



Sisters of Charity of St Jeanne Antide Thouret

**HOMILY TO THE MASS DURING THE POPULAR FEAST
OF SAINT AGOSTINA PIETRANTONI
Pozzaglia Sabina, Sunday 13 September 2020**

Dearest brothers and sisters,

We are here even this year to celebrate together the popular feast of St. Agostina Pietrantoni, a woman who belonged to this land, a religious of the Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne Antide Thouret and patron saint of the nurses. During these months we learned to appreciate the generosity and sacrifice of many of them in carrying out their work which is above all a mission at the service of many sick people, especially those who contracted the Covid-19. For many of them it is significant to lose your life for the others – and whom this morning we wish to remember to the Lord in our prayers. They are even aware how easy it is to contract the virus from one moment to the other. Again, for many others, their service has meaning by staying away from their families to assist many dying people – and in some parts of the world, others are still dying – alone, far away from their dearest ones ... and thanks to one or the other nurse who managed to bring especially to the elderly and the most vulnerable who aren't used to digital means, a mobile phone to be able to see for the last time their nephews, nieces, sons, daughters, partners and their dearest persons.

Through this Mass I wish to entrust all of them to the Lord through the intercession of St. Agostina and ask Him to welcome in His merciful arms the souls of many who passed away in these months, while He teaches us what that phrase means. A phrase that finds its full realisation in Jesus but which is required also from all of us his disciples: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”. And I want to thank also the many people who offered and continue to offer their generous service in our hospitals, in the nursing homes close to our dear sick people; thanks also to those who voluntarily give some of their time to take care of the weak and refrain from closing themselves up in that selfishness which tends to exclude the elderly and the suffering.

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”, is a life program which even our Saint has lived fully since her childhood among these mountains. She was the second child of a numerous family of eleven children. When she was still small, she had to learn how to be a mother to her brothers and sisters.



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Although she didn't have the possibility to study, she always dedicated herself to edify her companions, so much so that they called her "the professor". Still very young, she went to work in Tivoli and then, in spite of her poor cultural luggage, since she wanted to follow her personal vocation to consecrated life, she managed to be welcomed by the Sisters of St. Jeanne Antide Touret, the Sisters of Charity. This happened during the worst moment of the Roman issue, when the presence of the religious wasn't tolerated in the Hospitals, so much so that the Capuchins of the Hospital Santo Spirito were sent away and even the religious symbols were eliminated. Agostina and the Sisters managed to remain in that hospital which was defined as the school of charity.

There, Agostina lived her humble service loving, until she even contracted tuberculosis – precisely like many other nurses and health personnel who today have contracted the Corona virus – and practicing the virtue of love and pardon up to the supreme gift of self: that of her life taken away from her by one of the patients - Romanelli – who targeted her and received the pardon of the dying Agostina before ending her short existence, devoted to the souls in the service of charity and in prayer. Whenever she was unable to help the patients, our Lady could intercede to calm their hearts whom she encountered in her life that lasted only 30 years. But in spite of its brevity, her life was intense and fruitful. Thanks to her and to her example of self-giving and pardon, even the Director of the hospital of Santo Spirito – who was a mason and highly anticlerical – was converted because he was attracted by the concrete Christian love and pardon which weren't simply narrated or preached by Agostina.

We can now ask ourselves which was the secret of Agostina?

This is revealed to us by the God through today's liturgy, where Jesus invites us to forgive up to seventy-seven times, namely, always.

This Gospel gives us the reasons why we too must always forgive like Agostina. In the Gospel we have heard how a king forgives his servant who begged him to remit his huge debt, equivalent to about one hundred million working days. His debt would have destroyed him totally and would have forced him to sell all his assets, while bringing to slavery his wife and children. He was forgiven, but as soon he left the king's room, he met another servant like him who owned him much less: one hundred denarii – the salary of one hundred working days ... – but he failed to remit his debt. While the former asked the king to be patient and merciful with him and his situation ... on the contrary he was neither patient nor merciful towards his companion, who was a servant like him.



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This is our situation. We all have been forgiven by God. At a high price, the price of his Son's cross, the One who has forgiven our sins and guarantees eternal life after our death. And we? Instead of putting in practice what we often repeat in the Our Father: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us", we are often hard and incapable to forgive.

Agostina has been capable even to forgive Romanelli who has killed her barbarically! Dear friends of Pozzaglia, dear Christians who are present here, dear Sisters of Charity, priests, health personnel, politicians, police, families, men and women who came here today to venerate St. Agostina and to celebrate the Eucharist: but are we capable to forgive?

The Gospel that has just been proclaimed to us makes part of chapter 18 of Matthew's Gospel, in which we find a collection of Jesus' teachings concerning community life and the life of the Church. Are we always capable to forgive?

If the Church and our Christian communities are in crisis and perhaps are no longer attractive, the reason is because we don't know how to forgive.

The servant who didn't forgive his companion was imprisoned by the king whom we find in the Gospel. This could also happen to us: if we fail to forgive we could remain imprisoned within a chain of hatred, resentment and revenge which will never render us free. Only those who are capable to forgive render their life – even if they are dying like Agostina while forgiving their murderers – a masterpiece of holiness, of authentic freedom which remains forever and continues to serve as an example to everyone and an incentive to give ourselves to the others even though we don't know them, or we don't receive any personal profit, even to the cost of being hated or rejected....

Dearest friends, let's now proceed with the Eucharist. The Paschal Mystery of Jesus who died and rose for us will shortly become present again on the altar. Let's approach this sacrament which together with that of Confession serves to forgive our sins. With full hands, we welcome God's forgiveness and spread it in our life and work environment, in our communities and in our families. Amen.

+ Mauro Parmeggiani
Bishop of Tivoli and of Palestrina