

**A sister who was always available, humble and joyful**



**In the Hospital of *Santo Spirito***

**GREAT SAINTS, a SIMPLE SISTER, a STORM**

The oldest hospital in Rome, ***Santo Spirito***, is **situated a few steps from the Vatican...** a few steps from the place where

## the early Christian martyrs

and St. Peter himself

### were executed

. Great Saints have passed between these walls, to visit and comfort the sick: Philip Neri, Charles Borromeo, Joseph Calasanzio, Vincent Pallotti, John Bosco. It is here that a little sister of the poor has met death and glory, that on 18

th

April 1999 Pope John Paul II elevated to the honour of the altars and that the Italian Bishops' Conference declared her Patron Saint of nurses in Italy on 20

th

May 2003. Sister Agostina, Livia Pietrantoni, was killed on the morning of November 13, 1894 in this hospital by a tuberculosis patient, Joseph Romanelli. Apparently it seemed a random tragic episode. The gesture of a deranged madman, one would say. But for the people of Rome, who know how to recognize saints, was not so, right from the start.

**The day of the funeral of sister Agostina the circulation was blocked in Rome.** The *Messaggero*

gives the news on 16

th

November 1894

:

"never a more impressive spectacle was seen in Rome. From one o'clock in the afternoon the streets close to

*Santo Spirito*

and all the roads, from which it was believed that the funeral procession would pass, were crowded with people to the point of making the flow of traffic difficult". Thousands of people crowded the streets, kneeling before the corpse. "It wasn't the usual long line of soldiers lined up, the crowd of officials with rare and dazzling colours", commented the reporter of the

*Tempo*

: "it was everybody; it was the Rome of the people; it was the noble, charitable Holy Rome which gave the last salute to the one who, had sacrificed her feelings, thoughts and life and given herself angelically to charity, to the relief of the miserable poor...».

On the hearse the crown of flowers of the Jewish community stood out. On it was written: "To the martyr of charity". **Behind the coffin, there was professor Achille Ballori, Director of the hospital, Deputy Grand Master of the Freemasons**, who would also be assassinated in 1914, in the atrium of

*Palazzo Giustiniani*

. It was him who warned sister Agostina about that Romanelli, it was him who drafted the death certificate and who performed the autopsy.

**Sister Agostina had entered the hospital on August 13, 1887**, immediately after having received the religious habit.

Sh

**e was twenty-three years old**

**Professor Ballori assumed**

the direction of the hospital three years later. His first act was

**to expel the 37 male religious**

who were responsible of the spiritual assistance. They left once and for all in procession, holding the cross singing the Magnificat.

**The crucifixes and sacred images were removed, the remaining sisters were forbidden to pray in public**

**to speak of God to the sick**

, to offer them

**the religious comforts**

. It was the Rome of Ernesto Nathan, the years of open and obstinate anti-clericalism. On the door of the ward of tuberculosis patients there was the inscription: "freedom of conscience". Perhaps sister Agostina did not even understand the meaning of that expression.

## DAUGHTER of SABINA

She had not received a great education. The **second of eleven children, Livia Pietrantoni** came from a village, Pozzaglia Sabina, and had obtained only elementary education. It wasn't because she was not able to study but the

**family's economic difficulties**

had early conducted her away from school, onto the site of the provincial road

**Orvino-Poggio Moiano**

which was then under construction. She used to carry, buckets of gravel for a daily pay of fifty cents. There she worked on several occasions,

**between seven and eleven years**

and despite this she was able to complete the primary level of studies with good grades. Her religious education had been that of the

**catechism**

and of the

**few spiritual readings**

from her

**grandfather, Domenico ...**

the

## Rosary

,  
**mass**  
, the  
**flowers**  
offered to the  
**Virgin**  
in the chapel of  
**Rifolta**

, just outside the village. There was also the  
**work within and outside the house**

, where her father Francesco was forced to stay because of his arthritis and therefore she had to look after the children.





The mountains of the Sabina region, the home village of Livia Pietrantoni of Pozzaglia







