

Living in The Divine Will



**St. Annibale Maria di Francia
and
Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta**

By Fr. Ricardo Pignatelli, RCJ

SERVANT OF GOD LUISA PICCARRETA



Luisa, known as a great mystic, was born in Corato, Italy on April 23, 1865. At the age of 11 she enrolled herself as a Daughter of Mary, and at the age 13 she had her first revelation and vision of Jesus.

She never married, and at the age of 16, she offered herself to Jesus as his crucified and obedient spouse. Blessed with extraordinary mystical gifts, she received private revelations about the Divine Will.

She experienced the passion of Jesus in her body. By obedience and under Divine inspiration she wrote her revelations, filling 36 volumes. St. Annibale was assigned by the Church as an official censor of her writings and her extraordinary confessor.

Although she does not possess any human science, she is abundantly gifted with an entirely Heavenly Wisdom and with the science of the Saints. She was a perfect instrument for the triumph of the Divine Will all over the earth in conformity to what is said in the Our Father: Your Will be done (St. Annibale)

She was bedridden for about 70 years, and extraordinary signs accompanied her life and her death. She died at age of 82 on March 4, 1947. In 1994 the Church officially opened the cause of her beatification.

Prayer

O Most Holy Trinity,

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us that, as we pray we should ask that our Father's Name be always Glorified, that His Will be done on earth and that His Kingdom should come to Reign among us.

In our great desire to make known this Kingdom of Love, Justice and

Peace, we humbly ask that you glorify Your Servant Luisa, the little daughter of the Divine Will who, with her constant prayer and suffering deeply yearned for the salvation of souls and the coming of

God's Kingdom in the world. Following her example

we pray to You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

to help us joyously embrace the crosses of this world

so that we may also Glorify Your Name

and enter into the Kingdom of Your Will.

Amen

THE LIFE AND CHARISM OF SAINT ANNIBALE DI FRANCIA

INTRODUCTION

Friends, let me begin by telling you that I feel both honored and delighted to be with you today to share with you some insights into the life of Saint Annibale di Francia. As you know he was both the confessor and ecclesial advisor of our beloved Luisa Piccarreta.



In my presentation, in whatever refers to the life, writings and extraordinary phenomena of Luisa Piccarreta, I intend to follow the judgment of the Church. I think that the recent canonization of St. Annibale, the esteem that he had for Luisa and his approval of her writings cannot but help her process of beatification.

My position as Postulator of the Cause of St Annibale gave me a wonderful opportunity for knowledge, admiration, respect and love for Annibale. I grew to understand why the Church called him the apostle of prayer for vocations and true father of orphans and the poor. Pope John Paul II called Annibale the precursor of modern-day vocation promotion programs.

On behalf of the two congregations founded by Saint Annibale, the Rogationist Fathers and the Daughters of Divine Zeal, I would like to express our warm and sincere thanks to all of the devotees of Luisa Piccarreta. Because of your faithfulness to her you have helped spread the message and mission of Saint Annibale throughout the United States, Latin America, the Philippines and elsewhere. In getting to know her, you have been introduced to our beloved founder. In this way, you have truly been blessed by God as you seek to deepen your own spiritual journey through the examples of Luisa and Annibale. It is true to say that the journey of Annibale towards canonization has in fact shed a positive light on the life and times of Luisa Piccarreta.

Because of time constraints, I will only be able to present to you some brief insights into the life and charism of Annibale. For those of you who would like to have more information on Annibale, the members of our Rogationist community in California would be happy to send you a more detailed biography.

THE BEGINNING

Annibale was born in Messina, Italy on July 5, 1851, into a noble family. He was the third of four sons. His mother Anna Toscano was a noblewoman, while his father, Sir Francis, of the Marchesi of St. Catherine of Ionia, was Deputy Pontifical Consul and Honorary Captain of the Navy, Sir Francis received this great position at the early age of thirty-one!

Annibale's family was pious. Their great devotion to Our Lady meant that all the boys were given in addition the name Mary. Interestingly in some documents the name Mary preceded that of Annibale. Annibale lost his father when he was just fifteen months old. This was a heart-wrenching experience for him. It was also the source of his lifelong care, affection and concern for orphans and neglected children.

In a way he took an awful early life experience, and rather than dwell on it, he turned it into something beautiful for God. His care, concern and affection truly became the foundation stones of the many fine educational foundations he established for orphans and at-risk children.

At age seven, he enrolled in a school run by the Cistercians. It was here that he acquired great piety and special devotion to Mary and the Eucharist. His devotion was so profound that he even obtained special permission to receive communion daily. This was very rare back then!

While praying before the Blessed Sacrament, this pious seventeen-year-old had a wonderful insight which can be defined as "the comprehension and zeal of the Rogate," through which he discovered the importance of prayer to obtain vocations. I will use the word "Rogate" from now on to highlight this command from Jesus to us to pray for vocations. Only later did the young Annibale find in the Gospel the verse: "the harvest is great, but the laborers are few. Pray [Rogate] therefore the Lord of the harvest to send more laborers into the harvest" (Mt 9:38; Lk 10:2). For our young

Annibale this call to prayer was now more than a simple recommendation. It was an "explicit order" from Jesus and an "unfailing remedy" for the wellbeing of the Church and of society. This revelation moved him deeply and became the cornerstone of his own call to ministry, and his way to personal holiness.

Soon after this revelation, Annibale was seized by a call to priesthood which he described as "unforeseen, irresistible and very sure," coupled with an equally profound call to pray for all vocations. At age eighteen, much to the surprise of many people and of his own pious mother, Annibale received the religious habit with his brother Francesco, whose cause of canonization is in process.

He began his journey to priesthood with great gusto. With the zeal of a neophyte, he began his own personal quest for perfection. He would engage in countless penitential practices such as fasting, even to the point of wearing himself out. To keep himself focused on this quest for perfection, the young Annibale sought out the finest spiritual directors.

In the context of this Convention, it is important to stress why Annibale, since he was young, started to feel a particular sensibility in perceiving the presence of holiness in certain people. When he learned of their existence, he would look for them and would do everything to contact them, to receive their counsel, and encouragement for his own sanctification. This explains his providential relationship with Luisa.

Besides pursuing the ecclesiastic disciplines, Annibale also studied academic courses. In order not to depend on family finances for his education, Annibale started tutoring children of local noble families. This was the beginning of his teaching and preaching career.

AMONG THE POOR

One day while strolling around Messina, he had a providential encounter with a poor blind person. This man led Annibale, now a deacon, into one of the poorest and most notorious districts of Messina, known as the Avignone Projects, but usually referred to as the "Cursed Land." It was here that Annibale's mission to the poor took on a new direction and sense

of urgency. This ordinary encounter became for him an extraordinary event which changed his life and shaped his lifelong ministry.

Ordained a priest on March 16, 1878, Annibale asked his Bishop to allow him not only to exercise his ministry in the Avignone district, but also to live in the midst of the poor. He wanted his ministry to promote human rights while evangelizing its poor - the abandoned elderly, adults given to every vice, children exposed to corruption, and women forced into prostitution.

While living among the poor, Annibale found himself reflecting on Matthew 9:35-38; "Jesus went around the towns and the villages, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing the sick. Seeing the crowds, he felt pity for them because they were tired and exhausted, like a flock without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is great, but the laborers are few. Pray the lord of the harvest to send more laborers to the harvest'" Annibale shared Christ's compassion with those around him and, like Jesus, he prayed that many laborers, driven with compassion, would come to work in the slums of Messina. In answer to his own prayers, Annibale himself became one of those laborers. It was there and then that Annibale began his works of assistance, education and evangelization of the poor children and youth. He founded orphanages which he called Antoniani, since they were placed under the protection of St. Anthony of Padua. Soon various institutes were founded to serve the neediest in the community - trade shops, art and craft centers, trade schools, agricultural schools and cooperatives. All of these institutes were founded to serve the poor and nurture in them a deeper civic and spiritual awareness.

Soon Annibale became known as the "true father of orphans and of the poor." He expressed his love of the poor not only through his ministry but also by making their plight known to the community at large. Never one to stay silent, Annibale employed his journalistic talents by writing to the press and condemning the way the poor were neglected by city authorities. He wrote an open letter to all the city's newspapers entitled Hunting the Poor, which criticized the barbaric policy of trying to eliminate begging by jailing all the poor.

More than anything else Annibale was most concerned with the protection of children from all types of exploitation. To do this he hit the streets and went from house to house to beg for assistance and also to educate people about the dangers facing street children in Messina. He expresses these concerns in his poem:

I love my children...
They are to me the dearest ideal of my life
I have rescued them from being abandoned and forgotten.
My heart drives me to go on in hope.
So bread upon the table might not lack,
I brave the cold, the dripping sweat on back...
Oh, here it is today the food my children need;
Tomorrow's dole our Father sure will speed
I've often knocked on doors, a scant welcome bidden
My sentence stiff has scarce been hidden:
"Beware of him, the pest, he's lost his mind.
Now let him suffer fate unkind!"
Discern my martyrdom, my flaming core;
No father loved his children more...
For you I God and man implore!

THE EDUCATOR

Annibale's approach to education embraced a strong sense of love. It is enough to remember that everybody called him "the Father." Although his approach was based on the "preventive method" of Don Bosco, Annibale went further with the intention of creating around children a true family environment based on kindness, guiding them to discover the Will of God in their lives.

St. Annibale, a zealous priest, prolific poet (he wrote about 16,000 verses), militant journalist, convincing preacher (his collected writings fill 62 volumes), knew in his earthly life how to reconcile the concepts of action and contemplation. He had the gift of intense contemplation and untiring activity.

Annibale put all of his energy into education of children and youth with catechesis and with activities of promoting human dignity. For his kids, he

created a great many jobs and trades. He built a mill and a bakery, not only to provide food for his projects, but also to raise money. Everybody preferred to buy Fr. Annibale's bread for its good quality and out of esteem toward our saint.

He saw that his girls were trained to sew and embroider fabrics, to knit, and make clothes. He created vocational schools, training his boys in various trades, including printing, shoemaking, tanning, carpentry and agriculture. He even established a musical band.

Annibale encouraged his more advanced students in the fine arts. He knew that if they studied music, singing, theater and painting they would never want to return to the dangerous streets of Messina. What seems to be original at that time is that Fr. Annibale invented a form of profit-sharing for his kids, so that when they left the institute, boys and girls had funds in hand so that they could immediately have a job, which he himself would often find for them.

He was also a promoter of the rights of women. He writes, "For the modern Nun, I have the highest ideal. The modern nun should no longer be enclosed inside four walls. She should be in touch with all levels of society. She should live with the struggles of modern life and work with those who have no faith. She has to know how to honor the habit that she is wearing. She has to radiate modesty, prudence, charity, but also intelligence and knowledge." Let us remind ourselves that we are talking about a priest, in the South of Italy in 1906.

Annibale was also imbued with a spirit of ecumenism which was anything but common for priests of that time. He wrote, "I have seen the face of God in my brother and whatever I have desired for myself in this life and in the next, I desire for everybody... I feel I have a connection, a type of holy friendship with everybody in the world; with those who share my faith, and with those come from different faith traditions."

Annibale was driven by an intense, passionate and pastoral love for all people. This love was expressed in the way he treated everyone. He wrote about this consuming love in a pamphlet entitled, *God and my Neighbor*. This pamphlet was a hit and sold 700,000 copies, which was at that time an extraordinary accomplishment.

In order to inspire everybody to do good, Annibale applied all his versatile talents: excellent orator, writer, printer, publisher, promoter of arts and crafts, and creative mind. It can be said that his faith and belief in the poor was expressed in two ways, which came to be known as the spirit of double charity. Basically this meant that one must not just evangelize the poor and tell them that they are loved by God, one must work with them and for them. One must protect them and promote their rights in the workplace and the community at large.

Annibale, preoccupied with children and the poor, broadened his view to include those who, while rich in goods and culture, suffered profound interior poverty. Therefore, he wrote a booklet; A Letter to my Friends, sent personally to intellectuals, the judiciary and professionals known for their lack of faith. In this letter, he presented a synthesis of the doctrine of the Church, calling them persuasively to conversion to the practice of Christian life.

ST. ANNIBALE'S SPIRITUALITY

Annibale had a spirit of obedience, fidelity and special love, even to the point of veneration, toward the church and toward the Pope and the bishops. He obeyed scrupulously. He encouraged his spiritual sons and daughters to govern their lives with the same spirit of "great love to the point of tenderness."

He had great love for the Eucharist. He desired that the Eucharist be considered as "the loving, fruitful center of the institute," considering Jesus in the Eucharist to be the "the true, effective and immediate founder" of his congregations. Even today, the most important feast day of his two congregations is July 1, when we commemorate the first coming and the permanent presence of the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist in the Avignone Projects. "This day will always be memorable for us," wrote Father Annibale in a paper entitled The Feast of July I, in Honor of Jesus of the Blessed Sacrament. This paper calls all of his followers to remember forever that Annibale sees the Eucharist as the source and summit of all his works. "This feast," wrote Annibale "is for us the basis of our institutions. It is in the Eucharist that we are profoundly caught up in the heart of Jesus. All of our works, be they big or small, offer adoration to

Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. This Sacrament is for us the center of all our love, our service, our aspirations, our prayers, our supplications, and the hope of our congregations. In fact, all the spiritual favors of the Divine Heart of Jesus, present, past and future, for all our congregations come from the Eucharist."

Annibale wanted the poor in the ghettos of Messina to have access to the Eucharist at all times. He celebrated Mass for them in these notorious ghettos and prayed with them in their poor broken-down chapels. Annibale wanted the Eucharist to be kept in these places. However because of security concerns this was not always possible. He would not leave consecrated hosts alone until a safe and secure chapel could be found. Once it was possible to have the permanent presence of the Blessed Sacrament, Annibale was assured that the "True Founder" was in his institutes to protect them and make them prosper.

Alongside his devotion to the Eucharist, Annibale had a great devotion to Our Lady. Pope John Paul II was very aware of this and remarked on May 17, 2004, the day before his canonization, "Annibale Maria di Francia honored Mary since his baptism, even by having her name. He loved to call her Mama Mia. Towards her, he nourished a tender devotion. He praised her both as the Mother of the Church and the Mother of vocations. In his instruction to his two congregations, he wanted Mary to be considered the "absolute and operative superior" of both the Daughters of Divine Zeal and of the Rogationist Fathers. He encouraged daily devotion to Mary and saw this devotion as the true source of sanctity for these two institutes."Mary, in return, gave her servant a wonderful gift when she appeared to him on June 1, 1927, not long before he died.

In two publications *Positio Super Virtutibus* and in *Relatio et Vota*, the Holy See declared that Annibale heroically exercised all virtues, starting with the theological love for God and for his neighbor His unflinching faith was the foundation of his works and of his preaching. His faith was so perfect that he was inspired to make what he called the three vows of trust. Fr. Annibale's total abandonment of himself to Divine Providence reached and sometimes surpassed the level of the greatest saints.

In order to propagate the faith all over the world, he considered missions as the ideal for his congregations, and for himself he expressed his deep

wish, "If only I could have the grace to go to the missions!" However, God kept him close to home. Hope, as unyielding as his faith, convinced him of the effectiveness of the prayer for vocations because it was commanded by Jesus.

While the Church was reviewing the cause for his canonization, it stressed his absolute conformity to both the Will of God and that of his superiors even when these created inner struggles for him. He lived a life of perfect chastity, to the point of being known as "an angel in the flesh." He embraced poverty to the point that he was living it, not only for the poor, but with the poor and as the poor.

Before any major decisions, he prayed and acted with great prudence. He never violated the rights of anyone. He was a man of great justice and was driven by a spirit of charity especially in his dealings with poor priests and cloistered nuns. He channeled all his strength into fighting evil and campaigning for the spiritual and material welfare of the poor. He was a man of temperance, and he used mortification of the mind, the will and the senses. He was a humble man and often signed his name as "the nothing."

When writing to Luisa Piccarreta, he wrote, "God's Will doesn't need my misery and my little efforts." He refused the title of Founder, preferring instead the title "*los fondatore*" (the destroyer), attributing to himself and to what he considered his limitations everything negative or imperfect in his institutions. Despite these inner struggles, those around him saw him differently. The current Promoter General of the Faith (also known as the Devil's Advocate) remarked, "This servant of God embraced his natural and supernatural gifts and he is without doubt one of the greatest founders of the beginning of this century."

THE CHARISM OF SAINT ANNIBALE: THE ROGATE

I have already mentioned the driving force behind the life of Saint Annibale is his Rogate. His zealous prayer for vocations dominates his writings, his works, his intelligence and his zeal to follow the gospel command, "Pray, therefore the lord of the harvest to send more laborers into the harvest." To achieve this, Annibale "would move Heaven and earth." That is why the Church designates him as the "Prominent Apostle

of Prayer for Vocations" in the Collect of the Mass which is celebrated on his liturgical feast day.

This *Rogate* was truly the mission of his life and the cornerstone of all his activities. In the Greek, the word Rogate has a deeper meaning. In Greek when we use the word Rogate, we are not talking of a simple prayer, but rather a prayer of pleading and begging; a prayer uttered only in times of great need in which we realize that it is only God that can help us. For Annibale, this Rogate was truly such a prayer. He begged God to send good laborers to save the many troubled souls he came into contact with every day.

I would like to share some insights into Annibale with you now, which come to us from his own writings. Writing about himself, Annibale said, "A young man, at the beginning of his mission, and even before he knew those words in the Gospel, had this predominant thought in mind: in order to have the best in the Church for the salvation of souls and to extend the Kingdom of God on earth, nothing was as effective as to increase the elected ministers of God, holy men and women, apostles according to the Heart of Jesus. Therefore, the best and most efficacious prayer would be that of asking the Sacred Heart of Jesus insistently that he send to earth holy men and elect priests as in the times of St. Dominic, St. Francis, St. Ignatius, St. Francis de Sales, St. Alphonsus and others. For our young man this idea seemed to be crystal clear. This young man was then surprised and overjoyed to read Jesus' mandate in sacred scripture, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few; pray therefore, the Lord of the Harvest to send more workers into the harvest."

Annibale was often dismayed at the less than warm reception that was given to this gospel command in the church. "We pray for rain," he lamented. "We pray for good things and for freedom from bad things. Yet we rarely pray that God send evangelical workers into his mystical harvest." It troubled him that he could not find a special prayer for vocations, even in the books of prayer. Trying to understand why such a prayer was not as prominent as it should be, he wrote, "In twenty centuries, this is the truth, this great command of Jesus has remained almost hidden in the pages of scripture. I am amazed how this Divine Command has not been given the merit or importance that it should have received. This is truly a mystery."

Driven by his zeal, Annibale wanted to move Heaven and earth so that this Rogate would become universal and unceasing. He was tormented by the fact that every day, millions went to bed hungry, not just for bread but for the word of God. For Annibale this starvation had at its root a shortage of generous souls who would dedicate themselves to the salvation of these poor people.

Annibale found his answer in responding to Jesus' command, *Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send workers into the harvest*. He was convinced that all vocations were both the gift of God and the fruit of prayer. He also realized, being a practical man, that to pray for vocations was not enough. You had to help God's fruit grow. You had to do something about it. So he said, we cannot just be happy with prayer itself; we have to walk the talk and get busy promoting vocations. We had to become in a sense the answer to our own prayer.

Annibale was the first to walk the talk! On November 22, 1897, he instituted what he called the Sacred Alliance in order to involve cardinals, bishops, priests and religious and even the Pope himself in his crusade of prayer. Once they were on board, he widened his net when, three years later, on December 8, 1900, he founded the Pious Union of Evangelical Prayer to promote prayer for vocations among the laity.

On July 11, 1909 while meeting with Pope Pius X, he was granted permission to insert the invocation *Ut dignos ac sanctos operarios in messem tuam copias mittere digneris*, into the Litany of Saints in his institutions. ("We beg you to send abundant holy apostles into the harvest"). Annibale met with Pope Benedict XV in private to discuss this crusade for vocations. In one of these meetings held on November 11, 1914, the Pope agreed with Annibale that, more than an invitation, the Rogate, *Pray therefore*, was a command that our Lord gave to be obeyed. How happy he was when he heard the Pope proclaim himself to be *The First Rogationist*.

He continued to work with Leo XIII, and later with Pius XI. Pius XI encouraged Annibale and reminded him that the promotion of vocations is the true *Work of Works*.

Annibale also took advantage of the Eucharistic Congress to promote his message. Unconcerned about costs, he printed and distributed pamphlets in different languages, prayer aids that he sent to Popes, cardinals, bishops, priests religious and laity. He saw his magazine *God and Your Neighbor* as a wonderful tool for educating people about his mission. This magazine was distributed both in Italy and abroad. It reached a circulation of 700,000.

It is important to note that Annibale pointed out that the workers of the harvest are not only priests and religious, but they must also be laypersons, starting with parents, educators, and teachers. He saw a vocation even in government leaders who have the future of nations in their hands.

Annibale was truly a leader in the promotion of laity in the Church. He emphasized that "The Catholic laity is truly the only source of numerous workers." This same fact was reiterated in the Vatican *document Apostolicam Actuositatem*, "The Christian Vocation is at its heart an apostolic vocation." This document promotes the idea that each and every Christian has been given a special mission by God to be part of His overall plan for the world.

THE TWO RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS

Annibale founded two congregations, the Sisters of the Divine Zeal of the Heart of Jesus in 1887 and the Rogationist Fathers of the Heart of Jesus in 1897. The two congregations have as their mission a man date to pray for vocations and to look after children and the poor. Their very names are a reference to this mission. They are to express the compassion of the heart of Jesus for the neediest and poorest members of the community.

Beside the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, Annibale wanted his sons and daughters to be good workers in the harvest by taking a fourth vow, committing themselves to pray, to promote the prayer, and to take action for vocations. He wanted the members of his communities to tend to the spiritual and material needs of the poor by caring for them in orphanages, school, training centers, immigration centers, and centers for the handicapped.

He saw this work as,, "A legitimate and immediate consequence of the fourth vow." This fourth vow was directed towards helping the "tired masses who were like sheep without a Shepherd." Today, these two congregations are present on five continents. The Priests of the Rogationist Order and the Sisters of Divine Zeal dedicate their lives to administering centers of Prayer for Vocations, printing presses, parishes, centers of education for poor children and centers for professional formation of young people. They also administer centers for mothers in crisis, rest homes for the elderly, university centers, handicapped centers, health clinics and schools of all levels. All these institutes exist for and have at their heart, the call to promote vocations.

Through these many activities, the charism of Saint Annibale di Francia continues to live on in modern times. Interestingly Cardinal Pironio called our beloved Annibale "a surprisingly modern priest." Many things have been written about Annibale and I would like to share with you some of the titles given to him: *Apostle for our Times, a Man of Communication, a Vocation for all Vocations, a Model of Priestly Life, Promoter of the Rights of Women, Apostle of Families, a Model of the Eucharistic Life, a Heart without Limits, a Good and Tireless Pastor, a Wise Educator, a Priest for Our Times, etc.*

The mission and the spiritual legacy of Father Annibale continue to be lived out also by numerous lay people. These faithful followers are driven by the spirit of Rogate in their daily lives. Many fine lay men and women have joined the many associations which exist exclusively to pray for vocations. One such group is called the Rogationist Missionaries. This group is made up of women who have consecrated their lives to the fourth vow of *Rogate*.

It is important to note that Annibale was not just interested in numbers. He told his followers not only to pray for many vocations but to pray for saintly vocations. He also said that in order to pray for vocations for the Church, we first have to begin by praying for our own vocation. We have to say to God, "Here I am Lord, and how can I serve you, show me your Will and if you want, send me."

Annibale's motto was "fall in love with Jesus Christ." On the day of his canonization, Pope John Paul II repeated this motto to all who were

gathered. At the core of Annibale's motto is the reminder that we have to be in love with God. Once we are in love with Jesus Christ, we can find all the spiritual energy we need to discover God's Will and the energy to surrender to it.

CONCLUSION

Saint Annibale, burning with a love for God and his neighbor, spent his life tirelessly seeking to follow God's will. He wanted all people to be saved. He wanted all men and women to discover their own vocations in life and to remain faithful to them. He wanted people to pray for vocations. To achieve this, Annibale would often cry out, "God wants it." This was his way of infusing people with enough zeal to respond to Jesus' commandment, *Pray, therefore the Lord of the Harvest to send more laborers into his Harvest.*

This great mission of his was taken a step further when in 1964, Pope Paul VI instituted the *Worldwide Day of Prayer for Vocations*. This is celebrated on the fourth Sunday after Easter, which is the feast of the Good Shepherd. This is also for us, sons and daughters of St. Annibale, a day of *Rogate* par excellence.

From some of the letters written by Father Annibale to Luisa Piccarreta, we can see that Father Annibale focused on trying to understand God's will. "You must understand that my greatest goal in life and that which has given me the most energy has been my desire to follow God's will. I take advantage of every opportunity I get, to share my desire with everyone I meet."

Father Annibale died on June 1, 1927, in Messina after being comforted by a vision of Our Lady, whom he had always loved, praised and venerated. When he died, the cry went out in Messina, "The saint has died!"

Luisa Piccarreta echoed the same sentiment when, upon hearing of the death of Fr. Annibale, she wrote in Volume 22 of her writings, "He was a saint who guided me and helped me to understand what Jesus had said to me about Divine Will."

She added, "I saw in front of me a vision of the blessed soul of God, the Father [di Francia] bathed in light, beside my bed....and Jesus said to me, 'look how My Will is transformed, My Will is Light for you'".



{Painting based on Luisa's vision on the day of St. Annibale's death, currently hanging in the Church of St. Anthony and St. Annibale, Rome, Italy}

The Church that recognized St. Annibale as the "True Apostle of Prayers for Vocations and Father of Orphans and the Poor," listened to the prayers of people when Pope John Paul II, on May 16, 2004 in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican elevated Father Annibale to sainthood in the same place in which he had been declared Blessed on October 7, 1990. Pope John Paul II declared Annibale to be the *authentic and zealous precursor of modern vocation ministry*.

Before I finish I would like to share with you what Luisa Piccarreta wrote in Volume.21. "I was worried about Father Annibale's health.... then from inside of me, I heard Jesus say, 'Daughter of mine, he has been given a mission... I will bring him to Heaven. He will continue his mission from here. He will shed his light on those who follow him.'"

We are sure that St. Annibale, from his throne of glory in Heaven, is shedding a "light" on those who now carry forth the cause for canonization of Luisa Piccarreta.

Fiat. Let it be done.

THE DIVINE WILL IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF SAINT ANNIBALE IN RELATION TO LUISA PICCARRETA

INTRODUCTION

I feel obliged to renew my sentiments of gratitude for the opportunity offered me to speak to you about my Holy Founder, that is, the one of whom the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta, in Vol. 20, says: "Jesus moved in my interior [...] and said to me: "My daughter [...] do you believe that the arrival of Father Annibale happened by accident, and that he shows so much interest and taken to heart the publication of that which regards my Will? No, No, it was I who arranged it; it is a providential act of the Supreme Will, who wants him to be the first Apostle of the Divine Fiat and to be its herald [...]"

The sanctity of Fr. Annibale has its roots and its consistency in conformity to the Divine Will. In order to confirm this statement, allow me to read a few testimonies recorded during his cause of canonization, extracted from the *Positio*, about his virtue and directly pertaining to the unconditional abandonment of St. Annibale to the Divine Will.

- "I think that all that [Fr. Annibale] did he considered as the Will of God, to whom he wanted to be obedient. For example, he composed a rosary entitled 'Divine Will. [...] We have twenty-five prayers composed by the Servant of God that we recite every twenty fifth of the month to Baby Jesus to obtain the merits of that age of innocence and of devotion to the Will of God; therefore, I conclude that he had habitually the will to fulfill completely his obligations towards the Lord."

- "The Servant of God demonstrated his love for God with perfect conformity and union with the Divine Will. Once, while praying, a branch was scratching his head. At a certain point, almost agitated, he said: "What is this branch doing here?" Then, returning to himself, he added immediately: "What a fool I am! What is this branch doing? It is doing the Will of God, so that I would exercise patience."

- "I had the good fortune of assisting in his last illness, for about 15 days in my first time in Rome, and afterwards, for about the same amount of days, at Messina, in the month of March in 1927. He could not make the slightest movement without suffering atrocious pains. Nevertheless, it is impossible to describe his abandonment to the Divine Will, his continuous prayer, and his ejaculations."

- "During the illness he was always docile to the prescriptions of the doctors and gave edifying example of patience and uniformity to the Will of God. According to the testimony of Brother Michelino, every day, and often during the day and the night, the Servant of God recited a chaplet "for the fulfillment of the Divine Will."

THE DIVINE WILL IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF SAINT ANNIBALE

In light of these quotations and in light of what I will try to demonstrate, I believe one could confidently affirm that, regarding the aspect of conformity to the Divine Will, the spirituality of St. Annibale finds comparison to that of Luisa Piccarreta, especially if we consider that he himself considered and called the Servant of God "Teacher of virtue and of Divine Will."

Please allow me to make use of a series of quotations. I believe that you will agree with me in my preference that, rather than my speaking of Annibale and Luisa, it would be much better and more enjoyable if they speak themselves.

Conformity to the Divine Will is without doubt the necessary condition for the spiritual journey of any one seeking holiness of life. Therefore, it could not be lacking in Saint Annibale, in whom it reached levels of high perfection.

The unconditional union with the Divine Will of Saint Annibale is, independent and prior to his knowledge of the spirituality of Luisa Piccarreta. In fact, in the prayers which he wrote for the communities which he founded, there was always that aspect of doing the Divine Will already before he encountered and came to know the Servant of God.

However, one cannot deny that the familiarity with Luisa influenced the spirituality of our Saint, since he had certainly absorbed in his own way the substance of the charism of Luisa already before he was named her extraordinary Confessor and Ecclesiastical Censor of her writings.

His Excellency, Mons. Cassati, ex-Archbishop of the Diocese to which Corato belongs, the City of Luisa, at the international Congress on Luisa held in Costa Rica, had this to say: "The Church proclaimed Fr. Annibale Blessed. Without doubt, part of the sanctity of Luisa reached his soul, conforming him to the *FIAT* and to the Divine Will, which the Servant of God cultivated so tirelessly." It was the same Luisa who, as already noted earlier, in her writings called our Saint the "First Apostle of the Divine Fiat and Its Herald."

It is therefore evident that this influence absolutely cannot be denied. In a letter dated June 20, 1924, Fr. Annibale informs Luisa in these terms: "Presently, in the morning meditation, besides the adorable Passion of Our Lord Jesus, beloved of our hearts, I meditate, that is, I read for a while with reflection, two or three chapters of your writings on the Divine Will. And the impressions which I derive are intimate and deep! I see in them a sublime and Divine Science." and because of that which Fr. Annibale has defined "sublime and Divine Science", as I said earlier, he recognized Luisa as "Teacher of virtue and of Divine Will."

On September 4, 1925, he wrote: "The first meditation, which you must make in the morning, is that of the adorable passion and death of Our Lord. Then a bit on the interior life, and then a Chapter of the Divine Will preferably from the book *"The Hours of the Passion"*.

In the writings of Fr. Annibale, the words "Divine Will" occur 220 times and "Divine Volition" 125 times. He names the "Hours of the Passion" 47 times and he uses the expression, "God wills it" 25 times, which he repeats with conviction when he seeks to give strength to an important step or decision. Here is the clear conviction of Saint Annibale: "Desire the Divine Will as medicine, as holiness as food, as fullness of sanctity!" And again: "There is no one who

doesn't know that in doing the Will of God is enclosed every good, and in not doing it one contracts all evils.

His disciples learned from him to intersperse their speaking with: "May the Divine Will Always be blessed", a phrase which he used also at the had of some letters (for example, to his first successor and biographer, Fr. Francesco Vitale). In other words, it was usual for him to say that one needed to do the "always sweet Divine Will."

Fr. Annibale wrote: "When in our duties everything goes awry, there remains no other comfort than abandonment to the Divine Will that turns everything to good, even though we may not understand." And he asked that one "put one's self perfectly at the disposition of the Divine Will. Now, this adorable Will cannot be accomplished except by means of holy obedience towards those to whom we are subject." And again he wrote: "The second penance [the first was Holy Confession] will be uniformity to the Divine Will in all contrary things and in all sufferings, poverty, contradictions, etc." "It is certain that everything is according to Divine Will and that this Divine Will is a lovingly paternal will, that in everything and through everything seeks only our good."

Here is something else he prescribed: "For the moment, I send you a "Consecration" which ought to be said in every Religious Community, of Sisters, Novices, and Postulants. And we could continue still with other numerous and valuable quotations."

THE ROGATE AND THE DIVINE WILL

But now let us return to the spirituality, the charism, to the distinctive character of the holiness of Fr. Annibale, with the intention of demonstrating that this charism is situated in the larger sphere of doing the Divine Will.

Therefore, what is the new "way of sanctity" that the Lord wanted to indicate to the Church through St. Annibale? Certainly, it is the "*Rogate*": That is, the command of Christ to "pray the Lord of the harvest to send workers into His field," that is to pray and to work for one's own vocation and for that of others.

Our Lord commands something to express the will that it be put into action. Therefore, if Jesus Commanded this prayer, it means that He wants it to be fulfilled, and, as St. Annibale would say: "He wants to grant it; otherwise He would not have commanded it." Therefore, the obedience to that "Divine Command of Rogate [pray]", what else is it but to put into action the Divine Will?

John Paul II, during the homily for the Beatification (7 October 1990) of Fr. Annibale, said: "The fire of love for the Lord and for men marked all of the life and work of Blessed Annibale Maria di Francia. Even from adolescence he was struck by the Evangelical Expression: "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. Pray, therefore." (Mt. 9:38; Lc. 10:2). He spent all of his energies for this most noble cause. The multitude of persons whom the Gospel has still not reached and the insufficient number of evangelizers were the torment of his heart, that of apostle and priest. He founded towards this end two religious Families: The Rogationists and the Daughters of Divine Zeal. He promoted numerous initiatives to spread among the faithful the conscience of the necessity to pray intensely for vocations."

Allow me to return to make a few points regarding the charism of our Saint. With a certain irony, Saint Annibale, referring to his unconditional obligation towards the diffusion of prayer and action for vocations, had to say of himself: "This has been my dedication, whether for zeal or for obsession, either one or the other."

We have already considered that the **passion** of Saint Annibale for vocations is linked indissolubly with the solution indicated and commanded by Jesus himself in the Gospel: "*Rogate* (Pregate...)". Still a young lay person, he suffered for the lack of quality in a certain part of the clergy, and he lamented the insufficient number of priests, even though at that time they were much more numerous than those today. The Pope, has said very opportunely that this was "the torment of his heart, that of an apostle and priest."

The impelling need for "good workers for the harvest" therefore urged St. Annibale not only to pray for vocations, but to respond

with his own "*fiat*" to the call of the Lord, giving his personal disponibility to the need for vocations.

There exploded in Fr. Annibale uncontainable zeal to pray unceasingly, to propagate that prayer, to work with all the means available for vocations, and to respond to the Evangelical command also with the disponibility to be, first himself, a "worker of the harvest", and precisely there where is found "the crowd exhausted and famished like sheep without a Shepherd" (Mt. 9:36). He, therefore, took literally the parallel passage from Luke 10:23: "Pray the Lord of the harvest...Go!" And, in fact, he went to live in the poorest, most miserable quarter of his town, Messina, on occasion as deacon and more permanently as a priest. And he worked not only for the evangelization and promotion of that assortment of unfortunate souls of every kind, but also so that they themselves would be able to invoke the "Lord of the harvest to send workers" in their "field" and in all the fields of the world so crowded with the poor.

The vocational pedagogy of Fr. Annibale points towards the fulfillment of the Will of God through the personal involvement of those who pray for vocations. He used to say that those who pray to obtain vocations in the Church ought to be the first ones to commit themselves to being "good workers of the harvest." It is evident that to pray to God in order to obtain vocations involves personally whoever makes this prayer, so that he is ready and obliged to give first of all his own availability. One cannot honestly ask God to send others to face the needs of the Church without also asking one's self: "And what I do? Lord what do you want me to do?" One's own self-offering must follow: "Here I am, Lord, let your Will be done; if you want, send me!" In this way, every person who prays for vocations can become a response and immediate fruit of that prayer, which makes everyone available to discern the plan of God for one's own life and therefore to realize it, thus fulfilling the Will of God.

THE WILL OF GOD AND HOLINESS

"This is the Will of God: your sanctification" (1 Thes. 4:3). Now, the "Rogate" (Pray, therefore"), the charism which characterizes the

spirituality of Fr. Annibale is none other than an expression of the Will of God, that is never indifferent to the reality of the harvest of souls "weary and forlorn like sheep with out a shepherd," and therefore at risk of being lost. The Lord has compassion on them and commands, that is, he desires that his disciples pray to the Lord of the Harvest that there be many who, responding with their generous *Fiat* to the call of the Lord, become "workers of the harvest," new "apostles of the Divine Will", ready to work for the salvation of all.

Every life is a vocation, and holiness is the common vocation of every Christian: "God has called us to holiness," St. Paul tells us (1 Thes. 4:7). But to respond to one's proper vocation is none other than to fulfill this call and to realize the plan of the Will of God for us. We are therefore in the realm of the "*Fiat Voluntas Dei*" (The Will of God be done).

For Saint Annibale holiness consists in doing the Will of God: "What is the sanctification of a soul?" he writes. "The apostle says that this is the Will of God. According to the superficial view of some, there is no eminent sanctity if it is not surrounded by a great apparatus of austere penances and by a great show of facts and transcendental works, of portents and miracles of the first order. But these deceive themselves. True sanctity is the perfect union, though it is active, of our will with that of the Most High, through pure love of God and with the sole purpose of pleasing His Divine Majesty. Here there is no other need to work great prodigies, with the suspension of natural laws, because the soul, by giving itself totally to its God, has already worked the greatest of prodigies."

Elsewhere he wrote: "Holiness does no consist in a formula. In this new science of the Divine Will, in order to form saints superior to those of the past, it will be necessary that these new saints have all the virtues of the saints of the past to a heroic degree, that is, the sanctity of the confessors, penitents, the martyrs, the anchorites, the virgins, etc."

Fr. Annibale therefore insists by repeating that holiness is realized in the complete fulfillment of the Divine Will. He did not stop by simply insinuating this spirituality in his Institutes, but he had in

mind to extend it to a much larger group of people. In one discourse during a marriage he said to the spouses: "You must remember that you are husband and wife in order to fulfill the Divine Will, who has called you to this state in order to share together the pains and the works of life and to educate in a holy way the children that the merciful God will give you." Therefore, he wrote: "Let us make the following proposal: That a Pious Universal Union is formed, for now all private, of true devotion, with the title: Pious Universal Union of the Children of the Divine Will".

SAINT ANNIBALE AND THE WRITINGS OF LUISA PICCARRETA

Our saint asked of his sons and daughters (whom John Paul II on the 26th of June, 2004 has named "apostles of the 'Rogate, that is, apostles of prayer for vocations) that they have "a life conformed in everything to the Divine Will," And he made them promise: "I will strive to know and to follow always the Divine Will." In effect, he wanted them to be "children of the Divine Will."

Therefore, Fr. Annibale, undoubtedly transmitted to the two Religious Congregations that he founded, the Rogationist Fathers and the Daughters of Divine Zeal, more than a little of the spirituality of Luisa, even though there is no direct and explicit reference to the Servant of God made in our canonical Rule. This silence, however, is interpreted benevolently. One must keep in mind that the Founder, in his wisdom and prudence, would not have wanted to run the eventual risk of involving his two nascent Religious Institutes in the possible internal problems encountered in the course of Luisa's spiritual and charismatic journey. The same prudence is recognized in his successors, who in an early stage had to be concerned with the pontifical approval of the two Congregations and then had to try to avoid the probable risk of creating obstacles of the Cause of Canonization of Fr. Annibale.

We must remember that the same Luisa advised Fr. Annibale to be prudent regarding her writings, evidently not for lack of trust in him, but for the well-founded and necessary caution due to the delicate nature of the content: "Your being so far away and the fear that other

persons might read [the writings]," she wrote on the 14th of July, 1921, "is what makes me hold back. And, then, there is all my foolishness, things that concern my punishments, my jokes; therefore, to reveal myself to others causes me the most acute pain. I have written them only for the sake of obedience and for no other." And again on 27 December, 1923: "Now remember always the secret; these are always the most intimate things and only the Divine Will could have persuaded me to make the sacrifice."

For his part, St. Annibale, on February 23, 1927, recommended to Luisa: "There are points that, how ever true and holy they are guarded with the spirit and with holy simplicity, could also conflict with prudence in publishing them and which could encounter the criticism of the ecclesiastical Authority, which would then respond prejudiciously to the whole work. There are some chapters which ought to be delayed until you are in Heaven."

Fr. Annibale had the greatest respect for the prescriptions and norms of the Church. In the preface he composed for "*The Hours of the Passion*", placing himself again under the judgment of the ecclesiastical authorities, he writes: "I am undertaking with this first printing, the further publication of the 20 volume manuscript of sublime revelations, which one sincerely believes, subject always to the judgment of the Holy Church, to be made by Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ to a most beloved daughter and disciple of His, who is the pious author of "*The Hours of the Passion*." And again: "In order to obey the wise Decrees of (Pope) Urban VIII, the compiler and editor of these writings of a soul who wishes to remain anonymous, protests that inasmuch as there is in them revelations attributed to Our Lord and other matters which are supernatural, they do not require on the part of those who accept them, more than a purely human faith, and submits himself once again entirely, without any restriction whatsoever, to the supreme judgment of the Holy Church, represented by the Supreme Roman Pontiff and by the Roman Congregations authorized by Him."

Fr. Annibale, while enthusiastic for the content and the value of the writings of Luisa, felt charged with the great responsibility of examining and publishing them. Luisa must have calmed him when

she writes in Vol. 19: "While I was praying, I found myself outside of myself and at the same time I saw the Reverend Father who must occupy himself with the printing of the writings about the most holy Will of God, with Our Lord close by [...] and he said: 'My son, the assignment which I have given you is great [...]. I will guide you and I will be close to you to make sure that all is done according to My Will.'"

If, therefore, I can maintain that the process of canonization of Fr. Annibale was influenced also by his relationship with Luisa, I must also affirm that, in her turn, Luisa was drawn by Fr. Annibale to share also in the concern for the "*Rogate*," that is, the prayer and zeal for vocations. In fact, in the writings of Luisa one can find explicit references to vocations, as, for example, in the fourth hour of, "The Hours of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ": "I will pray to you for the priests, that they be worthy of your ministries [...] Jesus, I make reparation for the mistaken vocations of priests on their own part and on the part of those who ordain them without using all the proper means to discern their true vocations." In the 19th Hour she prays for "all priests, that they be light to the peoples" and later, during the same hour, she extends her prayer to the other vocations, asking of Jesus: "Give me your heart, so that I feel your same thirst for the souls consecrated to you." Obviously, there are certainly many other references to vocations throughout the volumes of Luisa's writings.

SAINT ANNIBALE AND LUISA PICCARRETA IN THE DIVINE WILL

Fr. Annibale, before receiving from the Archbishop Mons. Leo the assignment as Ecclesiastical Censor was already interested in reading the works of Luisa. In the first 58 pages of Volume 40 of her writings, there is a collection of transcribed phrases of Luisa and some observations, reflections, notes, and certain points relevant to the writings-in summary, all things which refer to his relationship with the Servant of God. [Luisa]

To put into greater relief the influence of St. Annibale on-Luisa, it may be sufficient to consider that there are a good 70 letters written

by St. Annibale to Luisa. In that of May 20, 1924, he wrote "[...] Arriving in Corato, if Jesus wants; I must make several observations to you and to the Confessor about certain points in the 12th and 13th books. But the doctrine seems to me sublime and Divine." And on the 4th of September, 1926: "Lady Obedience imposes on you that you write by day or by night, everything, and everything that the Lord reveals to you: nothing must escape."

Since she was concerned about fulfilling such a rigorous order, Luisa prayed that the Lord would give her the grace never to be lacking in obedience. In Vol. 19 she writes that she heard Jesus say: "My daughter, if the one who guides and directs you gives you this obedience, it means that it is indeed I who speak to you with the value that even one single word of mine contains. (...) Therefore, the one who guides you is right to give you this obedience. Ah, you do not know how I assist him and how I surround him while he reads my and your writings about my Will."

It was the same St. Annibale who assisted Luisa, in his turn, not only spiritually but also in the smallest details, even to the point of obtaining for her the materials with which to write: "I have already sent you the two bottles of ink that you asked of me for the writing pen. Write to me if you need writing pads... [Notebooks for appointments]". Luisa was deeply grateful for the assistance Fr. Annibale offered her, and she had full and unconditional trust in him. On February 9, 1920 she wrote: "Do whatever you believe you should; I give you complete freedom. You know and ought to remember that these are things of a poor ignorant one and that if there is any good in them, it all belongs to Jesus. Therefore, there is the necessity to review them with accuracy." But St. Annibale was very respectful of the content of the writings and limited himself to removing from the manuscripts only the errors in handwriting, leaving the same words intact. In summary, there is no doubt that Luisa and St. Annibale, in the plans of Divine Providence, helped one another reciprocally and influenced one another greatly, communicating in a mutual way the charisms which the Lord had enriched their souls for the good of the Church.

Let us enter a bit more directly into the mutual influence, more or less direct, between St. Annibale and the Servant of God, Luisa. St. Annibale was profoundly convinced of the great value and usefulness of the writings of Luisa. I will recall only summarily that he published four times (1915, 1916, 1917, 1921) the "Hours of the Passion" with the "nihil obstat" and the "imprimatur", making them very widespread with his greatly diffused periodical, "God and My Neighbor". Luisa had written this work between 1913 and 1914, upon the request of Fr. Annibale, giving it the title, "The 24 Hours of the Passion."

Fr. Annibale, in his beautiful preface, points out to us that such devotion is found also in other texts; in the footnote, he indicates that "one ancient Author, Fr. Simon of Napoli, published a work in two volumes on the Hours of the Passion in the year 1708." But at the same time, he has to underline that the work of Luisa is written "under a particular inspiration", because, he adds, 'it is different from any other and therefore it lends itself marvelously to our own times."

St. Annibale was as if seduced by the spirituality which flows out of the writings of the Servant of God, especially when they refer to the "secret revealed in acting in union with the Divine Will and the indescribable goods which are derived from it." Our Saint was convinced that "they are writings which now need to be known by the world. I believe they will bring about great benefits. Even though this science of the Divine Will is so sublime, besides being written by the hand of Heaven, it is presented very clearly and simply. But in my opinion, no human ingenuity would have been able to form it." (letter of June 20, 1924).

He finds there the indication of a life "all New and of Heaven," one that goes far beyond the three stages already noted: "of uniformity with the Divine Will, of conformity to it, and of transformation, or rather the annihilation of our will in the Divine." In fact, it dwells on a fourth quality which is that of "doing everything in the Divine Will." St. Annibale, as though blinded by the profundity of this "teaching all new and Divine", shows a praiseworthy attempt at explaining it, saying that it treats of "identifying one's self in such a

way with all the Divine intentions and actions that the souls is expanded within It [the Divine Will], is transformed, and acts with God and in God, works, wills, and rejoices as God Himself acts, works, wills, and rejoices." Not finding other words with which to express such profound truth, he concludes: "They are intimate truths, which are felt, and are understood better through praying than through reasoning."

In one study by Fr. Angelo Sardone Rogationist, he relates that when the first edition was published, Cardinal Cassetta appreciated the book so much ("The Hours") that he requested 50 copies. In a postcard dated July 10, 1915, Luisa informs Fr. Annibale that 60 copies were gone in less than 24 hours. In a successive publication, it is communicated that the second edition sold like hotcakes until they were sold out. Therefore, the publication of the third edition was announced before-hand, correct and more numerous printed copies. It is worthwhile to note that it was demonstrated in the "Positio" of Fr. Annibale that the edition which was put on the "Index" on July 17, 1938, refers to the fourth edition by Don Benedetto Calvi (last confessor of Luisa) and published at Taranto in 1934; therefore, that which was edited by Fr. Annibale has nothing to do with this painful measure.

Still drawing upon the study of Fr. Sardone, we know that Mons. Giuseppe Leo placed the include the first to the nineteenth volumes. Fr. Annibale began publishing the "Hours of the Passion" in 1915, followed by the "Tract on the Divine Will", of which mention is made in the edition of 1921. He began also the publication of "The Virgin Mary in the Kingdom of the Divine Will" and took care of the Preface and the entire content of the book. But illness and later his death (1927) blocked everything. The publications were then taken up by Don Benedetto Calvi.

As already noted Fr. Annibale, from his familiarity with Luisa, was certainly and ultimately strengthened in the mystery of the Passion of Jesus and in the exercise of the Divine Will. He composed the "Little Rosary of the Divine Will" and was about to initiate a "Universal Pious Union of the Daughters and Sons of the Divine Will," but without norms, obligations, or dues, but only with the

promise to recite five times a day the ejaculation: "Your Will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." However, he wanted it to be, as he himself wrote: "A Pious Union that is universal and spiritual called by the Sons of the Divine Will. It will be instituted in the most simple way. There will be no registrations, no rules, no meetings, nor dues, nor obligations of conscience. We will print, with the help of the Lord, hundreds of thousands of pages, in which there will be the recitation of the little rosary of the Divine Will, formed in two parts... This Pious Union I will present with the ecclesiastical approbation, to the Sacred Congregation of Indulgences in Rome, and I hope to enrich it with holy indulgences. It will serve to propagate throughout the world the publications and the knowledge of the revelations of the Divine Will.... These pages will be translated into many languages and diffused in many nations."

He therefore did not intend the foundation of a religious Institute, but he made it clear that it would be treated like that which today roughly corresponds to your spirituality, because he thought that "all religious houses of men and women, and all secular institutes, and whatever person in all the world, could become a son or daughter of the Divine Will, accepting only the little page... There will not be registers for enrollment, nor regulations, but only zealous souls...."

Fr. Annibale therefore maintained that the initiatives and devotions to diffuse the spirituality of the Divine Will ought to be characterized by simplicity in order to attract the faithful. And, maybe, precisely for this reason, he did not see the timeliness in founding an "Order" of the Divine Will."

On February 14, 1927, a few months before his death, Fr. Annibale wrote to Luisa: "You know that at this point I do not occupy myself with hardly anything else regarding my institutes, since I am completely dedicated to the great work of the Divine Will. I speak of it with spiritual persons; I raise the subject when I deem it best to do so; I promote it as much as is possible, also within my institutes."

One must say that the spiritual bond between these two holy souls was such that Fr. Annibale wanted to bring Luisa into one of his houses of the "Daughters of Divine Zeal" in Trani, and since that

was not possible, he set out right away to found a house right in Corato, where, in fact, Luisa was transferred, but only after the death of our Saint.

As you all know well, between Saint Annibale and the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta, there was an intense exchange of letters, in which he often signed his name: "yours in Jesus Christ in the Divine Will, Canon A.M. St. Annibale". The documentation of the correspondence between these two holy souls is of unique value and a treasure for their respective archives. The General Postulator of the Rogationists has dutifully transferred to the Cause of the Servant of God the authentic photocopies of 70 letters written by Luisa to Fr. Annibale beginning from 1911 (the first letter is dated March 20, 1911, and the last is dated less than a month before the death of the Saint, that is, June 1, 1927). Among the letters of Fr. Annibale, in Volume 56 (Various circular letters) one finds copies of 10 letters sent from Fr. Annibale to Luisa, the first of which carries the date of January 25, 1927, and the last from May 14, 1927. Fr. Sardone rightly points out, however, that from the archives of "The Luisa Piccarreta Association" of Corato, considering those letters published in their entirety and those published in part, the sum total of letters is much higher than the 10 already noted in the Rogationist Central Archive, beginning surely from 1911.

I am forced to lament that, in spite of our request made on February 4, 2002, we are still waiting to receive this other documentation.

CONCLUSION

The meritorious "John Paul II Institute of Christian Spirituality" which, with its initiatives, sets out to make known the "New and Divine Holiness", rightly emphasizes that, among its essential elements there is "the gift of possessing and doing the Will of the Father as in Heaven." "The Holiness New and Divine" is that indicated by Saint Annibale to his spiritual sons and daughters, so much so as to be proposed again by John Paul II, who, in his message sent to us in 1997 for the centenary of the foundation of the Rogationists, recalled that St. Annibale "saw in the 'Rogate' (prayer for vocations) the instrument given by God Himself in order to bring

about a 'New and Divine Holiness' with which the Holy Spirit wishes to enrich Christians at the dawn of the third millennium in order to make Christ the heart of the world."

The new era of spirituality, which all hope for, can be actualized precisely if all: laity, married persons and consecrated, in the prayer to the "Master of the harvest that he send other workers into the fields," respond to their proper vocations and rediscover therein their value by engaging themselves with a greater holiness of life.

We are all called by God to life and, through life, to fulfill one's own particular project: "Every life is a vocation, and every vocation is for a mission." Each one of us is "a dream of God"; and it is up to us to actualize it with His grace and with the collaboration of our good will totally surrendered to the Divine Will. In fact, to respond to God with our generous "Yes" is it not to say: "*Fiat Voluntas Dei*", let the Will of God be done?

Therefore, as I have tried to demonstrate, the spirituality of St. Annibale is espoused to that of the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta and that of Luisa with that of Fr. Annibale, influencing one another profoundly. We find ourselves finally in the presence, of two holy souls, both of whom have discovered in the Will of God for themselves and have proposed to all of us, the instrument with which to respond and to live in fullness one's own personal vocation.

Allow me to conclude with a long citation from the writings of Luisa, because no one can express better than she can how great was her esteem for Fr. Annibale Maria di Francia. In Volume 23, grieving because of his death, among other things, she wrote: "I was feeling sorrow over Venerable Fr. Annibale, for the many sacrifices which he made in coming often from so far away to deal with the publications (...)". In the same volume she affirms that she heard Jesus say to her: "Your past confessors in the next life will be as the prelude for the children of my Will, (...), especially the third (Fr. Annibale) who sacrificed himself so much in writing (...). He prepared the ground in order to make known my Divine Will. So true is this that he spared nothing, not cost, nor sacrifices. And even though the publication was not completed, simply by initiating it, he

prepared the ways to make it possible that one day it would be known and the work of My Will in the midst of creatures would have life. Who could ever deny that Fr. Annibale was the first initiator to make known the reign of my Will? And only because his life was spent, was he not able to complete the publications. Therefore, when this great work will be known, his name, his memory will be full of glory and splendor."

Today we can affirm that these inspired expressions of eulogy were prophetic in reference to the canonization of Fr. Annibale. But we must also consider that the judgments of St. Annibale regarding Luisa were no less enthusiastic. In the Preface for "The Hours of the Passion" he writes: "This soul, solitary and a most pure virgin, all of God, appears to be a singular predilection of the Divine Redeemer, Jesus. Our Lord, who century after century increases always the marvels of his love, it seems with this virgin, whom He calls the littlest found on earth, deprived of every instruction, wanted to form an instrument adapted for a Mission so sublime that no other can be compared to it that is, the triumph of the Divine Will on the universal globe, in conformity with what is said in the Our Father: "Fiat Voluntas Tua sicut in coelo et in terra." And, later on, in the same preface, he comes to affirm: "In the progress of these publications one remains astonished at recognizing an extraordinary familiarity of Our Lord with this soul, so that there is nothing to envy in St. Gertrude, nor in St. Matilda, nor in St. Margaret nor in any other whatsoever."

We hope that these opinions, expressed with much emphasis on St. Annibale Maria di Francia, will be auspicious and prophetic regarding the Cause of canonization of the Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta and that she whom he called "Teacher of virtue and of Divine Will" will have as soon as possible, if this be the Will of God, the due recognition also of the Church.

"Fiat."



On July 7, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI blessed a 17.5' statue of Saint Annibale Maria di Francia at Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.

St. Annibale was the Ecclesiastical Censor of Luisa's writings until his death in 1927.

Volumes 1-19 bear his *Nihil Obstat*. Additionally, St. Annibale was responsible for publishing four editions of "*L'orologio della Passione*".

All four editions were published with *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur*.

On May 16, 1997, at the end of the canonization of St. Annibale Maria di Francia, Fr. Riccardo Pignatelli R.C.J., Postulator General of the Cause, is photographed thanking Pope St. John Paul II:

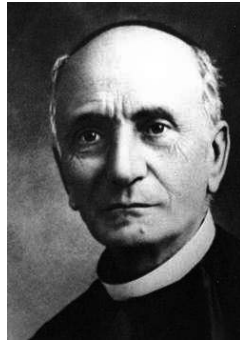


FR. RICCARDO PIGNATELLI RCJ

Postulator General of the Rogationist Fathers. Born in Barletta (Diocese of Trani-Corato) on July 02, 1934, was ordained a priest on July 13, 1958. He Served as General Counsellor of the Rogationist Congregation in Rome and as a Missionary in Rwanda. He was General Postulator for the successful cause of the canonization of St. Hannibal.

**ST. ANNIBALE MARIA DI FRANCIA
PRECURSOR OF VOCATION MINISTRY
AND FOUNDER OF**

**ROGATIONIST
FATHERS OF THE
HEART OF JESUS
(RCJ)**



**DAUGHTERS OF
THE DIVINE
ZEAL (FDZ)**

ROGATIONIST FATHERS OF THE HEART OF JESUS

The Rogationist are a religious community of priests and brothers consisting of about 400 members. The Rogationist, now present in four continents, were first established, with the approval of the local church in Messina, Italy, on August 6, 1926. The charism of the Congregation consists in the understanding and the zeal for the words of the Lord: "The harvest is abundant but the workers are few. Pray (Rogate) therefore the Lord of the harvest that He may send laborers to his harvest." (Mt. 9:37 38; Lk. 10:2).

The Rogationist express their specific consecration to God and to the Church through a fourth vow by which they promise obedience to Jesus' command of "Rogate" They commit themselves:

- To pray daily for Vocations;
- To spread the spirit of this prayer everywhere* and to promote vocations to Church ministry;
- To be good laborers for the kingdom of God by working for people's spiritual and material welfare.

In the United States, the Rogationist are present in, California, and are mainly headquartered in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the Diocese of Fresno. Their activities include: a parish, a center for underprivileged people, a Formation house for seminarians, a Vocation Center (including Publications of Vocation resources and **Vocations and Prayer** magazine), and "Harvest Association" (association of prayer for vocations).

DAUGHTERS OF THE DIVINE ZEAL

The Religious Order of the Daughters of the Divine Zeal (F.D.Z.) was founded in 1887, by St. Annibale M. di Francia in Italy, ten years before the Rogationist Fathers, and is now present in 10 countries all over the world.

The Daughters of Divine Zeal were founded 10 years before the Rogationist Fathers and, after their founder, took to heart the command to raised to God the prayer for the laborers of the Harvest. Their primary mission, as it is for the Rogationists, is to pray (*Rogate*) for vocations and to spread this spirit of prayer sealed with a fourth vow.

Their spirit of generosity and sacrifice have always distinguished the Sisters in their work of promoting prayer for vocations in the Church, as well as the practice of charity among the poor, most particularly in the orphans and abandoned of society.

In the United States, the Sisters are involved in education and pastoral ministry. They conduct spiritual retreats, prayer meetings for vocations, vocation discernment programs, vocation awareness groups for youth and laity, and prayer experience for women who are searching to discover their vocation in life.

St. Annibale's vision of the *Rogate* was shared by Mother Maria Nazarena Majone, co-founder of the Daughters of Divine Zeal. The cause of her beatification is under way.

**Private Edition Published and distributed by
Rogationist Publications.**

Donations can be sent to:



Rogationist Publications

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