docility of a child.

The days went by without any sign of improvement; on the contrary, a cerebral attack worsened the situation. On 23 July 1922, during his Sunday Conference to the young people in the Mother-House, after having said that only a miracle could have saved his friend, Fr. Allamano added, trying to hold back his tears, "Let us pray! If Our Lady will not grant what we ask, we shall have one more patron in Heaven. But let's still pray. He is full of merits, but it is for me, old as I am...", and he could not continue because of his emotion. He was a man of very deep faith, but he was still very human in manifesting his sorrow. To someone who asked him if he would offer his life so that God would preserve Fr. Camisassa's, he answered with simplicity, "I have already offered mine, for what it is worth... But let's leave it up to God! He is always a Father for us!"

The last twist

The sick man never complained about his condition. With visible acts of will, he replied to those who visited him; he talked about death as something he was ready to face with serenity. To a doctor who told him that there had been some improvement, he replied, "No, no; when it is time, it is so for everybody". If he was suffering, it was for his great friend (Fr. Allamano) whom he could not help any more, in spite of the fact that age and various forms of illness were weakening him more and more. At times he quietly wept and murmured, "Poor Father Rector; poor Father Rector!" Fr. Allamano, with an open heart, told his children, "Let the Lord allow me to go first. It is up to me, because I am older; later he will go to his reward, too!" To a specialist who mentioned a slight hope of recovery, he replied, "Thank you. See, after more than forty years of life together, it would be nice to be buried at the same time in the same grave".

However, faithful to their promise to always tell one another the truth, Fr. Allamano found the right way and the right words to inform his friend of his serious condition. Fr. Camisassa thanked him and, in his usual practical way, said, "Call a lawyer, please", because there were documents and other matters that needed to be taken care of.

On 6 August, feast of the Transfiguration, he got over the torpor into which he had fallen, and asked to get up, because he wanted to celebrate Mass. The nursing Sisters who were assisting him, and even Fr. Allamano himself, did not manage to hold him back. He got up, put on the vestments, and celebrated his last Mass in the Rector's Chapel, up to the very last prayers, without any sign of pain. Afterwards a cold sweat was all over him; he went back to bed and fell into torpor again. In the afternoon, Fr. Allamano told the community, "Was it a sign of recovery? I don't know... Let's pray". He had started hoping again and, together with him, everybody else.

On 18 August, it was the end. Now and then he got out of his torpor and wanted to get out of bed: he wanted to go outside... Towards evening, as if awakening from a dream, he looked around and indicated to Sr. Virginia Barra to give him her Crucifix. He did the same with Fr. Sciolla who was also assisting him. Then he bound together the strings of the two Crucifixes and held the Crucifixes onto his heart while gazing intently at the Father and the Sister. He tried to speak and say something, but had problems. He stammered, "It means that...; it means that..." Anxiously they asked, "Does it mean that the Fathers and the Sisters must remain united in mutual love?" "Yes; yes; that's it...", he replied. Then continuing to keep his gaze on those present he said, "It is Father (Allamano) who bound you together". "And you desire that we remain always so united; is that right?" "Yes, it is my desire, but it is Father who wants it." He kept kissing the Crucifixes, pressing them onto his heart.

At this moment, Fr. Allamano entered the room. He could not understand what was happening and, so, he asked them to unbind the Crucifixes. The sick man showed that he suffered because of that.

Fr. Sciolla later wrote, "I will never forget the way Fr. Camisassa said those words. It was his supreme desire, which he knew was also shared by Fr. Allamano who had given life to the two Institutes."

Sr. Michelina Abba', who had also been present, later told what had happened to Fr. Allamano. Surprised, he said, "If only I knew, I would have never asked to unbind the two Crucifixes. I would have kept them as they were as a witness to his intentions."

He wrote to the missionaries in Kenya, "The last words of our dear deceased were about union between our missionaries, the men with the women."

Later it was said, "That action was a last will of love. It is up to us to be faithful to it: it is sacred!"

Passing away

It was about 8.00 p.m. of that 18 August 1922; it was hot and humid: truly Summery! Everybody was at supper, except Sr. Emerenziana and Sr. Ambrosina who were watching the sick Fr. Camisassa and trying to hold him because he wanted to get out of bed and "go to the Institute", as he was saying. In his delirium, all of a sudden, he managed to get out of bed, walked a few tottering steps, and fell: he was dead.

“To go to the Institute”! It had been his daily walk for twenty years, and sometimes several times a day. His last steps were still in that direction, with a loving faithfulness without limits.

After the long period of waiting, the harsh news of his death arrived at the Mother-House suddenly. Fr. Sales wrote, “From the Mother-House we hurried to the Shrine and saw Fr. Allamano coming out of the room of his dead friend; we would never forget that sight! Our good Father looked like the icon of sorrow. Only his gaze was as clear as usual. He attempted to speak: “Our dear Vice-Rector...”, but could not continue. Sobbing prevented his speaking. He pointed to heaven, with eyes full of tears. We could see all his affection for his friend.”

Later that day some people asked him, “Father Rector, will you allow us to keep you company tonight?” He answered, “No, no, my dear. God is enough for me”.

On the last night of wake, to a group of missionary Sisters who had stayed longer with him to console him, he said, “Now I still have him, but what about the time I will no longer have him?...” And he remembered, “Every night we spent long hours together in this office. It is here that the plans for the Institute were born, and later we talked together about the missions... Everything was arranged here, in dialogue with him. Now, what shall I do all alone?” He still continued to speak about his friend, “He was always ready to sacrifice himself, in order to spare me some work. He knew how to keep his work hidden. His was authentic humility.”

Sr. Ferdinanda Gatti wrote that at the time of sealing the coffin, they called the Founder who had been praying in his little choir-loft. He came. He was petrified with sorrow. He looked with love at the venerated body of his friend, gave a last blessing and said with smothered voice, “Let’s go again to pray.” I timidly followed him. He went back to his choir-loft, knelt in front of his Consolata, held his face within his hands and remained there a long time...”

The Turin Catholic newspaper, “Il Momento”, gave a lot of space to the mourning that affected the whole city and diocese. Mentioning the fact that Fr. Allamano could not take part in the burial, it said, “In his deep sorrow, he remained alone at the Consolata, in prayer...”

In the few years that Fr. Allamano lived after his great loss, he continued to miss the one who had been his friend and brother: “It is as if I lost both of my arms”, he once told Mgr. Peyretti. “When he was here, he was everything for me. We loved one another in the Lord. We lived together for 42 years. We were like a single being.” Fr. Barlassina said, “These two great souls were fused together. It was marvellous to see their sincere affection, their love, together with their respect for each other, their sharing...”

Characteristics

Fr. Tommaso Gays wrote the following about Fr. Camisassa: “Rather short, well built, with a broad forehead, energetic in his movements, with a robust constitution,

exceptional intelligence and strong will-power, our Vice-Rector is a practical man, always on the go.”

“An accomplished writer, a wise administrator, a clever organizer, skilled in everything, he wanted to be aware of everything: he examined the materials used for the various works, the capacity of water or gas pipes, window frames, door locks, styles of clothes, the quality of cloth, the furniture of a room, the packing of a trunk...”

“With fine perception, he always avoided interfering in the Founder’s doings. He never attracted people’s attention to himself. Only one person had to be the centre of attention for the young men and women preparing for mission: Fr. Allamano: *the* “Father!”

“The two of them (Frs. Allamano and Camisassa) were both diligent in their ministries; both of them were members of the Metropolitan Chapter (of Canons) and of the Pontifical Faculties (in Turin), and their age difference was very small; yet, they always dealt with one another in a gentlemanly way, with great mutual respect, consideration, and courtesy”.

The spiritual qualities are those which characterize a person: humility and obedience seem to be those which characterized Fr. Camisassa. His active and dynamic temperament never led him to dissipation, because of his constant self-control. A man of few words, he worked for a cause which he had made his own, with unalterable dedication. When he was misjudged, he took refuge in God’s Word, “The one who judges me is the Lord”, and remained peaceful.

Not many people knew him by name, and fewer knew what he looked like, even if he was the Vice-Rector of the Consolata Shrine. Even at the Institute he was never well known as the kind of man he really was. On some occasions, e.g., on his “onomastico” (feast-day), Fr. Allamano wanted that the missionaries (men and women) could manifest their affection for him; but it was enough to mention the gratitude they felt for him, and he was moved to tears. “Fr. Camisassa’s tears!” All Fathers, Brothers and Sisters were aware of them: they would appear when he was praised, or at the mention of the sickness of someone’s parents, of the sufferings of a missionary or of a needy woman. Was he an emotional man? Yet, some people thought he was all reasoning and calculations. But, he was a tender-hearted man who, up to the very end, was vulnerable as a child.

As a very humble man, he had such a clear notion of ranks that, whenever there was a celebration in honour of Fr. Allamano, he would instinctively take hold of the chair that had been prepared for him next to the Founder and put it onto the floor, next to the platform.

Fr. Mario Borello, during the commemoration of Fr. Camisassa on 18 August 1949, said the following: “To have the abilities of a leader and make oneself an assistant; to be able to govern and prefer to serve; to build something by oneself and give the honour for it to another; to be second not only for a year, but for the whole life, committing oneself to what somebody else wanted; not to be in charge of something, and yet work with the whole of oneself for its success; to feel uneasy about

receiving some sign of honour, thanksgiving, or distinction: all the above is great virtue!”

“This was the virtue and sanctity of Fr. Camisassa”, commented Fr. Giuseppe Gallea, who, to confirm his statement mentioned a fact the he himself had witnessed when he was working with Fr. Camisassa.

It happened in 1918, immediately after the end of World War I. Fr. Gallea, who was the bursar at the Mother-House, noticed that the food provided was rather scarce and some young seminarians were getting thin. He would have liked to increase the amount of food, but Fr. Camisassa felt that it was not yet possible to do so. Fr. Gallea had a chance to mention the situation to Fr. Allamano, who called Fr. Camisassa and said, “It is true that our finances are scarce, but let’s trust once again in Divine Providence. All considered, I think we could increase the amount of food as Fr. Gallea suggested.” Fr. Camisassa not only did not object, but he simply said, “If this is what you desire, Father Rector, I am going to the Institute, and tomorrow we will begin to do so.” “We went together to the Institute”, Fr. Gallea said, “where he wanted me to accompany him into the kitchen, and there he told the people what had to be done with such naturalness and precision as if it were something that he himself had wanted.”

The above fact, simple as it is, is quite meaningful. It shows that Fr. Allamano had full trust in what his “Vice-Rector” was doing, but at the same time did not simply give in to him. It also shows the docile simplicity with which Fr. Camisassa abandoned his

own judgement, in order to follow Fr. Allamano’s directives.

They were two men, different and free, who together created harmony. When Fr. Allamano said, “In matters of obedience Fr. Camisassa is first”, people instinctively felt that he was telling the truth. Anything that resulted in the kind of harmony that existed between the two of them had to be true.

Fr. Allamano’s statement, “If I did not have a man like Fr. Camisassa with me, the Institute would not have been founded”, certainly showed his true humility, but also the real and determining collaboration of Fr. Camisassa with his work.

In 1880, when Fr. Camisassa as a young priest said, “Nothing done out of obedience is small”, he did not know that this was the way he was going to become great. When in 1880 he accepted to follow Fr. Allamano to the Consolata Shrine, he did not know that he was choosing the role of “Vice-“ (deputy) for the whole of his life: it was a “no-through road”. While an assistant parish priest legitimately dreams of one day becoming a parish priest himself, Fr. Camisassa, gifted as he was in many areas of work, realized that his choice gave him no chance of promotion. He accepted this and was satisfied with it for the whole of his life; and he accepted it not as a man who accepts a sacrifice, but as one completely fulfilled in God’s service.

Mgr. Rostagno once said, “Fr. Camisassa disappears in the missionary work to which he has given the whole of himself”. This *disappearing*, a quite rare human quality, made him stand out. The first biographer of Fr. Allamano, Fr. L. Sales, talking about Fr. Camisassa, whom he knew quite well, stated, “The spiritual heights of Fr. Camisassa are humility and obedience”.

Conclusion

Testimonies and judgements about a person usually are not all in agreement with one another. If we think that even Jesus' contemporaries were divided about him, it would be naïve to think that feelings and observations about the complex personality of Fr. Camisassa would all agree.

There were sincere admirers who venerated him as a man of God, but there were other people who pointed out his weaknesses, whether true or only perceived as such. For instance, Canon Antonio Bertolo admitted that Fr. Camisassa had been a providential and faithful helper of Fr. Allamano in restoring the Shrine and in founding the Missionaries, but he felt that his cleverness and abilities had been darkened by a character that he defined as "hard, not always proper and affable..." He concluded his observations by saying, "The missionaries will act well and justly in remembering Fr. Camisassa but, when exalting him, they should not raise him too high..."

Unfortunately, for a number of circumstances and for a rather long time, Fr. Camisassa was rather forgotten even by the Consolata Missionaries.

Now, fortunately, it is no longer so, and the greatness of his work and sacrifice is vividly remembered, at least by many. The testimonies of those who appreciated and liked him remain vivid and very meaningful. Here below are some of them.

"Those who approached him could have the impression of a man with little sentiment, but it was not so. In spite of his grave appearance, when speaking with him, he showed a great goodness of heart that favoured confidence" (Canon Cantono).

"I always admired the constancy of that man. Nothing and nobody could deter him from doing what he knew he had to do" (Canon Barberis).

"In him there was a heart always open to people's needs, and he was second to none in discerning human needs" (Fr. Pagliotti).

Mgr. Rostagno admired the humility of Fr. Camisassa, who "was able to hide in the shadow of Fr. Allamano".

He lived as a poor man. "Millions went through his hands. He handled scrupulously the incessant flow of offerings that in great part were solicited by his creativity, but for him money was always and only a means to give glory to God" (Fr. G. Gallea). And Sr. Michelina Abba' remembered that "having to look for a pair of shoes to put on his feet before laying him in his coffin, all we found was an old pair with holes in the soles".

The highest and most precious testimony, however, is always the one of Fr. Allamano who, after Fr. Camisassa's death, spoke several times about him with loving admiration: "Our Vice-Rector possessed virtue and a firm and constant will, totally based on God's will" (11 March 1923). On another occasion, almost revealing the focal secret of their life together, he said, "If we did something good, it is because

we were different from one another; but we promised to always tell each other the truth: a promise that we kept. If we had been alike, we would not have seen each other's faults, and we would have made more mistakes..." "We have been like a single heart, like a single being, for 42 years". "We always loved one another in God".

In concluding this writing with which we tried to uncover at least some of the rich personality of this priest from Turin, we think we can summarize it in a new beatitude: even if he had all that was needed to be first, he freely and with determination chose to be "vice-", to be "second" for all his life: **THE BEATITUDE OF BEING SECOND!**

It is a beatitude incarnated with a great heart and without wavering by a man of great talent and faith: Fr. James Camisassa.