

**Suore di Sant'Anna**

*Provincia "Carlo Tancredi e Giulia di Barolo"*

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**10122 TORINO**

*La Superiora Provinciale*

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*"If we live, we live to the Lord,  
and if we die, we die to the Lord". (Rom 14:8)*

Dearest Sisters,

The words of the Apostle Paul comfort us in this moment of sorrow, while the serene and joyful image of our dear Sister Gesualda remains impressed in our eyes. Christ is the only reason for living and for dying, for this reason we are deeply grateful to the Lord who has made known to us the profound meaning of this mystery as Sr. Gesualda gave witness to it.

**Sister Gesualda** (Testa Anna) was born at Cervere (Cuneo) on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1920: in two months she would have turned 100. Last year she had the joy of celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of her Religious Profession, which she lived with lucidity and great joy.

On 8<sup>th</sup> September 1941, Sr. Gesualda entered our Congregation, in the Mother House-Turin, where she celebrated the stages of her formative journey:

on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1942, she made her Vestition,

on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1944, she made her First Profession at Pollone,

on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1950 she consecrated herself to the Lord through the Perpetual Profession.

In 1943, in Turin, she obtained her Diploma for teaching in the Kindergarten, and the following year, 1944, she began teaching in Zubiena (Biella), then in Viù in 1946, Rotondo in 1951, Gavorrano in 1963, in Rotondo again in 1964, Nazzano Romano in 1967 and Mariotto in 1978.

Nazzano Romano was her longest field of apostolate. Sr. Gesualda felt blessed by the Lord who had given her the opportunity to be a gift from God, in simplicity and in the 'passion' for the life of the children and the many people she encountered. Her jovial character and the ability to relate to everyone made her presence very lively even in the Community. Her active hands and creative mind were always ready to produce little handiworks and poems for various occasions. All of this stemmed from her experience and an openness of mind and heart that characterized her.

In 1978, Sr. Gesualda was transferred to Mariotto. A Sister who lived with her writes thus: *"Sr. Gesualda: A religious profoundly serene and convinced of her self-offering to God. You would see her close to you, next to you, as is often said, on tiptoe, simply and only to say through facts: "I am here!" Gifted with goodness and simplicity, she made everything good and accessible, with the one and only desire to create unity and a family spirit. She was a friendly presence to all and for all, to win everyone over to the Lord. Yes, only the Lord and the offering to Him of everything made sense and filled her heart. A particular aspect of hers was her "clean wit" which she used often to lift hearts and give joy and serenity. One Sister in the Community used to call her "Ray of sunshine". With her, there was no need for many words to understand each other: a look, a smile was enough and everything became bright".*

In 1982 she was appointed Superior for a triennium in the Formative Community of Rome-Viale Marconi. Her serene presence and openness of mind and heart aimed at helping the young women to make a

serious vocational discernment, and this, not with words but through her beautiful testimony and rich experience as a consecrated person.

In 1984 she was sent to Narni Scalo as Superior, then to Caldana in 1986 again as Superior, for a second triennium. Through this assignment she proved to be the “strong woman” of the Gospel, solicitous, active, creative, for the good of the Sisters: ready to accept every request, every need, doing everything with joy, gentleness and availability.

In 1991 she resumed teaching in the School of Vetulonia, and after a few years, in 1993 she was again appointed Superior in the Community of San Giovanni Gemini.

In 1997 she was transferred to the Province of Northern Italy to the Community of Pianezza. The following year, in 1998, she was sent to Carmagnola San Bernardo with the appointment of Superior and after a year, in 1999 she was transferred to Turin-Via Massena to assist the children.

In 2011 Sr. Gesualda joined the Community of Turin-Casa Betania. Being cardiopathic and in therapy with anticoagulants, she needed special attention and monitoring in therapy and food. Sr. Gesualda willingly accepted this change of Community and brought with her the richness of the experiences she had lived.

Until 2012 she was quite self-sufficient, though walking with the support of a walking stick. Unfortunately, an accidental fall caused her to fracture her femur and subsequently, following another fall, to break her pelvic bone and wrist, thus Sr. Gesualda had to accept to be in a wheelchair so as to avoid further falls and fractures.

Despite her advanced age, her mind was active and her spirit cheerful. To spend time with Sr. Gesualda was a pleasure for everyone; the lay helpers too enjoyed her witty remarks while they assisted her.

During the last months of her life, the dear Sister appeared increasingly tired and in need of bed rest, passing the time in prayer.

Recently, due to Covid 19 which affected the whole world, Sr. Gesualda was aware of the need to use a face mask and wash her hands. Unfortunately, during the second wave of the virus, she was badly affected together with the other Sisters: the swab test done on 27<sup>th</sup> August confirmed that all the Sisters of Casa Betania, except 3, had tested positive for the virus and they underwent appropriate treatment. For Sr. Gesualda in particular, the following days were characterized by a succession of respiratory problems which she seemed to be overcoming; unfortunately on 16<sup>th</sup> September she got worse. While she seemed to be asleep, some Sisters called her by name, she smiled and opened her eyes for the last time. From that moment she was constantly watched over by the Sisters who were lending their services in Casa Betania.

On 17<sup>th</sup> September at 1.45 a.m., the dear Sister began to show signs of a rapid decline. The emergency medical services were contacted immediately, but at 2.17 a.m. she breathed her last serenely, surrounded by the Sisters who were assisting her and praying.

On Saturday the 19<sup>th</sup>, while the coffin of Sr. Giustina, who was also called to enter into eternal life, was leaving the Amedeo di Savoia Hospital to come to the Parish Church of Sant’Agostino where the funeral Mass was celebrated, the Sisters of Casa Madre and Casa Betania, unable to participate in the funeral ceremony due to quarantine, were able to give their last farewell to dear Sr. Gesualda who was taken in the hearse to the Parish Church. It was moving to see, in addition to the Sisters in the porch, those too from the windows who followed the departing body with their eyes: each window with a face, a look, a hand, to remind us that even the physical distance and the forced separation could not extinguish our unity and sense of belonging, rather they were strengthened, in the awareness that we all belong to one family which at this moment, despite its fragility and weaknesses, rediscovered that it was one family and felt the bond that made each one part of the other.

At the beginning of the Eucharistic celebration, presided over by the parish priest, Don Andrea Pacini, the two coffins, carried across the nave together, were placed side by side, as if the two Sisters wanted to live this moment of celebration together, at which some relatives of Sr. Giustina and the Sisters of the neighbouring Communities participated, while Mother General was able to follow it on live stream.

After having addressed Sr. Giustina and Sr. Gesualda with a brief greeting that outlined some of their typical characteristics, the Eucharistic celebration began. In his homily, the celebrant underlined how in this experience, in which we were not allowed to be close to the Sisters as we would have liked to, in particular to Sr. Giustina, the Lord asked us to share the experience of many people who in this time of COVID could not accompany their loved ones on their last journey. He repeatedly reminded us of the call to spousal love: *if we have chosen to consecrate ourselves to the Lord it was not in order to do this or that work, but to be with Him, to be “one” with His life; for this reason, even in the time of old age, consecration loses nothing of its preciousness: because the reason for our being here is that our life becomes one with His.*

After the Communion the following words were addressed to Sr. Gesualda:

“Dearest Sister Gesualda, *‘God loves a cheerful giver’* (2Cor 2:7). This was the programme of your long life, 99 years, always lived in joy, in total abandonment, in daily offering and with your gaze always fixed on Jesus, Crucified and Risen, igniting Hope more and more. You have left a void and we miss you very much. Your missionary and youthful spirit that you always nurtured - even in bed at night you gave catechism lessons – was a reality for you.

When the Superior, Sr. Marietta, entered your room, and if you saw her with a worried look, you used to say to her: *‘Has anyone died? Trust in the Lord!’* then you narrated to her little anecdotes and both of you had a good laugh. You used to add: *‘When you are sad, come to me, I will give you medicine that costs nothing; I will make you laugh, laughter is the best medicine’*. We will miss you very much. Our collaborators are very sorry, they said to us: we will miss her very much! One of them, crying on the phone, said: *‘I have lost a true friend, a mother, I will miss her good and healthy jokes, her wise advice and good laughter.’*

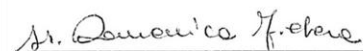
Your cousin Anna too, on the phone, pointed out that you had many gifts and that you were able to make them bear fruit by loving life and all those you met in your long life, so much so that you had the joy of seeing 5 boys of the Parish become Priests.

Thank you dearest Sr. Gesualda, you have been a beacon in our Community of Casa Betania. From heaven continue to smile, to watch over and to intercede for all of us. Ask for the gift of holy and new vocations for our Congregation. Goodbye, we will always remember you as a cheerful Sister. We love you very much”.

At the end of the celebration, the body of Sr. Gesualda was accompanied to the monumental cemetery where some of our Sisters participated in the burial.

Dearest Sisters, let us thank the Lord for the gift of Sr. Gesualda. May He who endowed her with kindness and sweetness, now shower on her His mercy and may she enjoy the eternal reward reserved for His chosen ones. Now that she is not physically present in Casa Betania, she will be closer to us through her intercession beside Jesus and Mary whom she always loved and tried to make them to be loved by children and adults.

I greet you all with affection,



Sr. Domenica Fichera, Superiora Provinciale