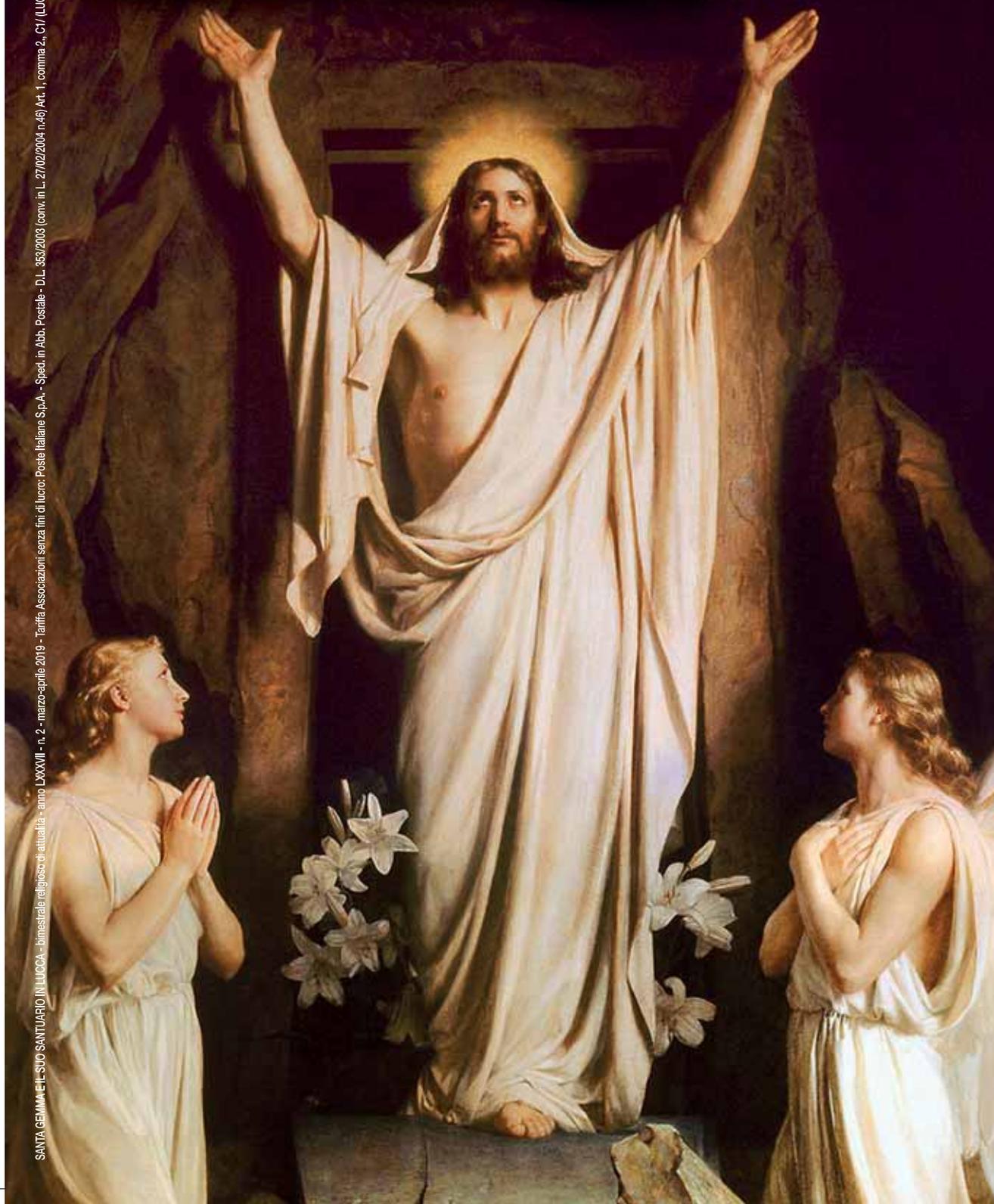


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EDITORIAL

ST GEMMA, AND THE VICISSITUDES OF HER SANCTUARY

In the common cemetery of Saint Anne, in Lucca, where the corpse of Saint Gemma had been interred, about thirteen days after her death exhumation was carried out in order to examine the body of the Saint for the first time. When Father Germano, who was not present at Gemma's death nor at her funeral, went to Lucca, he obtained permission from the authorities to conduct an autopsy to see if her heart, which had burnt with Jesus' love during her life, carried some extraordinary signs, as the one of other Saints did. During the post-mortem examination, "...Gemma's heart looked fresh, vigorous, flexible, rubicund and filled with blood, as

if it were alive... and thirteen days had already passed. Her heart looked larger than longer, and her ribs looked elevated and rather bended".

After the corpse was put back together and buried again, in 1909 there was another investigation on Saint Gemma's body, on the occasion of its relocation to another burial niche inside the cemetery, where Father Germano, some months before his demise, had a gravestone placed, the latter being nowadays found in the Sanctuary of Saint Gemma, where her mortal remains lie, too. During the first half of the 1920s, Gemma's body was moved to the Community of the



Passionists, outside Porta Elisa, on the eastern part of Lucca, were a third investigation took place. Here, the remains of her heart, together with other relics, were placed in a crystal heart reliquary, they were granted to the Passionist Fathers and preserved at the General Postulation of the Passionists, in Rome. As time went by, there was a considerable increase in the number of believers devoted

to Saint Gemma coming to Lucca from many countries, both to pay homage to her and to invoke her intercession. The need for another church and another monastery was soon manifest. In fact, the chapel of the Passionists had been obtained by the conversion of an old building dating back from the second half of the 18th century. The mortal rests of the then Blessed Gemma were placed in a crystal urn in one of the altars of an internal chapel, where the priest and the altar boy were the only ones allowed. In order to receive the new Saint, the construction of a worthy church and a sanctuary were mandatory.

Gemma herself, during one of her ecstasies, had the vision of Christ talking to her about the new Monastery of the Passionists to be founded in Lucca. There was nothing left to do but to proceed to the realization of the work, yet the opinions of the nuns on how to proceed diverged and this created divisions among them, as the Venerable Mother Maddalena Marcucci tells us in her writings.

“Some thought a Saint could not get the veneration she deserved in a cloistered

convent... others thought the already existing parish would give the Saint more veneration... and then some said the parish in which she had died should be privileged. The same applied to the place that would work as their definitive see. Some of the nuns believed that it would be better to look for a place inside the city centre... Others believed they should buy an ancient

urban boarding school, San Ponziano: it would be sufficient to expand it in order to have it ready... Others, on the other hand, disliked the idea of leaving the place in which they were living at the time, which had a huge piece of land, more than enough to construct buildings”. The Archbishop, who was aware of this divergence of views among the nuns, asked the Passionist Mother House to choose a nun. When the nuns of Lucca’s monastery found out about this, they asked for Mother Maddalena Marcucci, a daughter of the House and the right person to guide this Community.

Mother Maddalena was part of the first group of the

Passionist Nuns of the Community in Lucca, the one Gemma Galgani had seen in vision. She had left for Mexico with five sisters to open a monastery; after about three years, she had to go back to Europe due to the revolution, but she had stopped at Deusto, Bilbao, where she had founded the first monastery of Passionist Nuns in Spain. Mother Maddalena, whose cause of beatification is now in progress, has met during her spiritual journey Monsignor Giovanni



Volpi, Father Gemano, Lady Cecilia, who introduced Gemma to the Giannini family, and Eufemia Giannini, one of the three daughters of Dr Giannini, druggist; Eufemia took the veil under the name Gemma and founded the Nuns of Saint Gemma.

Mother Maddalena was called back by the Congregation when she was, indeed, in Spain, and this piece of news left her with great astonishment, as she herself gives testimony in her writings: "I was astonished that a cloistered community, an already established one, with worthy people, decided to ask a Mother Superior, although daughter of

the very same community, who is in another country.

Were there no other nuns capable of such a task? I sensed the reasons why they called me since I was in Spain, when I received the invitation, and then I perfectly understood when they started to discuss the matter.

The Archbishop, in fact, had built the plan of the Sanctuary and monastery in the very place they were living, hastening to start the project before the nuns were even

informed about it, or of how the work would proceed..."

With the arrival of the Mother in 1935, works began, and for five years they were constantly supervised by her, who directly talked to

both the architect and the builder. As she writes, for many times she had to climb the high scaffolds in order to check the measures

for windows and doors. They were busy days for her, filled with engagements; one need only think that Mother Maddalena had two or three assistants who knew French, German and Spanish, and who would help her to answer the voluminous correspondence that arrived to the monastery from the many believers all over the world.

The construction, although with many difficulties, especially economic ones, got to a point when it was necessary to demolish

the old building. The believers coming to invoke Gemma came from everywhere, so that it was impossible to interrupt her cult without creating inconveniences to people filled with hope and coming from far away...

The various difficulties were eventually overcome, and the day came when

Blessed Saint Gemma had to come into possession of her Sanctuary, even though partially; the anniversary of her death, April 11th, 1937, was thus chosen. "All the civilian and religious authorities of

the city and Province took part in the event", Mother Gesualda writes in Gemma's biography. "On the occasion of that solemn ceremony, the entire city had moved for Her". Everyone was busy trying to make the cele-



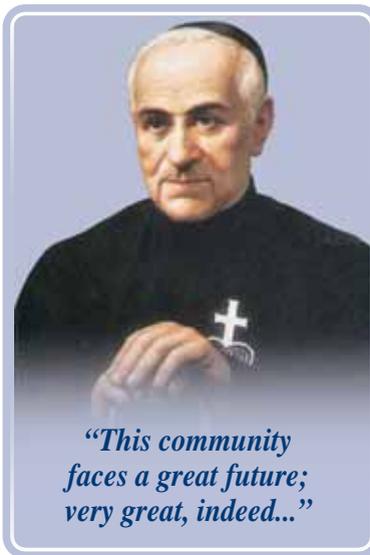
Lucca, fuori Porta Elisa: Chiesina delle Passioniste e urna di Santa Gemma

"On the occasion of that solemn ceremony, the entire city had moved for Her"



bration of their fellow citizen more solemn; she was no more the poor Gemma, as she used to sign in her letters, but the Blessed Gemma.

Archbishop wanted the urn with the mortal remains to be carried into Lucca's Cathedral, the Cathedral of Saint Martin, three days in advance, in order to prepare people with a triduum and to have a procession start from there to take Gemma back to the Sanctuary. As she went past, streets were decorated with arches of flowers that the municipal administration had ordered to erect in her honour. Everyone, the sick and the healthy, was close round the borders of the streets where the procession took place, chants and bell rings echoed and awakened in every heart feelings of hope, compassion, praising of God, the one who thus elevates



“This community faces a great future; very great, indeed...”

the humble, the poor, those who suffer and attempt to imitate those virtues of which Gemma was, in those moments, a remarkable example. Some of the nuns who were present thirty years before still remembered when Gemma was in the common cemetery with the other dead people, when the community was just living its first years, flooded with poverty and far from imagining what would happen; these nuns thought about Father Germano's prophecy. By ripping off the mysterious

veil of the future, he, almost transformed and out of his mind, said: “This community faces a great future; very great, indeed...”, and he pronounced these words with such a heavy emphasis. This future was then visible, before everyone's eyes, in its outstanding achievement.

By GIUSEPPE MILANI

SPRITUALITY PAGES



THE SCIENCE OF LOVE



It is an overwhelming love the one that binds our dear Saint Gemma to the myriad of pilgrims who, in a way or another, have had something to do with her.

This is because she is a particularly active Saint, and this is well known by the faithful scattered all over the world. In making this statement, and supporting it, Maykel comes to my mind, an Ecuadorian from



Esmeraldas, a city of 154,000 souls close to the border with Colombia, and overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The city of Esmeraldas gives its name to the province of the same name, which is also called "green province", because it enjoys abundant vegetation all year round.

I met Maykel on a day of our sunny August, in the Sanctuary of Saint Gemma, together with

seven other people all coming from Ecuador.

Father Marco and Father Giovanni had called me to volunteer to hold visits in the house where Gemma received her stigmata. A quick introduction in Spanish, patched together as best as I could, some words in English, and presentations were done.

We could set off for our target, inside the city centre.

While on our way, I tried to answer their questions on the city, which appeared in its usual majesty inside the 16th century walls, on Gemma and on her wonderful story. I tried to search those black, black eyes which looked curious into mine, searching for something

to release me from my torments, racked as I was by the many questions and uncertainties. I wondered how it was possible

“I wondered how it was possible for our dear Saint Gemma to be known even in such a distant world...”

for our dear Saint Gemma to be known even in such a distant world; in a country that the Equator cuts in half lengthwise, carrying warmth and colours of uncommon beauty. Who on Earth took the luminous offspring of such an incredible and yet simple, authentic, unrealistically

spontaneous Saint in such a place?

My searching look was clearly not the only one to navigate the dangerous waves of questions and doubt.

Then, a woman in the group, called Ashley, told me I should not be so surprized, since Gemma was very popular in their country.

And she was right in giving answers to my wandering attitude; in any case, I had already had similar experiences, with New Zealanders, for example, not to mention Australians. With them, I remember discussing the fact that they came to Lucca from the remotest place on Earth: I maintained that if we dug a hole in our city and





exited from the other side of the globe, we would arrive to New Zealand and Australia. However, the experience with the Ecuadorians affected me deeply, maybe because it was unexpected; but I repeated to myself I had to be used to Gemma's surprises, whose message of love has no limits. I remember spending two hours of my time talking about Gemma's story, and it was a well-spent time, especially for me, since I was happy to see their interest and, once in the room of the stigmata, their extremely intense praying. I prayed with them in Spanish, following Ashley, who kept the rhythm with her hands joined. When we said goodbye we felt as if we had always been friends, and while they took the

road to the city centre and its outstanding beauties, I chose to walk on the city walls, and sat on an iron bench to meditate.

I distinctly remember what J. F. Villepelée used to say on

"... the features of a Saint always escape the "carnal" looks, but it shows up to the ones who look with the eyes of the heart."

what concerns the features of a Saint: he said that, as Charles Péguy –illustrious French writer, poet and essayist– would put it, the features of a Saint always escape the "carnal" looks, but it shows up to the ones who look with the eyes of the heart. We live, nowadays, in a

world torn apart by the most varied sins, sins of misunderstanding, egoism, violence; yet, God, in His magnificence, spreads along our journey Saints who bloom here and there, lightened by the only sun capable to warm: Grace.

However, if we think about it, Saints hide in the prayers of time and in those of history, bordering the dark alleys and places that life gives us. History books talk about heroic characters who tread the boards of life, often by stepping on what they found in their way. But this is not the Saint's case: he or she knows other ways, brightened by transparency and light.

Saints, and Gemma, in specific, do not lose the baptismal innocence; they rather fortify

it, by drinking from the light of Christ.

There are no storms that can wreck their ships, even during the most dangerous tempests; they –and Gemma is their master is this– cling to Christ’s cross, the wood of which redeems and sets us free, and is unsinkable.

Our life is made of encounters, and we know it well: how many people cross our way? Some do it daily, while we deal with ordinary business, so we shake hands, we say hi, we smile.

However, some other encounters happen in a different way, in different senses, with no presentations or greetings, but in a supernatural way –sometimes we do not even realize about them.

Obviously, we cannot forget that, through the Baptism, we

become members of an immense family and Jesus is our older brother.

The love of God is not subject to our temporal and spatial limits; its arrows can hit us no matter where we are; they can

“There are no storms that can wreck their ships, even during the most dangerous tempests; they cling to Christ’s cross...”

cross the mountains, go beyond the oceans and, of course, they do not take into consideration human frontiers; they can hit us during the apotheosis of an indescribable joy, as well as when we withdraw into ourselves, maybe when, at nightfall, the colours are fading, our heart becomes smaller and smaller before regrets and memories.

Jesus also uses Saints for their superb example of creatures bearing the one and only Charity; he uses them to upset our lives, so that he can draw us closer to him and never leave us again. Let us face it: how many times, just by looking at a simple picture, or at the short lines or moving prayer written on it, we feel rapt and fascinated by a presence we cannot perceive, but which traps us forever?

Besides, with Gemma, our wishes of purity, sweetness and peace can be really accomplished.

One cannot be indifferent to a look like hers, which searches our souls and exposes us to our faults.

The Letter to the Hebrews (12, 1), as Villepelée reminds us, presents Saints like a golden cloud, the drops of which re-



flect the sunlight, which is the Lord, while the *Revelation* (7,9) reminds us that *Saints were a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.* The Saint, and Gemma can bear witness of this, might be dressed in a humble way, but his/her chest shines with the brightness of Grace which knows no darns, nor fashionable clothes, but which directs all its attention to the heart. Yet, if we think about it, art has not been faithful in the representation of the difference between appearance and reality. It has often enclosed Saints in their halos, reduced them to

icons, and idealized them in legends.

Truth is much simpler than it might look: their clothes are made of everyday life –melancholic, often–, but they hide under that fabric a fire that

“A great multitude (...) stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands”

warms, a fascination that intrigues, because that is where our Lord is.

Gemma’s message, dear reader, is the message of limitless love, a love that knows no road that does not converge in Jesus. I was lost in these thoughts, on

the iron bench on Lucca’s city walls, and I did not even realise the Ecuadorian group was passing by.

“Hi, Saint Gemma”, Michael whispered in my ear in a perfect Italian, and hugged me tightly. And when his mouth drew closer to my right ear, he added: “Gemma is here in Lucca with you, but she is also here, you know?”, and while saying this, he touched his heart, and I nodded with satisfaction.

He said goodbye, together with his friends, and I followed them with my eyes until they disappeared from my sight, just like a dot on the horizon. “Horizon?”, I wondered, “Distances have never been so close with Gemma...”.





THE REAL WITNESSES

APRIL 11th 1903, THE DEATH OF SAINT GEMMA

Some months ago, my friend Alessandro from Lucca gave me as a gift, together with other texts, the 1903 biography of Blessed Gemma Galgani, written by Sister Gesualda Maddalena Eletta dello Spirito Santo (1879-1930). I was amazed by that gift, since I was already acquainted with the classical biographies by Father Germano, Zoffoli and the more modern ones. That biography had been written by one of the most remarkable daughters of Lucca.

Gesualda was born as Adelaide Sardi in Lucca, on the 16th of July 1879, from Count Cesare Sardi and Clementina Martelli, of the Martelli family from Florence. Lively and resourceful, Adelaide was admitted to

one of the most exclusive boarding schools in Florence, called “La Quiete”, which was under the Montalve Sisters. Once she came back home, in line with the style in vogue among wealthy families, she improved her knowledge of languages, music and painting. While in her paternal house, she received several proposals of marriage, which, one after the other, she refused, thus declaring her intentions towards a consecrated life.

After a careful reflexion, she entered the Carmelit Convent of Saint Mary of the Angels in 1902, where she was then named Sister Gesualda Eletta dello Spirito Santo. There, she was in charge of the archive of Saint Maddalena de’ Pazzi, together with other traditional

monastic duties, and she started a real period of spiritual education through her personal study and writings.

She kept in contact, both personally and by letter, with a considerable amount of prominent secular and religious personalities of her time. Among others, besides her relatives and her school friends, Cardinal Mercier, Sister Agnes of Lisieux, Saint Mary (Alessandra di Rudinì) of Paray-le-Monial, Blessed James Alberione and St Pio of Pietrelcina. Moreover, her knowledge of the languages allowed her to be acquainted before anyone else with the best texts on spirituality published in France at the time. This is how she came to the decision of translating into Italian *Story of a Soul*, by



Thérèse de Lisieux, which was then followed by the *Memories* by Mother Germana of Jesus, on Elizabeth of the Trinity, and by several other biographies; among which, that of Gemma Galgani.

Sister Gesualda knew Gemma by sight -she writes-, since she had ended up next to her several times, during the long waits before Monsignor Volpi's confessional. People told her that Gemma was a "little cold chicken", and she did not excite her liking. Once, though, she was impressed by Gemma's smile.

When, years later, people asked her to write Gemma's biography, she was reluctant, because "everything about her disgusted me".

For twenty-five years, Sister Gesualda objected: "How could I write about someone I do not love and someone I do not believe in?"

However, one day she addressed Gemma, and said: "If you want this homage from me, let me love you". As if by magic, my dislike for her vanished, it turned into an overwhelming love, and this happened before I read her biography. I read it, eventually, and since the very first pages, the sweet and heroic figure of Gemma jumped out of it, beautiful, bright, saint [...]. I contented myself with writing these few pages, in which I wanted to put all my love, to make amends for my past incredulity; read from me,

reader, and communicate to the others."

We offer her by the very same text by Sister Gesualda, readapted; we are sure that, by sharing the feelings revealed by the text, the reader will be able to live over again the same intensity of the three days that prepared Gemma for the embrace with her crucified spouse in the eternal Easter of His kingdom.

On the evening of January 24th, 1903, for fear that the

*"Let us pray, sister,
let us pray.
Let us not think
of anything but Jesus!"*

younger children of the Giannini family could be infected by her disease, Gemma abandoned the house and was moved in the small flat her aunt was renting. Her pains were by now excruciating. Her stomach could bear no more food, not even some liquid drops; vomit achingly shook her poor body. Cough destroyed her chest, taking her breath away. Not even one part of her body was exempt from pain. Later on, sight failed her, and her voice got weak, she struggled to utter a word. Still, never did she ask for relief; never did she look tired or grieved; never did she ask to be moved or

lifted a little, although she rested in an uncomfortable position. She never asked for anything (spontaneously, on her own initiative) throughout the entire illness, not even a mouthful of water -Mother Gemma Giannini says. Due to mistakes or misunderstandings, it happened that she was sometimes left alone at night, the moment she would have mostly needed help; but she did not say a word, she did not get upset, nor did she groan. In order to prevent this, the Sisters of St Camillo De Lellis were called to look after her, a community which Gemma had once thought of joining. One of them tells that, at the beginning, she heard Gemma crying out, in the midst of the torment: "My dear Jesus, I can bear this no more"; but, after being told that with Lord's grace everything is possible, she stopped repeating this. On the contrary, to those commenting: "Poor soul, she can bear it no more", she answered: "I can". During those long nights, her only comfort was praying: "Let us pray, sister, let us pray. Let us not think of anything but Jesus!". And when she could not pray with her lips, she prayed with her heart, as she had been taught to by Monsignor Volpi. "I do exactly what he told me to do". Besides the physical sufferings, Gemma had to bear the moral sufferings, too, which were even worse.

The devil tried to drive her to



despair, by filling her mind with ghosts, so as to raise anxiety, bitterness and fear in her heart. Her sorrowful life, the misfortunes of her family, the agonizing hours, the privations of every sort, all of this was set before her, and a voice filled with irony and sarcasm seemed to repeat in her mind: "This is what you have received from your hard work for the Lord". The very same voice suggested to her the idea that God had abandoned her because she had taken the wrong path, and only showed her deception and hypocrisy in her most heroic virtues, in the great favours she had received. This temptation was the most terrible and the most lasting. Gemma almost found herself oppressed by it, so she thought she could try to contrast it with a general confession. She took a pen and, in the middle of that painful state of spiritual agita-

tion and confusion, she wrote the story of her life, declaring herself guilty of a thousand hells, for having deceived, with evil intent, her confessors, directors and herself. Coming to the details, she went through the Decalogue, the precepts of the Church, the deadly sins, the obligations of her state, and she declared herself terribly guilty for everything.

This letter, before being sealed, was read by someone and sent, at Gemma's request, to a saintly priest well known to her, and whom she begged to come and give her absolution for her sins. He came and reassured her. The Devil tried to tempt her impatience, but in vain. He tried to tarnish her virginal purity, but in vain. This last temptation was so painful that she wrote these words to her spiritual director: "Father, this torment is more than I can bear. Ask Jesus to change it for me

into something else...". Then it was the time of fearful apparitions, of deafening noises. People in the house sprinkled holy water in the room; then, for a moment, the disturbances ceased, but only to begin again later on, even worse than before.

When they offered her some food, she saw it, under the devil's spell, strewn with filthy insects, so that they were forced to take it out of her sight, leaving her hungry.

She felt like horrible animals of hideous shapes came into her bed and crept over her body, she felt trapped in a serpent's coil choking her. She asked to be exorcised, but she was not allowed to, so she did it by herself. Sometimes the Lord and his good Angel rushed at her aid, cheering her up with words aiming not at fear, but at increasing her hope: "Resist, do not be defeated, if

temptation persists, then shall resistance persist as well, and the fight will lead you to victory". But these moments of light were rare, and after them, the fight got fiercer. "Where are you, Jesus?", she said after every fit, "Where are you? You know it, Jesus, you see my heart...".

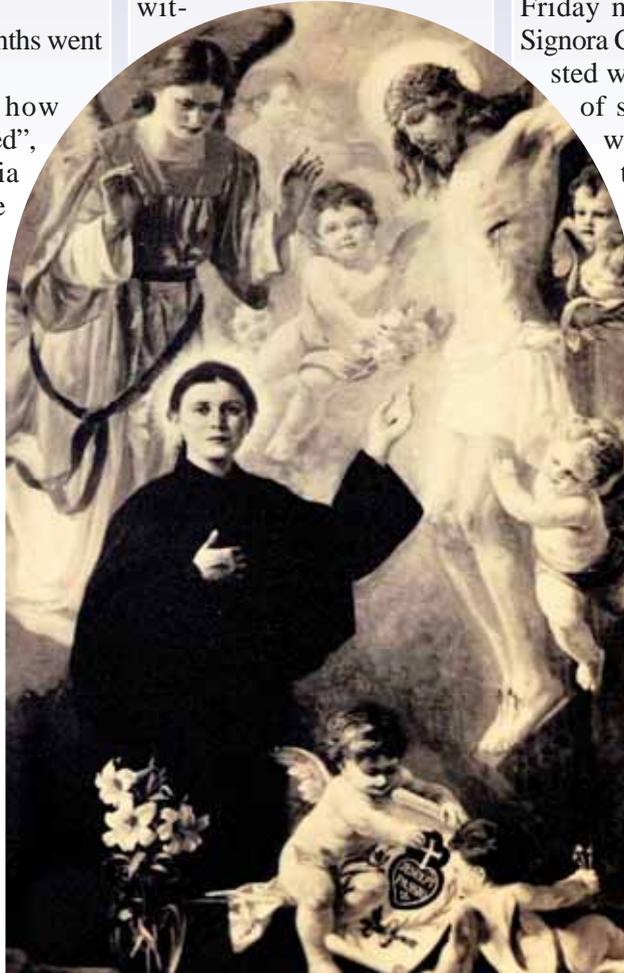
And days, weeks, months went by like this.

"Learn, Eufemia, how Jesus wants to be loved", Gemma told Eufemia Giannini one day, the latter being holding a basin for her, who was prey to a severe cough. "Jesus, I am yours, body and soul. I accept every suffering, but I want to be entirely yours". Being with Jesus was the only aim of her life.

But Jesus did not abandon her beloved. The special graces with which she got strength for the last fight acted as a counterpoint for her sufferings.

On Good Wednesday God had already been so kind as to lift an edge of the veil which hid heaven from her. When in ecstasy, a Sister asked her if the Lord had comforted her, and she answered: "Oh, Sister, if only you could see the smallest particle of what Jesus has shown me,

how you would rejoice!". Then she received the Viaticum, and on the following day, she desired to receive the Viaticum again, fasting throughout the night, the priest finding it difficult to give it to her for two consecutive mornings. "She looked like a Saint", a wit-



ness said, "seated on the bed with her hands joined, her eyes lowered, her face radiant and her lips smiling, in spite of the extreme pain she felt". During the ecstatic meditation of the Holy Communion, on that

Thursday morning, Gemma thought to have seen a crown of thorns, and said: "I shall go through all sorts of pains, before you are completed!". And turning to the Sister she added, "What a day tomorrow will be!". It was almost the end of the tragedy. In fact, when on Friday morning around ten, Signora Cecilia, feeling exhausted with fatigue and want

of sleep, expressed her will to go home and take a little rest,

Gemma said to her: "Do not leave me until I am nailed to the cross. I must be crucified with Jesus! Jesus told me that His children must be crucified."

Shortly after, Gemma entered into a sheer ecstasy, and she gradually extended her arms so that her body got the shape of a cross, and she remained like that until half-past twelve, on that Friday. Her expression reflected sorrow and love, desolation and

calmness. She did not utter a word, but her attitude suggested she was in agony with her sweet Lord. Everyone in the room gazed upon the scene, thinking they were about to witness her last breath. But her

agony went on for the rest of the day, for the entire night and even on Saturday morning. She had said it: her crown of thorns had to be completed with cruel sufferings. On that Saturday, she found some little strength to answer in a low and weak voice to the prayers of the Anointing of the sick ceremony.

The priest who had anointed her went away at once, and he did not come back until her very last moments, to pray for her soul.

The one who had given her the Viaticum did not show up again, nor did the exceptional confessor who she had called, and who confessed her quickly. Gemma wished Monsignor Volpi to come and perform the exorcisms of the last sacrament, because she saw the Devil in the form of a ferocious black dog close to her; but, since the services took a long time, he was not able to go until around midday. "I left", said Signora Cecilia, "Gemma said she wanted the exorcisms and Monsignor, after having given her blessings, asked her: 'Are you satisfied, now?'. Gemma answered she was not, and that she wished for the real exorcisms. 'I must go to wish the Archbishop a happy Easter,' replied Monsignor. 'I will come back and see you later on.' But he was not to see her again, as Gemma passed away shortly".

"I must confess", says Signora Cecilia "That on that morning

Monsignor had been told that Gemma was expecting him, and he had answered: "Tell her if it is for confession I will come, but if it is to assist her in her agony, it is impossible. There are the curates". Those days were, for an auxiliary Bishop like him, exceptionally busy. When I told Gemma Monsignor's words –Signora Giannini says– Gemma took the Crucified in her hands, holding it opposite her eyes and, while looking at it, she said: "You see, Jesus, I really cannot bear this anymore; if

"She kissed the Crucified, she placed it on her heart and, while keeping her hands on it, she closed her eyes, and remained still."

this is your will, then take me". Then she glanced up towards the painting of Mary, hanging on a wall, and added: "My Mother, I entrust you with my soul, tell Jesus to be merciful". She kissed the Crucified, she placed it on her heart and, while keeping her hands on it, she closed her eyes, and remained still. When Monsignor arrived, she opened her eyes told him what we said before. When he left, she went back in the same position.

Signora Cecilia ran to call the parish priest, Abbot Angeli of the Canons Regular of the Lateran, and then rushed to the Giannini's, where the family

was at dinner. "Gemma is dying!" she exclaimed. The whole family, all except the young, rose and hastened to see the dying girl. Signora Giustina lifted her, and put one of her arms behind the pillows, so that Gemma's head could rest on her shoulder. Eufemia, kneeling before the bed, held Gemma's right hand into hers, pressing her head against it. Next to her, Signora Cecilia and the other members of the house filled the room.

Abbot Angeli, who prayed for her soul, looked at the present people and asked: "Has she died?". She really had died, but nobody had realized it. "I attended to many sick people", he said, "But never have I witnessed a death like this, with no foreboding signs, no tear, no panting. She died with a smile, and she remained with that smile on her lips, and I could not persuade myself that she was dead".

Father Germano also missed Gemma's agony. When the end appeared imminent, Signora Cecilia told Gemma: "We must send a telegram to Father Germano", but Gemma, knowing by an interior light that God wanted this sacrifice, too, did not mention it anymore, and to those who asked about him, she answered, with a sweet smile that expressed her love: "I seek nothing more. I sacrificed everything and everyone to God. Father Germano will come after Easter."

Jesus had been celebrated in Lucca's churches during the Holy Week: he had by now been taken off the cross, and the Eucharist had been placed in the so called sepulchre. It was the Holy Saturday, and a complete silence reigned. And on that very day of peace, the Lord chose to take off the cross his loyal lover, too, and to indissolubly bind her to him in the glory of resurrection. Therefore, on the Holy Saturday, her soul opened to receive the Love that, in a moment, would become eternal inside her, a nameless glory.

Gemma had asked Jesus to die with no human support, just like Him: "A priest and a Christian will be enough", she had said.

The last verses of that poem filled with love and pain ended in a great suffering and surrendering. She silently bended her head and, with nobody reali-

zing it, she passed away. They dressed her in black, put the necklace around her neck, the Passionist emblem on her breast, a garland of flowers on her head; they joined her hands, in the position she took when she was in ecstasy; she did not look dead, just peacefully asleep, or in the middle of a love ecstasy.

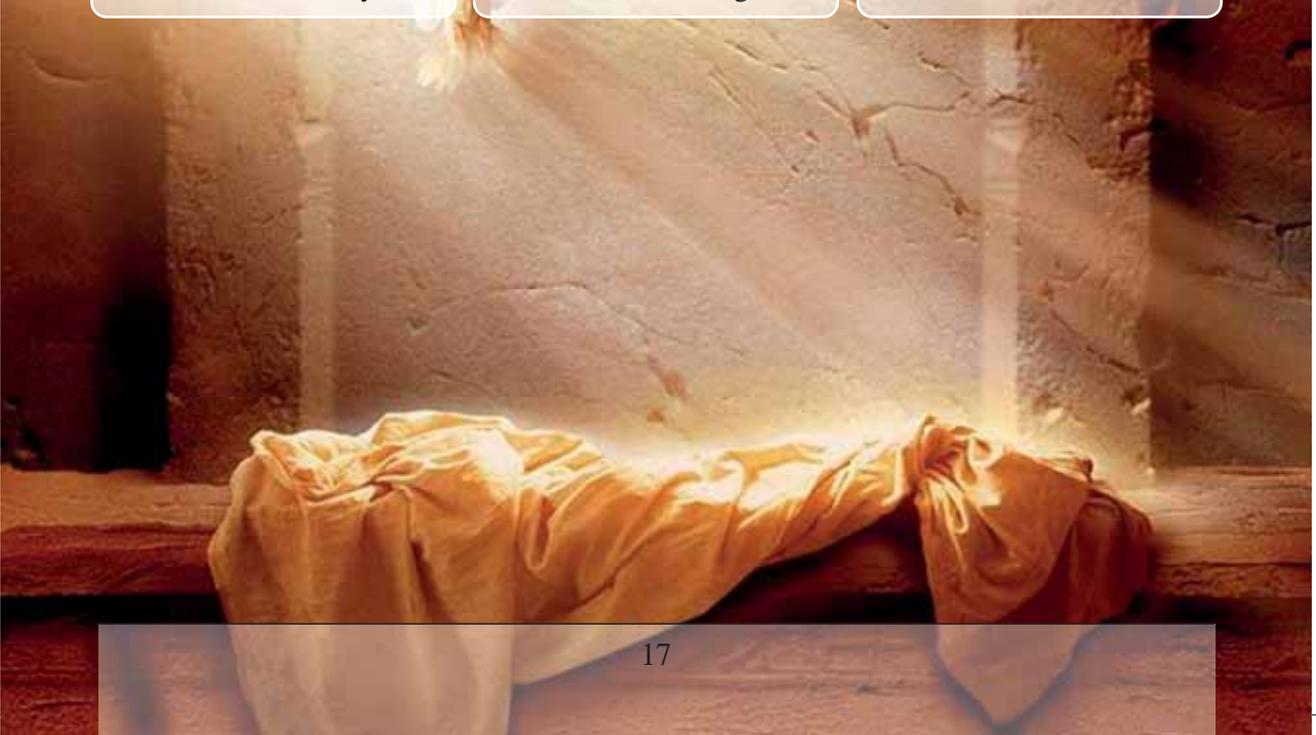
A vast crowd gathered around the body of that creature who had lived in darkness, ignored almost by everyone. The old and the young, priests and laypeople, everyone came to kneel before her remains, invoking her holiness, asking for her relics, kissing her hands, pressing crowns and medals against them.

Among the others, there was the priest to whom Gemma, when possessed by the devil, had written the general confession of what she considered to be her sins; he, falling on his

knees to respect her body, exclaimed: "Gemma! Here lies a miserable sinner! Pray Jesus for me!"

On the Holy Saturday -a day that is regularly part of Easter's solemn vigil-at dawn, the brothers of the company called "The Rose", with their typical yellow sack, went out of the house where Gemma had passed away. The coffin was carried by two of them and by two members of the Giannini family, who considered this last homage as an honour to their angel Gemma.

The city bells rang a joyous peal for Easter, while the Angels of Passion and Resurrection floated around the coffin, singing hosanna and hallelujah to the woman who, having followed our Lord to the Gathsemane and to the Calvary, had also deserved to join Him in the triumph of His resurrection.





LIFE EXPERIENCES

PATIENT, COME FORTH!

Christian reading of the “Patient advocacy”, the great revolution in the world of science and people who live with a rare disease.

The crossroads and the impulse towards change

What can reassure the heart of an ill person and her/his family? Where does the impulse that throws your heart beyond the wall of illness and makes you feel better, no matter the difficulties, come from? I left you with the story of my family and how the three of us –my son, my husband and I– reacted when our son, only two years after his adoption –so at the age of five– was diagnosed with a rare disease, a form of dystrophy. After an initial mo-

ment of trauma and discouragement, a strange reaction became manifest in our first-time-parent minds, actually, a totally unexpected one. At the time, now 13 years ago, for every bad news –and they poured in one after the other– my heart felt pierced, no way out. At the first occasion, I cried all my tears; then, after a while, sometimes in a day’s time or even less, I felt my strengths returning, and I started anew, in search for answers, solutions, ways out.

I felt like, finding myself at a crossroads, I had to decide

whether to live and be active or to die and throw in the towel. However, before each problem, before each stone on my way, the answer came naturally, like water gushing out of a spring, out of a stone behind which nobody suspected a source could hide.

Coming into action

As a perfect ignorant about rare diseases and about that specific disease, the facioscapulohumeral muscular dystrophy, I found myself, against my will, coming into action to



Fabiola among the group of expert patients certified at Winter Course EURORDIS



get to know the experts personally: doctors, scientists, institutions, associations, specialized centres, etc.; in short, the world which could positively affect my son's health. I really could not sit and wait, I had to know and understand. In 2006, one year after the diagnosis, I had set my mind on investigating, on entering in contact with people that counted in the field of my son's disease, on getting to be known by them, and I gave myself one year. An ambitious goal, maybe, considering I was starting from scratch. "On our way", as we say in Brianza, the place in which I was born, so I set out. Or, better, we set out, since, although the first effect of the diagnosis was the shock, the second one

was a process of getting closer, becoming accomplices and more unite, a process which allowed a resilient force, which we had never felt in our lives, to flow out of my husband, my

son and myself. A path made of many slopes, many fallings, and many tears. We needed so much patience! So much perseverance! So many prayers!



The art of trusting

From that moment on, we have never stopped. The journey is still going on. There still are slopes, fallings, tears, and there still are prayers, but also many good differences, in comparison with that pioneering time which, nowadays, feels so far away. First, and I am now talking exclusively about myself, since I am entering a spiritual dimension, I have become fully aware of the fact that I am not alone. Nobody ever is. Providence has its own paths

and logics, which men and women cannot understand, so it hurts when we have to admit we do not have the situation under control.

Here comes the best of it, but also the most difficult part. We must learn to move like the blind. Senses that we had never experienced awaken, sensitivity becomes manifest beside the ordinary rationality. The approach to life changes, both towards ourselves and towards our neighbours. It is a process. Everything happens by progressive hues, not from one day to the next. Then we realize we are “accompanied”. The Lord is with us, He precedes us, He follows us, He challenges us. Sometimes he shows up with signs, sometimes we must trust that he is there even though we cannot see him, even if we despair. That is how we learn the art of trusting. This is the biggest challenge. To accept we do not have the situation under control and place our trust in Him.

The biggest pain in the neck

Nobody ever wants to drink from the bitter cup of sickness, or impotence before the difficulties of a dear one for whom

you would give your own life. There are moments when, no matter how much you struggle, you never see the end of the tunnel, not even a feeble light. In those moments, prayers become more intense, and we knock, repeatedly, louder and louder. I have learnt that even when you feel alone, He is the-

pected. I once confessed these pains to the then Mother Superior of the Sanctuary of Saint Gemma and this woman, physically weak but spiritually powerful, answered: “Fabiola, keep on working and keep on knocking on Jesus’ doors: you must be the biggest pain in the neck to him!”.



Fabiola and Melanie Bordes pose in front of the Center for Genetic Diseases in Paris

re, he forges you, he models you like an artisan with his work. Stepping out of the comfort zone to explore the unexpected, disease, uncertainty, and dependence is never something we wish to do. Yet, in doing it, we find paths that we had never imagined, we land in harbours of our being that are totally new and unex-

We all are the main characters of a cartoon

I have been telling all this with the aim of making you understand that each and every of us is the main character of a drawing, like a cartoon, or a documentary. The Author of Life sketched us, and we do not know what story he has in store for us; what we know, if we decide to accept His will, is that we have a Father and that this Father loves us and looks after us, gently asking to make choices, to decide if

we do want to cooperate on His drawing. Every answer is legitimate. All of us are pieces of work. My story can resemble other stories, but it will never be the same story. There are no right or wrong choices. Everyone has its own. So let me conclude by telling you what my choice has been when facing the mystery that Provi-

dence set before me by means of my son's disease.

Patient Advocacy: active patients for everyone's sake

I am writing to you today, in March 2019. I have just finished the second qualifying course EURORDIS that the European Community funds in order to educate patients and make them experts in the so called Patient Advocacy. The first course -which I finished in June 2018- aimed at the preparation of patients (or of their close relatives) who live with rare diseases, focusing on the subject of how scientific experimentation that brings to the development of new drugs work, and what are the national and the European central bodies in charge of controlling this process in the interest of public health. The second course, on the other hand, allowed me to obtain a certification of expert patient in the field of genetics and that of the new technologies that nowadays underpin the development of new therapies. An example is the gene therapy, which uses viruses to diffuse compounds that modify the expression of a defective gene; another one

is the CRISPR/Cas9, the innovative technology through which we can "cut" the genetic code exactly where it needs to be modified, and which promotes a correct genetic expression, which means, it eliminates the flaws.

Science is making great progress. The result is not a certainty, yet, but the way is paved.

You will be wandering why

The reason why the European Community realized patients had to be advanced to the status of co-stars of a medical-scientific process, especially for what concerns research for new drugs, is that "no expert is more expert than the patient herself/himself".

During the years, excluding the patient, or diminishing her/his importance, has led the European Community and its

organisation in this field -the EMA, European Medicines Agency- to observe that considerable fortunes were invested in scientific research in conditions that were not optimal, and that was because the patient was an outsider, a player who benched and... was just patient!

Whereas nowadays, people like me or like many other mates coming from many European

countries, have the ability to acquire knowledge, to study, to be selected and certified and, eventually, to say: "Here I am! I am here to find a new drug or to improve an existing one, to improve a new technology for the community of people who share my problem".

Monza, Saturday, March 23rd, 2019



Fabiola and her husband Maurizio with Jaya in Lourdes

patients, being ill people who, by definition, have a passive role and "have patience" are now to become expert patients and to help their own selves, the other patients and, consequently, their families. In a word: their neighbours. Patient Advocacy is a term that means protection, defence, support, which is, actions that us patients can carry out for ourselves and for other people.



OUR DIOCESE

PAOLO STARTS... FROM GEMMA

It is a date that we must keep in mind: May 12th, 2019, Good Shepherd's Sunday. On this day the pastoral service of the new archbishop of Lucca, Paolo Giulietti, begins.

The press has already outlined his essential features. He comes from Perugia, where he is auxiliary bishop and collaborator

of Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, president of the CEI (Conferenza Episcopale Italiana – Italian Episcopal Conference) and guide of the regional capital of Umbria. The fact that His Excellency Monsignor Paolo Giulietti chose Good Shepherd's Sunday as the starting day of his pastoral service into the Diocese, is certainly no

accident.

The image of the good shepherd is a symbol that the Bible bears in many of its Scriptures. The application of this symbol to the Lord is evident, and in the Letter to the Hebrews, it is expressed very clearly.

Hebrews 13, 21-22

20 Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead



our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. I perfectly remember this pastoral image being my favourite psalm, the 23rd, out of which a famous religious song was then made; the song says: *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want... he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness... thy rod and thy staff they comfort me... Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..."*.

This, in a way, is the "command" interpretation of the shepherd, but it is always associated to the one of the "travel companion" who "does not make me fear no evil because you are with me". The shepherd is not the one who first refreshes himself but, together with his flock, he uses the fruits of the oasis and, on the contrary, wisely makes provisions and gathers flasks for the long periods of transhumance and poverty. The good shepherd is the one who lives for his flock, unlike the mercenary who, when danger arises, only tries to save himself. No. Not the Shepherd. As the character Cardinal Ferrero Borromeo reminds us

in a memorable page of *The Betrothed*, referring to the newly converted Unnamed: "We will leave the ninety and nine sheep... they are in safety on the mountain. I must now remain with the one which was lost". Surely Archbishop Paolo Giulietti will be equal to be that good shepherd of whom the Bible speaks.

The first pieces of information

cause, on the very 12 May, before entering Lucca, the archbishop will stop in the house of Saint Gemma; that's because the new bishop will arrive in Lucca on pilgrimage with young people, passing by the Via Francigena, a road long 7 kilometres by foot, starting from Capannori, the meeting place for the departure at 2:00 p.m., up to Lucca, with a stop at Saint Gemma's Sanctuary for a brief moment of prayer; from here he will resume the path to the Cathedral of Saint Martin.

We are very grateful to the new Archbishop Paolo Giulietti for having chosen our Sanctuary, where the remains of an incredible Saint like Gemma Galgani rest. She wanted to be the bride of the Crucified Jesus, for the conversion of all sinners, and she had a direct relationship with him.

We are sure that, before resuming his journey to Lucca, Archbishop Giulietti will stop to pray, kneeling before the body of the Saint. Dear Saint Gemma, we earnestly ask you to inspire Paolo to be that "good shepherd" who John, in Chapter 10, describes as one who knows and loves his flock. If you have called him to you, before the beginning of his service, perfume him with the love you have given and received from our wonderful Jesus.



describe the new young archbishop (he just turned 55 years old) as a bishop "wearing his shorts", considering his passion for pilgrimages on foot: this is how he had presented himself to a General Audience by Pope Francis, completely dressed as a scout, with the inevitable shorts, blue shirt and handkerchief. On this point, our Sanctuary has reason to rejoice be-



Dates and events at the Sanctuary

GEMMA'S 141st BIRTHDAY

Last March, on the 12th, the 141st anniversary from Saint Gemma Galgani's birth was celebrated.

As you might know, dear and affectionate reader, on the very same day we also celebrate children. This year, too, there

was a broad participation of children, mothers, fathers and grandparents, who did not miss this event, which, by now, is considered as important and is marked on the calendar. While Father Giovanni, as usual, opened the doors of his confessional to those who

would take advantage of the occasion to reconcile with the Lord, Father Marco was busy for the organization and the celebration of over 250 children and about 500 adults. He was very skilled in catching their attention by distributing



little hearts and by explaining to them that the most important thing in the world comes from those very hearts, and that is love.

As he always does, he took a simple but precise, synthetic path to get to explain, even through Gemma's words, that

God is love, to quote the apostle John.

Then it was the turn of a mother, then that of a father, then that of a grandmother and a teacher: in turns, they went to the ambo to read passages from the Scriptures.

A very pleasant celebration,

indeed, by now a tradition, the end of which took place in the "Sala del Pellegrino" (Room of the Pilgrim), with a tasty buffet. It is a right thing that images, more than words, shall speak, and we hope, dear reader, to see you next year among those present.





SPIRITUALITY PAGES

EASTER TIME...

It is a memory that I still preserve in the casket of my heart, that of the two most important celebrations of Christianity: Christmas and Easter. As a very young kid, I liked Christmas the most, with its magical time: snow, maybe, and the fairy-tale landscape;

the night falling all of a sudden in the middle of the afternoon, leaving a coat of mystery; the intermittent flashlights of Christmas trees, projecting incredible views. And the nativity scene, with the asymmetrical but incredibly meaningful faces of the little shepherds, the flock of sheep, the cave,

nestled in the rock and moss; in the distance, Herod's gloomy castle, which gave you gooseflesh...

These are slides from a past time, a time that is nowadays being lived by other children, who are loaded with an atmosphere—even climatic—which makes them dream.

It takes time to understand that

Easter, the Resurrection Sunday of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the most important between the two events. The real apotheosis, our hope, our faith, lies in there, as it is made clear in a most wonderful work, *Romans*. *But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the*

ba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. (Romans 8, 11.14-17)

Each and every of us remember, from the first Sunday school classes, the angel who, in the empty sepulchre, waited about, among the bendages that were once tied around Christ, the bendages of the women who, early in the morning, the day after Saturday, had come to the sepulchre with the spices. Carved in stones, but even more in our



dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Ab-

minds, those words still echo:

HE IS NOT HERE, FOR HE IS RISEN.

A sentence which will be repeated century after century, and which will be the emblem of the whole evangelical message, of theology, of art. Jesus Christ, real God and real man, who assimilated human condition

until the last terrible proof, death, but who, son of God, is risen, bearing witness of his condition, that of our Lord, who came to redeem us all. The Italian term for Easter, *Pasqua*, comes from the Hebrew *pesah*, a term referred to a Jewish festivity. It reminds us of the ritual of the veal, roasted without having its bones broken; the blood over the nomad camping tents; the unleavened breads; all famous rituals in the ceremonies of transhumance shepherds. In Israel, Easter is the celebration of the liberation from oppression. In the New Testament, Easter and resurrection are made explicit through the use of two verbs, which is better to know and adopt. The first is *eghêirein*,

which means “to awaken”. Death is seen as a sort of sleep, while life is seen as a state of wakefulness. In the Greek tradition, the word used by the angel with the astonished women is meaningful: *eghêrte* = he is risen. The other Greek verb still gives us, figuratively, the precise idea of “rising to one’s feet”, and it is *anistemi*. It is a verb which reveals the power of our Lord who, from

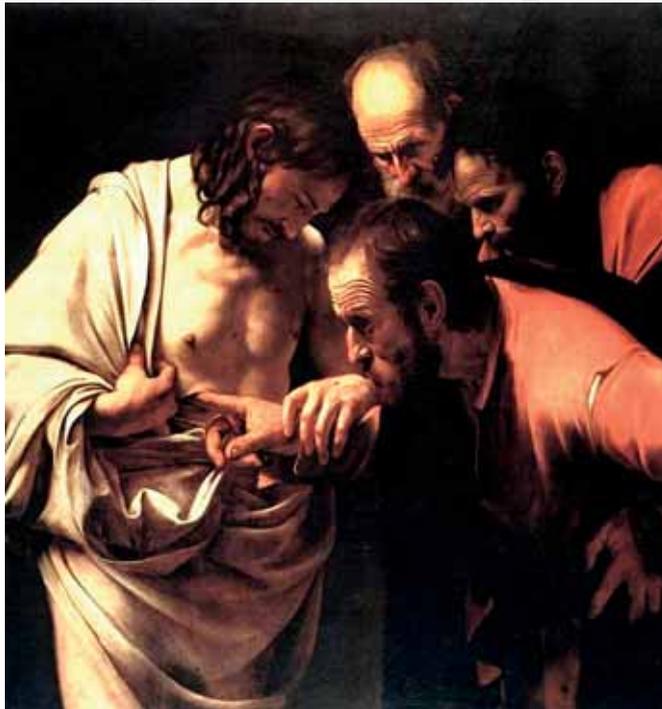
the shadow of death and from the ice-cold sepulchre, rises to his feet, rises to heaven. Jesus’ story is paved with people who described him first as a hero, then as a great prophet or whatever. Nothing more wrong: he is not a hero who dies, in the end, but, as a famous religious song says, he is

HANDLE ME, AND SEE; FOR A SPIRIT HATH NOT FLESH AND BONES, AS YE SEE ME HAVE.

Thus, dear reader, Easter is a festivity; or better still, the festivity of festivities. It is an event that goes beyond history, although it took place in history; an event that goes beyond the limits of space and

time.

Jesus rose to set us free from evil: we must look upon him if we want eternal life, too. Actually, talking about resurrection, in addition to the two verbs we talked about before, *eghêirein* and *anistemi*, there is a third one, rather meaningful, to be properly learned as well. This verb is *hypsoun*, which means “to lift up”. Do you remember? Jesus said



that: “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself”.

This is basically what we also have to do, to lift up, to rise above human miseries, above our pure selfishness, above our mostly wretched deficiencies, in order to fill ourselves with him. Still, today is a great celebration, as we were saying; life, this life, does not stop here...

THE LIVING GOD

That’s right, because, after his death, he is still present in history and, in the guise of a mangled body, he allows the incredulous apostles to touch him, in particular Thomas the sceptic; he meets his followers on a magic night, on the Road to Emmaus. Before the natural astonishment and fear of his disciples, Jesus is at pains to tell them.



Dear Saint Gemma

TESTIMONIES AND PRAYERS FROM THE PILGRIMS VISITING THE SANCTUARY

Gemma, my friend, how many times have you comforted me, relieved me, cheered me up? I feel your love... I did not know you, yet you called me and I found that I was loved, you know everything about me. I think about you every day, and I thank you for your protection. Talk with Jesus about me and protect my children. Thank you, Gemma. I love you.

Antonietta

The Passionist Nuns introduced me to Saint Gemma... I was given her diary, the book of her short but intense life. The more I read it, the more I understood that I had never been a good Christian, that I had never done anything for Jesus... and one can only think that, in her holiness, Gemma felt as the worst of sinner, even though she did not allow sin to come close to her... she was always careful and always praying. She had a direct contact with the Lord, who also gave her the stigmata... That is why she was much hated by the devil! Dear Saint Gemma, I wish all the Christians were like you!

Pina

Saint Gemma, my dear sister, for a long time I have not been able to listen to your words, but one day you appeared in my dreams. I was surrounded by flames and you, bright and beautiful, prayed with me, and after five Ave Marias, you took me away from the darkness. From that day on, my life has changed... I have changed. I have learned to pray with you and every day I pray the good Lord to protect my family, the sick and all the people who do not believe, so that they will be able to find in yourself and in the Lord the path to salvation.

Salvo, Agata e Valentina



I would like to give my testimony: I have been devoted to Saint Gemma since my childhood because my maternal grandfather, who was born in Chile, was also devoted to her. My mother was named Gemma. I have lived in Italy for five years, and I was born in Venezuela. I had two pregnancies in Italy and, when my children were born, I went to Lucca to give thanks to Saint Gemma. I am now living in England and three years ago I gave birth to a girl who, at the time of her birth, suffered from meningitis. I fervently prayed Saint Gemma. She spent three days in intensive care; we baptized her because we did not know what would happen. The priest who baptized her saw the image of Saint Gemma that I had placed on her incubator, recognized her and told me that Saint Gemma was the Saint of hospitalized children (I did not know this). The following day my daughter was discharged from therapy. Today, Martina Gemma is three years old. Two years ago, we went to Lucca with her and we took her to the Sanctuary.

Anonyma



Dates and events at the Sanctuary

Passionist cenacle with Saint Gemma Galgani

On the first Thursday of every month, at 9:00 p.m., we meet at the Sanctuary before the Corpus Christi, and we take our requests and pleas to the altar. We alternate silence, chants, simple symbolic gestures; that is how we adore our Lord, praise him, and invoke the Holy Spirit on those present.



On the 3rd Wednesday of every month, the Padre Pio prayer group “Volto Santo” from Lucca meets at the Sanctuary at 4:00 p.m., to pray the holy rosary and for the Eucharistic Celebration.

Useless Servants group

They meet on the last Monday of every month, at 9:00 p.m., for Eucharistic Adoration.

Memory of the gift of the stigmata

On the 8th of every month (or on the following Monday, if the 8th corresponds to a Saturday or Sunday), we remember in a special way Saint Gemma’s gift of the stigmata, which she received on the 8th of June 1899: the house of the stigmata will be open for visiting and praying. At 6.30 p.m., the “Memory of the gift of the stigmata” will take place in the

Sanctuary, and it will include rosary and Mass.

Praying with and for families

Moments of prayer and meditation open to everyone, with a special treatment for families with children, for which a service of babysitting is available during the meetings. At the end of each encounter, we dine together with a “bring and share” meal.

The theme of these encounters is “Master, teach us how to pray”. You can find the timetable of the encounters below:
3rd encounter: Saturday, March 30th, 2019, 7:00 p.m.
4th encounter: Saturday, May 18th, 2019, 7:00 p.m.
5th encounter: Saturday, June 15th, 2019, 7:00 p.m.

Day of Saint Gemma’s death

On April 11th, we remember Saint Gemma’s birth in heaven during the Eucharistic Celebrations at 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.



Novena and Saint Gemma’s celebration

From May 7th May 16th, we celebrate the novena in our Sanctuary, in preparation for Saint Gemma’s celebration: every evening there is a rosary praying at 4.45 p.m. and a Holy Mass at 5:30 p.m., livened up by Lucca’s parishes.

Padre Pio prayer group “Volto Santo”

The Saint’s Celebration is on May 17th. Masses at 8:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 5:30 p.m.



Dates and events at the Sanctuary

IN YOUR HEART!

Gemma's words turn into music

Lucca, city centre. Santa Maria della Rosa Church. A painting of the Merciful Jesus that I stared at for several minutes, because of a writing next to it: "Jesus, I would like my voice to get to the limits of the world, and I would call all the sinners and I would tell them to enter your heart!". I did not know that this sentence would become like a worm in my head and in my heart, until the day it became a song.

If Gemma had wished her voice to get to the limits of the

world, maybe there was something I could do to help her. I am not a musician, nor do I know a lot of music, but God gave me the ability to turn into music thoughts and feelings that rise from experiences and relationships with the Lord and those who live next to me... That is how the first song inspired by the writings and life of Gemma Galgani was born. I still remember that night: I was at home with my kids; I took my guitar because those words had been echoing in my

mind for days... The children were watching TV in the living room and I closed the kitchen's door. In 10 minutes, the music and the melody of the song *Nel tuo cuore (In your heart)*, which would also give the title to the CD that our Lord gave us, were born. On that very night, I recorded the newborn song with my mobile phone and sent it to David, a close friend of mine, who I had met (and now I can tell it was not by chance) thanks to Saint Gemma. A mutual musical understanding was



born straight away between David and I... maybe because he is a real musician, a violinist of distinction.

I sent him a message, asking his opinion on the song, and asking if he could “frame” it with the music of his violin. I also wanted to know his wife’s opinion, Floriana, an excellent soprano, who could lend her voice to Gemma. The result? The chant was ready in a few days and it was sang in the Sanctuary during the Eucharistic Celebration. What an emotion!!!

This was only the beginning of our journey.

New inspirations came little by little, which turned Gemma’s words and life into songs. With time, more and more people showed their taste for “Gemma’s chants”. Many people told us they could pray in more intimate terms, thanks to them, someone even asked if they could record them... Why not do it ourselves? Why not record our chants and put them at the disposal of the



whole community of Saint Gemma’s followers, not only those from Lucca? After all, this was Gemma’s wish: that her voice got to the limits of the world!

Enthusiasm was, from the very beginning, the major engine of this adventure. There were many things to do, and we had no experience in the field: we had to deal with the SIAE (Società Italiana Autori ed Editori - Italian Authors and Publishers Association), we had to find a sound studio, improve the tracks, record them and release the CD.

We did it, eventually. We presented the CD at the Sanctuary on a Saturday evening, and told

people the story of each track. It was a powerful emotion. Our prayer was, since the very beginning, that of being just humble tools in the hands of God, tools that could allow Saint Gemma to fulfil her dream; her voice will undoubtedly get to the limits of the world in the form of music and words, and the Monastery will be able to benefit from the earnings of the CDs’ sales (for ourselves, we only ask prayers to the nuns).

With this service, we wish to be a tool in God’s hands to help Gemma fulfil her dream. With our music and our voices, we wish to help people pray and praise, enjoying Saint Gemma Galgani’s spirituality and her limitless love for the Lord. With our hearts filled with the hope that Gemma’s voice will get to the limits of the world, we thank God for having granted us the privilege of playing and singing for Him, and we wish everyone a journey of holiness with Jesus, Mary and Gemma.



A Message from Mother Catherine Marie



Cari amici di Santa Gemma,

Auguri per una Settimana Santa e una Pasqua piena di benedizioni! Voi e i vostri cari sarete nei nostri cuori e nelle nostre preghiere durante questo tempo santo. Speriamo che possiate partecipare il più possibile alle celebrazioni della Settimana Santa, per mostrare gratitudine al nostro Signore per tutto ciò che Lui ha fatto e sofferto per amore nostro. La Settimana Santa e la Pasqua sono un tempo meraviglioso per dare pubblica testimonianza della nostra fede, e per approfondire il nostro impegno nel parlare ed agire come figli amati del Padre in mezzo al mondo spesso ostile alla Cristianità. Questa potrebbe essere l'ultima volta che scrivo a voi, perché sono stata eletta Madre Presidente della nuova Congregazione Monastica dei monasteri delle Suore Passioniste sparsi in tutto il mondo. Stiamo aspettando l'arrivo di Suor Monica Graffinara, che prenderà la leadership del monastero di Lucca dopo Pasqua. Suor Monica ha svolto il suo servizio come formatrice sia a Loreto che a Malang, Indonesia. So che voi la farete sentire la benvenuta a Lucca come avete fatto sentire me. Gli amici di Santa Gemma a Lucca e in tutto il mondo sono senza dubbio persone meravigliose piene di fede.

Sarete sempre nelle mie preghiere.

Vi ringrazio anche per aver risposto generosamente al nostro appello di aiuto finanziario. Noi abbiamo ancora bisogno di riparare diversi metri di rivestimento sul tetto del santuario. L'umidità ha polverizzato gran parte di quello precedente, lasciando scoperti i mattoni.

Abbiamo bisogno di ripararlo prima che subisca ulteriori danni. Così spero che ci ricordiate nelle vostre offerte e gesti di carità nel 2019! Ogni offerta, anche piccola, conta enormemente!

La nostra preghiera e gratitudine si estende ad ognuno di voi, amici di Santa Gemma.

Madre Catherine e le suore passioniste di Lucca.

Un Messaggio da Madre Catherine Marie

Dear Friends of St. Gemma,

Greetings for a blessed Holy Week and Easter-tide! You and your loved ones will be held in our hearts and prayers during this holiest season of the Church year. We hope that you can attend as many of the Holy Week services as possible, to show Our Lord your gratitude for all He has done and suffered for love of us.

Holy Week and Easter are a wonderful time to give public testimony to our faith, and to deepen our commitment to speak and act as the Father's beloved children in the midst of a world often hostile to Christianity.

This may be the last time I will be writing to you, for I have been elected Mother President of our new Monastic Congregation of Passionist Nuns' monasteries throughout the world.

We are now eagerly awaiting the arrival of Sr. Monica Graffinara, C.P. who will take up the leadership of the Lucca monastery after Easter. Sr. Monica has served as a formation director both in Loreto and in Malang, Indonesia.

I know that you will make her feel as welcome in Lucca as you have made me feel.

The friends of St. Gemma in Lucca and throughout the world are certainly wonderful, faith-filled people.

You will always remain in my prayers.

I also want to thank you for your generous response to our appeals for financial assistance.

We still have an urgent need to repair several meters of plaster facing just below the roof of the Santuario. Humidity has pulverized large portions of plaster, exposing the brickwork underneath. We need to repair this before more deterioration occurs. So, I hope you will keep us in mind for your charitable offerings in 2019! Every gift counts tremendously!

Our prayers and gratitude extend to each and every one of you, the friends of St. Gemma.

Mother Catherine Marie and the Passionist Nuns of Lucca.