

SUORE DI SANT'ANNA

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The Provincial Superior

Turin, 3 December 2010
Feast of St. Francis Xavier

*"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent
and have revealed them to infants" (Mt 11:25).*

Dearest Sisters,

On 29th November, after almost a month in the hospital, our dear Sr. Susanna left us, to say her "Yes" once more to her Spouse who came to meet her, call her and welcome her into His Kingdom of love and peace, that Spouse who for more than 60 years of Religious Life she had served with great enthusiasm and generosity. She leaves a great void in our Community and in the entire Congregation, in which she had felt she was a daughter, sister and mother.

Sr. Susanna (Giovanna Maria Damilano) was born at Fossano (CN) on 17th October 1923. Right from a very tender age she came to know the fatigue, pain and desires of emigrants, because her family had migrated to Argentina.

She learnt the values of hard work and honesty, simplicity and dignity, trust in others and openness to the whole world, values that were all anchored in a solid and crystalline faith, lived and transmitted by her dear ones in every circumstance. The sudden death of her father when she was only 8 years old while the other four children were all younger than her, forced her mother to work. While still a child, she learnt how to be a little, tender and responsible mother to her two sisters and two brothers, one of whom would become a priest and a missionary. The precarious situation, however, soon urged her wise mother to return to Italy with her family. Even in her old age, Sr. Susanna carried in her heart a lot of memories connected with these experiences, through which the Providence of the Father had written His story of love for her.

Upon returning to her home town, she was received into the Boarding School of the Sisters of St. Ann at Fossano. Here, she grew in maturity as a woman, and her religious and missionary vocation developed in a simple and vigorous way. At the age of 18 she responded to the call of the Spouse and entered the Postulancy. It was the 2nd of October 1941. The years of her formation were marked by a great spiritual and human commitment and also by the adventures and the hardships connected with the events of the Second World War.

On 10th August 1942, she made her Vestition at Turin and two years later on 10th August, she made her First Profession at Pollone, where the Novitiate had been shifted because of the war. She consecrated herself to the Lord through the Perpetual Profession at Turin, on 10th August 1950.

After her initial formation, she dedicated the years of her youth to teaching in the Elementary School. Subsequently, she accompanied and assisted the young pupils in our boarding school, and having obtained her Diploma for teaching Religion in the Middle School, she taught for some time and carried out as well her responsibility as Boarding Mistress. The Communities of which she became a part and which profited by her passionate and generous service were: Turin-Mother House, Rome-Viale Marconi, Turin-Via Massena and Moncalieri. In September 1976 she was appointed Superior of the Mother House, a service which she carried out with great affability and sense of responsibility.

In 1978, the XXVII General Chapter elected her as the First Councillor and Vicar General. Therefore, having been transferred to the Generalate, she was appointed Superior of this Community. As Councillor and Vicar General, she made the best use of her gifts of mind and heart and lived, not only spiritually but concretely, the missionary spirit. Those were the years of the various foundations in Latin America and her heart, already open, was widened totally to the horizons of the whole world. Sr. Susanna was a woman who lived for the ideals, but she also knew how to concretize them with simplicity and ease in daily life. Her real attention to the person, her gentleness, hard work and humble sacrifice, her ability to reconcile and create unity were unanimously

highlighted in the testimonies of many Sisters who had lived together with her either for short periods or for many years.

Having completed her service as Councillor and Vicar General for two six-year terms, she was transferred to the Community of Viale Marconi (Rome) as Superior, then to that of Via Giusti in Rome itself, where for some time she also carried out the task of Provincial Secretary. In 2005 she returned to the Generalate where she remained until last year, when, feeling her strength giving way, she expressed her desire to be a part of our Community at the Mother House in Turin.

The various tasks she had carried out in the Congregation, were according to her, an opportunity for growth, interior renewal and greater dedication to the works of the Congregation.

In all the Communities of which she had been a part, Sr. Susanna gave the best of herself in any task, to the Sisters, children and youth, from the spiritual, human, Christian and professional points of view, making the most out of her great maternal sense.

Simple and humble, but rich in common sense, equilibrium and concreteness, she was attentive to everything. She served all and knew how to do everything: from spiritual animation to the many acts of prompt intervention, from well prepared prayer services and adorations to works of crochet, knitting and stitching. She made herself useful to every person and on any occasion. She also had the rare capacity for listening and saying the truth in the right way and at the right time. She was good in the true sense of the word and one could not but love her. The object of her love was above all the Lord, to whom she had offered her whole life.

She loved our Religious Family infinitely and each member of it. She loved her family members, friends and benefactors with maternal tenderness. To all she gave her time, prayer, counsel and loving thought.

She always pursued the missionary ideal and not being able to go and evangelize in far-off lands, she tried to be a missionary at heart, working for the missions and with a missionary spirit, also involving in her "Passion for the Missions" the persons with whom she came into contact.

She had great confidence in the Merciful Heart of the Lord and trusted in Him right till her last breath. Her devotion to Mary was deep and full of trust.

For a long time, Sister Susanna had been suffering from respiratory problems, which worsened during the last months. In the hope of finding a remedy and giving her relief, she was admitted into the Gradenigo Hospital in Turin, where she passed away quite imperceptibly on 29th November at 7.40 a.m. Her passing away was serene and confident, the crowning of a life founded moment by moment on the Word of God. We would like to think that the Immaculate Virgin Mary carried her away in her arms on the first day of the Novena dedicated to Her, to celebrate her Feast in a fuller way in Paradise.

Her funeral was held in the Chapel of the Mother House in Turin, which was full of Sisters, relatives and friends coming from her home town. The Mass, intense and moving, was presided over by Fr. Sergio Giordani SDB and concelebrated by Fr. Gullino and Fr. Beppe, both friends of Fr. Giovanni, the brother of Sr. Susanna. Various messages were read out, coming from the Generalate and also from the missions, a sign of the greatness of heart of our Sister. At the end we accompanied the body of our dear Sr. Susanna to the Monumental Cemetery of Turin, where she now rests together with many other Sisters of ours, whom she had known and loved.

The heredity that Sr. Susanna has left us is truly great and precious, it is a commitment to live our vocation as Sisters of St. Ann in simplicity and in all its amplitude. Let us entrust to her, who loved our Congregation so much, the journey of our Religious Family spread all over the world, and in a particular way the needs of Mother who at this moment is visiting the Communities of the Province of South India.

I offer my deepest condolences to the members of Sr. Susanna's Family and in particular to her brother, Fr. Giovanni, priest of the Focolare Movement and missionary in Brazil, who, while the funeral of Sr. Susanna was going on, was undergoing an operation. I also thank all the Sisters who alternated at the bedside of dearest Sr. Susanna, assisting her and making her feel their affection, and all the other Sisters from near or far, who in various ways made her and us feel their nearness and support. In this period of Advent, I wish all the serene trust and confidence in the Lord which Sr. Susanna witnessed to us and left us as heredity.

I greet you all fraternally.


Madre Franceschina Milanese, Superiora Provinciale