

Suore di Sant'Anna

Provincia "Carlo Tancredi e Giulia di Barolo"

Via della Consolata, 20

Tel.: 011/234.22.30 - Fax: 011/234.23.37

E-mail: sup.provinciale.italia@gmail.com

10122 TORINO

The Provincial Superior

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*You show me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy,
in your right hand are pleasures for evermore (Ps. 15:11)*

Sister Umilde (**Ida Italia**) was born in Augusta (SR) on 20th February 1931, the last of seven children, three boys and four girls (one of whom had died at an early age). When Ida was still a baby, her mother became seriously ill. Her niece remembers having heard her father narrate that the dying mother looked for a while at the cradle of her daughter Ida, and for a while at the face of Our Lady, whose picture was in her bedroom, and prayed: "My mother, I entrust my daughter to you". Thus the mother died, leaving little Ida at a very tender age.

After being orphaned, Ida was raised in the orphanage of our Community in Augusta. Although she had not known her mother, she experienced true motherliness in our Community, where she met Sisters who did their utmost for the orphans like real mothers. Spontaneously, therefore, the seed of her vocation sprouted in her and at the age of 20 she chose to consecrate herself to the Lord.

On 20th January 1951, she entered our Congregation at the Mother House in Turin where she began her formative itinerary. In the same year she made her Vestition and in 1953 her First Profession; she then continued the stages of her formative journey until 1959, when she consecrated her life definitively to the Lord through the Perpetual Profession at the Mother House in Turin.

After a year of apostolate in Monticelli, Sr. Umilde was transferred to Pieve Fosciana in 1954 and from that moment onwards she lived her mission in the Communities of the Province of South-Central Italy, rendering her services at Ravi (1963), Augusta (where she was sent several times), Bagnoregio, Acireale, Caldana, Rosolini and then Narni.

As Needlework Teacher and assistant to the orphans first (in Augusta and Bagnoregio) and then to the boarders (in Acireale), Sr. Umilde spent approximately 25 years of her life in silent and hidden services, completely normal, but very fruitful: only her smile and her clear and disarming look were the signs, almost imperceptible to most, of "another" life, hidden and profound, where she offered herself, through "simple, cheerful and sincere" obedience, in bowing to the will of God and moulding herself to it, as it presented itself every day. And for Sr. Umilde, for more than 25 years, this obedience was shown in a humble and very simple way.

Precisely for this reason, those who approached her knew how to recognize in her a woman of God. Thus writes a Sister about her: *"the Caldanese population remembers Sr. Umilde with affection. There is no family that does not cherish a particular memory of her for her cheerful nature, simplicity and pleasantness... As is said by one of her former students: Sr. Umilde was for everyone a mother with a big and loveable heart"*.

Meanwhile, life in the spirit worked silently, making the apparently impossible possible. In 1992, at the age of 65, when her body began to feel the signs of the wear and tear of a life of tireless work, Sr. Umilde was asked to accept a vocation within a vocation: to continue being a silent and fruitful presence in a mission land. She simply said "yes" and left for Peru.

From **1992 to 1999**, the year in which she was forced to return to Italy for health reasons, Sr. Umilde was a missionary of the people, of the poor and of the young.

And today precisely those young people testify:

"We, young Sisters, were very impressed to know that, at your age of 65 years, you threw yourself into the adventure of the overseas mission, accepting the novelty and the challenges of a place with a culture and language different from your own and with great confidence, letting yourself to be guided by the hands of the Good and Provident Father. Your name "Umilde" was also the expression of your whole personality; your simple appearance, that sweet and beautiful smile attracted many people and they opened not only the doors of their hearts but also of their homes to receive the light of the Gospel.

You used to visit the families of the slums, climbing tirelessly up and down the sand hills in Comas, on the outskirts of Lima...

Not even the difficulty of language stopped Sr. Umilde who had learned over many years a language that everyone understands: *"Even though you didn't speak Spanish well, your language of love was well understood by everyone. How you enjoyed yourself with children, showing the great love you had for them. Thus, dearest Sr. Umilde, with audacity and perseverance you made the impossible possible, that is, by opening a nursery (Cuna) that would welcome the small children from the poorest families of the locality, so that they could be cared for, fed and kept in a safe place, while their parents went out of the house in search of their daily bread! ... Today, together with us, many Peruvians whom you have loved and served, mourn your departure. Accept dear Sr. Umilde, our great affection and immense gratitude as a small tribute for all that you have sown and made to bear fruit in our land for the Kingdom of God, with the certainty that God has welcomed you into that Blessed Kingdom, that you always desired during this life!"*

Not without pain, after so much fecundity, in 1999 Sr. Umilde agreed to return to Italy forced by the health problems. The following year, in 2000, she was sent to Narni to help in the various services of the Community: simple and humble jobs, but full of industriousness and joy, as one Sister recalls: *"Your presence in Narni was joyful, fruitful and full of hope... The people were fond of you and had great affection for you, because you knew how to give everyone, a word of comfort, of faith and of consolation. You were a joyful and a serene person, attentive to everyone and everything. Never a word of criticism and of complaint, but always joyful, positive and proactive. This was your simple, peaceful and faith-filled life. Being close to you was truly an asset. Your smile and your kindness were always written on your face"*.

After these peaceful years, in 2006, the worsening of health problems made it necessary to transfer Sr. Umilde to the Community of Stella Maris, Rome. Cared for and supported by the Sister Nurses who in every way did their utmost for her, the Sr. Umilde went through the last phase of her life in a slow physical and then mental decline, but in which the smile on her face never went out, not even in recent times. Even when she was no longer able to understand and recognize others, the Sisters who went to visit her and approached her bed with an expression of a greeting or a caress, were rewarded by a smile - gradually less and less aware, but it was a smile. Her slow and silent decline ended with her encounter with the Bridegroom in the Father's House, on 17th May, at 3.25 am.

The funeral was celebrated in the Chapel of the Community of Stella Maris, Rome, in the presence of the Sisters of the Communities of Rome. At the wish of her family members, the body was then transported to Augusta, the birth place of Sr. Umilde, where on 19th May, Holy Mass was celebrated in the presence of her relatives and the Sisters of the Community of Augusta. After the funeral, Sr. Umilde was buried in the family tomb, where she now rests in peace next to her dear ones.

We do not know how many graces she has obtained for the Congregation, the Church and her family, through this silent offering, free of complaints. A look, a smile and a small movement of her lips were always for us, a great gift, a sign of her closeness, her affection and her feeling. Now that she is in Heaven she will certainly continue to be close to us, praising the Lord and interceding for the needs of the world.

Let us entrust ourselves to her prayers as gratefully keep her memory alive, by continuing to offer suffrages for her soul.



Sr. Domenica Fichera Provincial Superior