

21. HIS MOTHER DIES

We are shown a notable aspect of the spiritual quietude of our exiles in Bologna by the fact that precisely in Bologna Gaspar and Albertini dedicate themselves to study the bases of the future Congregation of the Missionaries of the most Precious Blood and that of the Sisters.

This detail is significant. They speak of Corsica, of prison - realities that will not be long in coming - and two priests deprived of everything and fallen into the disgrace of the one who was ruler of the whole world and wished to follow, being two priests, I say, who were planning a project with a utopian outcome and putting in their minds the basis of two new institutions. What would the emperor have said if he could have known their minds?

Albertini had always been a teacher in many things for Del Bufalo, but above all, he had guided him in his devotion to the Precious Blood. Gaspar had been called to embrace this particular love; the passion of Jesus had moved him since he was a little boy, and his mother, as we have seen, had to swing him back to reality from the contemplative world. In his last Roman sermon which was given at the request of Albertini in the church of St. Nicholas in Carcere on the first of July, 1810, he spoke precisely on the most precious blood. During the long days of exile Albertini and Gaspar spoke often on their preferred theme of adoration; for them it was easy to bring up the mystery of the cross because they themselves carried their own modest cross out of fidelity to Christ, even more so when that cross was becoming even heavier on their shoulders.

On the 20th of October 1811 Gaspar received the greatest sorrow. The state of his mother had gotten worse when he left; the

only son, as we have seen, since Luigi, the older, had died five years previously. The absence of Gaspar reduced the house to a place of complete solitude. Annunziata wasted away during the weeks and months from worrying: in Rome the French ruled and nothing could prevent that she die some day. Her son could not return except under the condition of taking the "oath".

Both father and mother unanimously rebelled against this condition. "Better far away than a traitor", Annunziata said, and every day these words took away a part of her life. But she kept repeating them, at the same time humbly and yet unshakeably.

The idea that she would not see her son for many years weighed heavily on her heart uninterruptedly. That which was the most sorrowful was that she feared that her son would suffer greatly and that this situation was getting worse; she did not trust the notices she received and, as we have seen, she had reason to fear. She was right in her premonitions.

The sufferings she lamented became even greater between 1810 and 1811; on the other hand she did not want Gaspar to know of her sickness: what good would there be in having Gaspar worry about it? Antonio was hoping that Annunziata would get better in the spring; most sick people tend to get better then. There were ups and downs, but the tiredness of the body increased and became more constant. At the end of the summer it got even worse.

Without complaining and without recriminations, the poor woman became weaker each day in a noticeable way. Canon Santelli, who had received the pious assignment to assist her and kind of take Gaspar's place at her side, if that be possible,

said one time: "She drank death by sipping."¹

Pious mother that she was, sensing that she was dying, she gave all her love to Jesus Crucified. He was her helper and refuge. From the moment Gaspar left and said goodbye, she had said to herself valiantly that she would prepare herself for death: "Son, let me kiss your priestly hands, because I feel that I will never kiss them again."²

She died the 20th of October, praying, after having offered her long sufferings to Jesus.

When Gaspar heard the news he felt suddenly that his cross had become heavier. Everything disappeared around him: the exile, the prison, the drama which he and the rest were living; only one item remained as a seal etched profoundly in his heart: Mama has died; she died in sorrow, he knew very well, and if someone tried to tell him otherwise, he would not have been deceived.

He dedicated himself to Christ, just as his mother had done, and he lived those days in a similar agony. Shortly after this he wrote to Maria Tamini a letter in which he reveals his sufferings which were great but which were overcome by a total offering to God:

"Bologna, 2 November 1811

"Among all the tribulations with which the Lord is pleased to visit me, there is now added the one, the heaviest of all, of losing my holy and incomparable mother. Conformity to divine wishes does not prevent, in my humanness, the great sorrow that I feel so deeply on such a loss. Patience. She passed on to eternity on the 20th of last month, and I have not written to you before this, so as to make use of another opportunity not to burden you with mail. I will not dwell lengthily on this whole matter for now,

because the wound is still too acute. The only thing I ask, in as much as I know how to and am able to, is that you offer suffrages for such a blessed soul, who was so dear and beloved to you.³ Furthermore, do me the kindness of procuring for her even more good. Have the entire school and your girl pupils and other pious people receive Holy Communion for her. With that intention in mind, write to, or have others write to all the schools of your Institute, so that she will have the suffrages of the Maestre and of the pupils, as I have mentioned above.⁴ For all this I will ever be grateful to you. I always maintain before myself the obligation that I have with you because of the matter that you know of. Sufficient for now is that you do me the favor of being patient. Let this not be a disappointment for you, for in that case I would seek out a remedy as quickly as possible. My mother had noted down everything, as you probably also know. Meanwhile, I am still stunned.

"Fr. Eugenio is in Corsica. But the sorrow on the death of my Mother is inexpressible.

³ We read in the deposition of Maria Tamini at the Ordinary Process of Albano: "The reputation and fame of the mother of the Servant of God was that of a Saint, in fact she was nicknamed another Saint Monica. As I got to know her and drew close to her after the death of my own mother, I used to call her *madre mia*, for she was a person beyond reproach, had the greatest integrity and modesty of life. During the week she would often go to Confession and almost daily received Holy Communion."

⁴ In the same deposition, we read: "He wrote to me while he was in exile about the death of his mother; every year after that, just before the anniversary day, he would write to me again, so that I and my Companions and the girls would offer prayers and Communion for her."

¹ Santelli, I, 88; cf. Rey, I, p. 162.

² Santelli, I, 64.

“See to it that you recommend Annunziata to whomever you see fit, and if in this matter or any other I can be of help to you, just remember the disposition of my heart which you know very well. Marchetti wrote to me, and he is well.

“Pray for me. My greetings to your fellow-Sisters and consider me

“Affectionately yours, at your service

“*Gaspare C. del Bufalo*

“Oh, how willingly would I see you!
Hail to the Cross.”⁵

And with these words the letter ends.

Two months after the death of his mother, Gaspar and Albertini were separated. He had been the only support as his spiritual director and teacher of devotion. The French command had sent him to Corsica, to imprisonment in the Bastia.

Gaspar remained spiritually alone. When the notice arrived of his mother’s death, his companions in exile were fearful that he would suffer a collapse, as had happened in Piacenza; fortunately Albertini was at his side, with whose help Gaspar offered his suffering to God. Now Albertini had gone and Gaspar suffered for him, fearing that he would be in worse condition in the prison of Bastia. Christmas was near and this date was the most sad of his whole life. Such is the feast of Christmas, so loved by children; he recalled to mind the hours of past Christmases when he was a little boy with his mother in the church or at home, with all the humble gifts that she prepared during the previous night, so that her sons would not see, for a greater surprise and pleasure.

Now the family had been destroyed; his mother and brother dead; his father alone in that empty house, weighted down with work which he would find more and more

dreary down through the years; and for him, Gaspar, what could he look forward to?

In the year 1812, as we have seen, the disagreement between the church and the empire had become more pronounced until Pius VII was transferred to Fontainebleau; thus the worries caused by the damages to the church got mixed up with personal damages. But even then was seen the harmony Gaspar found in grace, a mixture of sorrow and hope, which helped him overcome his human weakness.

⁵ Cf. Letter No. 24 of the *Epistolario*.