

THE FIRST COMMEMORATION OF FR. JOSEPH ALLAMANO

The first commemoration of Fr. Joseph Allamano was held on 23 March 1926, by Bishop G. B. Ressa of Mondovi', during a solemn "Thirtieth Day Memorial" celebration, at the Consolata Shrine. Fr. Allamano and Bishop Ressa had been good friends since their Seminary days, and Bishop Ressa had given his support to all of Fr. Allamano's works, especially to the foundation of the two missionary Institutes. Also, together with their classmates who were still alive, they had celebrated the 50th anniversary of their Priestly Ordination at the Consolata Shrine.

The kind of friendship that existed between the two of them may be seen in the friendly expression that Fr. Allamano used when he wrote to the Bishop, in order to convince him to celebrate their Golden Jubilee in Torino rather than in Mondovi': "We are old and cripple: in Mondovi' we would be noticed..., while at the Consolata Shrine we would be ignored."

It is always touching to read Bishop Ressa's commemorative talk, also because it was held in the very Shrine from which it seemed that Fr. Allamano had never moved.

Here below are some parts of it, which show how much affection and admiration surrounded Fr. Allamano, beginning with his classmates.



Jesus, far from Bethany, in the solitude of Jericho, told his Apostles about the death of Lazarus with the words, "Amicus noster dormit" (our friend is sleeping) [...] I reminded myself of that "Amicus noster dormit" when, on 16 February, the vigil of Ash Wednesday, I received the telegram which informed me of your death, O dearest Canon Joseph Allamano, my classmate in the Seminary, ordained a Priest with me, and a model of virtue and saintly works to all. [...] Yes, Canon Allamano has been a true friend of Jesus and our friend, and he has now fallen asleep in the Lord. Why shouldn't we be consoled?

A Friend of Jesus

[...] There is no doubt that Fr. Allamano has been a friend of Jesus, both before and after his Priestly Ordination; in fact, I would say that he has been a favourite friend of Jesus, a dearest priest of his. When I first met him, he had just received his clerical cassock a few days earlier, and for seven years I shared with him and the other classmates our life in the Seminary, during classes, study time, recreations, works, and prayer times. [...] I don't know if others enjoyed his familiarity as I did. He seemed to prefer me because my character was more opposite to his, and I was more in need of his charity. So, I could discover even better the saintly ingenious ways he was using in giving back to Jesus the graces he had receive from him. This is indeed the sign of true friendship: reciprocal communication of goods. Once he told me, "How lucky we are! We may attain to great goodness by doing always everything in the presence of the Lord and for love of him; thus, what is small becomes great..."

The day of our Priestly Ordination came (6 June 1873). Deacon Allamano, not having reached the required age, had to wait till September. The next day, I was appointed to Celebrate Mass and to distribute Holy Communion in the Seminary. The first person to whom I gave the Eucharistic Jesus was you, Deacon Allamano! And I remember the

emotion we experienced when, together with the other seminarians, you came to kiss my hands. Three months later, he himself was kneeling in front of the Archbishop Lorenzo Gastaldi, who repeated to him in Jesus' name, "I shall not call you servants any more...; I call you friends", and he became a priest. [...].

I saw him again, fifty years later, here at this altar (in the Consolata Shrine), surrounded by those classmates of ours who were still alive, by friends, by people he had helped, and by devout faithful, on his Priestly Jubilee. His head was crowned by white hair, but he was still entirely himself: recollected, devout, dignified, precise in performing ceremonies. He aptly repeated, "I shall go to the altar of God, to the God of my joy" (part of the Introductory Rites of the Mass at that time).

Our Friend

By becoming a priest, the friend of Jesus became also "Amicus noster" (our friend) ..., friend of the souls for whom he will spend his life. Like all his classmates, he was dreaming of passing from the Pastoral Institute to the work of Assistant Parish Priest in some small parish, to begin his pastoral work under skilful guidance. He had a short experience of this, giving good examples and endearing himself to everybody; but obedience called him back to the Seminary to continue the work of the unforgettable Canon Soldati in the very sensitive role of Director of the Seminarians [...]. Anyone who was a seminarian at that time may willingly say that Fr. Allamano was a good angel for them, a loving father who cared for all their needs, a tender and compassionate mother who consoled them. He was like Jesus who was preparing his disciples for their apostolate. And the Director was happy with the work entrusted to him by obedience.

But Divine Providence had other plans on him. In Torino and in the whole Archdiocese, new needs were being experienced. On a certain day, a mysterious voice told Francis of Assisi, "Go and repair my church". Francis went and first repaired the church of St. Damian, but then he also repaired the church of souls by instituting three religious Orders. Obedience told Fr. Allamano, "Go to the Consolata (shrine) and repair". And here he was. Still young, he was the Rector here, where a pain was affecting his heart, and a thought was continually in his mind: "Repair. Repair." A decision was taken. In spite of very serious financial and technical difficulties..., after some years, here was the Shrine, restored and enlarged, richly decorated with gold and marble, well served by saintly and numerous ministers, frequented by the people of Torino and of the whole Piedmont, restored to its life of First Basilica and worthy throne of the Queen and Mother, the Consoler of the afflicted.

As the Queen's "Pages of honour", the messengers to be sent to repair the temples of souls purchased by divine blood, were missing, here was another miracle: the re-opened Pastoral Institute, and the newly ordained priests around the Seat of Wisdom. And the Rector would be, for many years, their Teacher through theory and practice, a model of virtue for them...

After such achievements, Canon Allamano, the "Amicus noster", could have told himself, "That's enough." However, fire never says "enough"; it either expands, or it gets extinguished. [...] When still a seminarian, he had been dreaming of the missions, and he had asked to go to Genoa, to the "Brignole-Sale Institute". At that time he was dissuaded by his superiors. But now, having taken care of the most serious needs (of the Shrine), the torment of his youth came back. He suffered because of it; he was sick but, eventually, he

succeeded in sending young missionary men and women, under the banner of Our Lady Consolata, to enlighten and console the people of Africa, by bringing them the light and incentive of Christianity. He thus opened a very vast field to the people who desire to glorify God and save the souls of their brothers and sisters most in need.

Now, my Friend, this was enough; wasn't it? Yes; but he still desired to provide a heavenly protector to all his works. Who had inspired those works from heaven, and who had supported his physical and moral strength in accomplishing them? Our Friend had no doubt about it: it had been his maternal uncle, Fr. Joseph Cafasso, who everybody said was a saint, who had established on solid foundations the Pastoral Institute, and who had lovingly frequented the Consolata Shrine. The proofs of the required miracles were there, or they would come. So, why shouldn't he be officially proclaimed a Saint? Fr. Allamano trustfully wanted it, and he succeeded in making it happen.

A year ago (1925), Torino, Castelnuovo, and the Piedmont, were in Rome, in St. Peter's Square, for the glorification of that holy priest (Joseph Cafasso), the pearl of the Italian clergy, and the glory of our people. His nephew, Canon Joseph Allamano, was present and, during the singing of the "Te Deum" (hymn of praise), as if enraptured, he kept his eyes fixed onto the painting of his newly beatified uncle; when he lowered his gaze, his eyes were full of tears, his face pale, exhausted, as he perhaps was softly saying like Jesus, "Father, I accomplished the work you gave me to do."

Again, he prepared the solemn celebrations of last July; then I saw him once again in October, during the Episcopal Conference of the Bishops of Piedmont, when he greeted me, mentioning our old bodies which were still going on as by a miracle... and, then, we never met again. It was the last "Good-bye". The Friend of Jesus and ours was about to lovingly fall asleep in the Lord.

Our Friend is sleeping

[...] Looking at his corpse in his little room, or in the mortuary chapel, surrounded by a few candles and under a painting of Bl. Joseph Cafasso..., and observing the halo of his white hair, his unchanged countenance, his white hands holding a Rosary and a Crucifix, in an atmosphere of holiness and peace, who wouldn't say to him/herself, "Amicus noster dormit" (our friend is sleeping)? – "Sister, this dead is not scaring; are all the dead like this?" "Yes, but when their soul is in heaven". "Mummy, why do many people make medals and Rosaries touch the Canon's corpse?" "Because he was a saint." (From the chronicle of that day).

Many people confidently felt that, having closed his eyes to the light of earth, he had opened them to the light of heaven. [...] However, he had recommended, until his last moments, not to forget him, but to pray for him, while he would always be praying for his (spiritual) children and for his friends. For this reason, we are offering this sacrifice, on the "Thirtieth Day Memorial", together with your prayers and tears, O dear children, friends, and admirers of Canon Allamano, for his eternal rest [...].

And you, O Canon Allamano, do not forget the people who are left here on earth in desolation and tears; and pray also for the one who placed this poor flower on your tomb; keep away from him the Gospel's threat: "There were two people working in the same field; one was taken, and the other was left".

(From "G. Allamano: dalla Consolata al mondo", May-August 2005)

