

**BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF SALESIAN
CONFRETES CALLED BY GOD TO
ETERNAL LIFE**

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Preface

Since we began publishing biographies of those amongst us called by God to eternal life, for the use of our Salesian Congregation, many ecclesiastics and lay people outside our Congregation wanted them made fully public, convinced that they would redound to the greater glory of God and our neighbour. Supporting this idea, we decided to collect and publish them for the consolation of relatives and friends and to provide spiritual material for other devout readers.

Although they are not the lives of Saints recognised as such by the Church, we nevertheless find particular features of God's goodness, shown even in our own times, and we note the practice of Christian virtues in family life, ways of preserving oneself from the corruption of the world, and ways in which the Lord calls souls to consecrate themselves to him. On the other hand we can also see the graces and blessings the Lord wishes to bestow on those who respond to his call to consecrate themselves courageously to his service.

May God grant that the effect corresponds with the intention, that is, that by reading these biographies the result may really be his glory and the good of souls.

Fr John Bosco.

Salesian confreres called to
eternal life in 1874

Fr Francis Provera

Fr Francis Provera, son of John Baptist (dec) and Aurelia Ricaldone, was born in Mirabello, a sizable town in Monferrato, on 4 December 1836. His early upbringing was what one can expect from truly Christian parents involved in works of charity.

After his teenage years he wanted to embrace no other life than that of his father who ran a delicatessen, while also looking after the family estate.

From a human perspective it would have seemed that Francis would spend his life peacefully within the family, who saw in him a model of virtue and a very capable businessman; but God's plans for him were different. When he turned 22 he decided to follow an inspiration that certainly came from heaven and which invited him to leave the world behind, a world he already knew was full of dangers for whoever truly wanted to think about his eternal salvation. "In the ecclesiastical state," he told himself, "I can do good for myself and others. But to succeed, I need to study and I need to be recollected". He made these thoughts known to his good parents and brothers and sisters who, though sorry to see him go far away, nevertheless did not get in the way of his vocation.

He had some vague ideas about the Oratory of St Francis de Sales and Don Bosco, its director, and that is where he went to be accepted. When some of his friends found out, some said:

"Why have anything to do with Don Bosco? That place is not for you; there they only talk about Our Lady, the Our father and Heaven!"

"If that is the case," Francis replied, "that is just the place for me: Mary, prayer, Paradise is what I am after".

He entered the Oratory of St Francis de Sales on 14 October 1858.

He applied himself to his studies and we discovered a sharp mind that neither he himself nor his teachers had imagined he had. In the space of a year he had completed all his elementary education, an entire classic or secondary year and had sat for the exam for promotion to philosophy and for being accepted for his clothing as a cleric at the Archdiocesan Seminary in Turin.

During this first year of residence at the Oratory he was able to get to know the spirit of the Congregation of St Francis de Sales, which at the time was beginning to take on a regular shape. And finding that it conformed to his own wishes, he did not delay in associating himself with it in a stable manner. He made his first triennial vows and shortly afterwards his perpetual vows. "Giving myself to God in half-measures," he said "is not my way: so let's break with the world, give ourselves to our true master; let's give all of ourselves and be his forever".

His extraordinary attitude to study also allowed him time to do other things, and in his second year of philosophy he was asked to teach the first year of secondary classes at the Oratory, where he taught 180 youngsters for two years, with great profit. He had

begun his third year of teaching when they found a tumour in his foot which did not respond to any of the medical treatment he received and troubled him for the rest of his life.

In 1863, through his initiative the minor seminary of St Charles at Mirabello was opened, and it was considered that there was no better person than him to take on the role of Prefect or bursar. He displayed his particular talent here and his experience in all areas of domestic administration. He continued in that role at Mirabello until autumn 1864, when he was transferred to carry out the same role at the college at Lanzo, opened that year and which needed a bursar with more than ordinary ability. While he was at this boarding school he achieved his goal of being ordained a priest. This special favour of Divine Providence confirmed him in his resolve to dedicate his whole life to the service of God and neighbour and indeed it seemed that celebrating Mass had given him renewed strength to put up with his illness with edifying resignation, an illness that caused him terrible pain.

With the College at Lanzo set up and running, he was again sent to the minor seminary at Mirabello. But in August 1869 with a new college opened at Chetasco, he was appointed there as Prefect, and after a year transferred to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales where the increasing range of activities needed an open and active helper for those who already found themselves there. Here too he was given the role of Prefect. Only someone who has experienced it can know how many and how different are the things this job needs to keep an eye on, as it is the centre to which the entire moral and material administration of the house refers and begins from. Fr Provera, calmly intent on not losing a moment of time, consecrated every moment to the greater glory of God and kept an eye on everything, observed everything without missing out on anything.

As well as carrying out his office he found time to prepare his lessons in philosophy, which he taught to the great satisfaction of his pupils. The Lord had given him a tenacious memory, facility of speech and exceptional clarity of thinking, which also made him a successful preacher. He enjoyed this part of his sacred ministry and produced good results. Although poor in health, whenever asked to preach he always found it a great pleasure. He often expressed the wish to be able to go out and preach retreats, give missions, and he suffered when he saw other confreres involved in this while because of his illness he could not follow them. "God wants to humiliate me" he often said. "But since I cannot do what my companions are doing, I will pray for them so they may reap abundant fruits from their evangelical efforts".

1874 had begun when the ulcer in his foot that he had put up with for a good twelve years began to get worse to the point where symptoms soon appeared that were life threatening. He became weaker, the pain was stronger and he found no rest by day or by night, but we never heard a complaint from him. One day he was seen with tears in his eyes, and when asked the reason he answered tranquilly:

"The pain I am suffering is beyond description".

Any treatment, consultation of good doctors, every remedy applied was in vain. He was told to leave all work aside and take some rest.

"No," he replied, "work and dealing with people is the only relief I can find".

In fact he told one confrere he would like to die working:

"I believe that it is truly a glorious thing for a soldier to die in battle", he said.

His most beautiful moments were those he spent in prayer, and he was always most exact in carrying out his practices of piety. The Superior advised him to rest some more and to suspend some of his religious practices.

"That is not good for me since I have so little time left on earth; so I have to use it well for the eternal things of heaven" he said.

While he could remain on his feet he never wanted to miss out on celebrating Mass. On the last occasions he was so exhausted he did not even have the strength to go back to his room. It was 30 March 1874 when he took to his bed under obedience. As bad as the pains he suffered were, he did during this brief final illness what he had done throughout his life - his heroic patience never slackened. With the faith and resignation of someone who suffers for love of God he received the comforts of our holy Religion to the edification of everyone around him, and his beautiful soul left us on 13 April 1874.

He was 38 years old and 14 of religious profession.

The one who was with him in his final moments said that Fr Provera did not die but went to sleep in the embrace of the Lord he had so loved and so faithfully served.

The life of this friend and confrere of ours is a true model of detachment from things of this earth, of patience, and of zeal for God's glory. So that his activity may be better known it will very soon be published in an appropriate biography.

Fr Joseph Cagliero

Fr Joseph Cagliero was born in in Castelnuovo d'Asti on 30 March 1847 of James Cagliero and Katherine Febbraro. Even as a young lad he had loved a certain aloofness from the world, a sign that in the future he was not made for this world. Wanting to support their son's good inclinations his family decided to send him away for studies. The boy asked if he could be placed in the Oratory of St Francis de Sales where a number of other boys from the town were; since it was already his intention to embrace the ecclesiastical state it seemed to him to be easier to follow that through in that school.

In October 1859, at the tender age of 11, he became one of our pupils. In the early months he found difficulty handling the many subjects involved in the classics or secondary course, but encouraged and helped by both friends and teachers he got to like it and tackling things with his more than ordinary God-given talent he was promoted that year and was amongst the top scholars in the class.

When he had completed his secondary course with praiseworthy results, he was able to satisfy his wish to take on the clerical habit. His intelligence developed considerably during his study of philosophy and theology and in the public exams his results were always outstanding. Along with his studies went a great love for piety and the acquisition of virtue; he was always a model of humility. When one of his companions invited him to come to Turin to join other confreres in gaining their Degree in Theology, he replied:

"You have too good an opinion of me; I do not think I am all that capable; I would make a fool of myself and bring disgrace to the Oratory". And yet he was regarded as one of the most suitable candidates.

As he was approaching ordination a respectable individual, perhaps to test out his vocation to the Salesian Congregation, suggested he might find great advantage as a lay person in the world.

"Thank you," he replied, "But I seek no rewards here on earth, only the rewards of heaven. And there is no doubt that someone who leaves this world out of love for God will have a hundredfold in this life and an eternal reward in the future. So is it not better to leave the world of one's own will, than to leave it perforce and without reward at the end of one's life?"

After ordination, and given his admirable approach to the sacred ministry he was appointed Catechist or Spiritual Director at the boarding school at Cherasco. He then carried out the same role for two years at the school at Varazze. Here he displayed the outstanding zeal that is only found in good ministers of God's love. As well as religious instruction which he taught to boarders and day pupils, he often went out to preach in nearby towns. His simple, familiar way of presenting things could be followed by everyone, and they found it pleasing, so wherever he went to preach his word was most fruitful.

The people at Cogoleto were a particularly good harvest for Fr Cagliero's zeal, since having gone there to preach on a number of occasions he soon won over the hearts of his congregation, who never tired of listening to him no matter how long his sermons were. 1874 was a particularly abundant year in that regard when he preached the Lenten preparations in the town.

Meanwhile Fr Pestarino, the director of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Mornese, died suddenly; Fr Cagliero was chosen to replace him in June 1874. It is worth noting that usually the priest appointed to head such institutes is someone of somewhat advanced age whose knowledge, piety, morality and experience leaves nothing to fear, and indeed everything to hope for. So if the Superiors chose to entrust Fr Joseph with that delicate office it was a sign that they judged him, despite his youth to have mature wisdom, and offer such a guarantee in his behaviour that they could be happy knowing they had chosen a secure guide for the Sisters and the girls entrusted to his zeal.

Because he so much loved quiet and a certain withdrawal from the world, staying there at Mornese far from the world's racket, seemed to him to be heaven on earth. When he went to see his father or other family members or wrote to friends he could only say that he was really very happy in his present position.

Dear Fr Joseph! You had begun to enjoy that contentment that people in the world seek in vain; the peace that only finds its fulfilment in heaven! Only two months had gone by when he fell ill and then his illness immediately became serious: it lasted a month and he bore it with admirable resignation.

All kinds of medical treatment, assistance, remedies were applied to the point where he commented: "If they do all this for me, what will happen to priestly poverty?" His father went to visit him and invited him to come home. "There is no better place than here to be helped," he replied. "Not even a prince could be better assisted".

When he saw that his strength was failing and the end of his life was approaching, he received the last Sacraments with great edification; then serene and content and his heart truly at peace in the company of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, for whom he had always had great devotion, he awaited the great moment of passing - which did not delay in coming. He went to sleep in the Lord on 4 September 1874 at the young age of 27.

During his life he was often worried that he was not capable of carrying out well enough the tasks he was entrusted with. It was this thought that urged him to such exactness in his duties, even occasionally to the point of being scrupulous. It is from such a model of Christian and priestly life that we learn to cultivate study but always joined with piety, something essential for anyone who wishes to gain true knowledge. May he be an encouragement to everyone to be zealous for the good of souls, not through polished eloquence but in apostolic simplicity. Then we can learn to seek peace of heart not amidst all the world's noise but in quietly withdrawing from the world and in fulfilment of the duties Divine Providence give us.

Cleric Louis Ghione

Cleric Louis Ghione was born of James and Antonia Allanda (dec), within the boundaries of Sts Michael and Peter Parish in Cavallermaggiore on 12 October 1850. The son of poor but upright and devout parents, from his earliest years he showed a special love for study and prayer and cultivated these as best he could in a way compatible with his circumstances.

His spirit of prayer grew as he got older, as did his desire to often receive the Sacraments, especially Holy Communion which he received unfailingly every Sunday, to the particular edification of those around him.

Feeling an inclination to the religious state, indeed he wanted to become a missionary, he was ready, he said, to spend his life to bring the faith to regions where unbelievers lived and should it be heaven's wish, to also die a martyr of Jesus Christ. With ideas like this he asked to be accepted amongst us at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales, in the hope that he could study here, develop his life of prayer, and in due course accomplish his plans. He was accepted at the Oratory on 1 May 1869, and soon showed special proof of his virtue. He was constantly admired for his readiness to obey, his humility and his love of God and neighbour. His Superiors knew of his keen desire to study and wanted to satisfy that. But he was first put to work in the refectory, a job he did exactly and patiently and made it clear to everyone that he sought only the glory of God in everything he did.

When others would be playing or going out for a walk he would usually make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament then do some reading, study, or writing. To all of this successful effort another task was added - one which would offer him greater opportunity to apply himself to school work and study. He was asked to work in the Reception, something he did for two years. That was when we came to know that Louis was gifted with special intelligence. In a short time he had completed a course in Italian, went on to study various sciences, learned Latin along with other studies required for his clerical clothing day. Only God would really know the extent of his joy on the day he received his clerical habit.

At this point he put aside the idea of becoming a missionary or tackling one or other particular thing, but consecrated his entire life to the Salesian Congregation, ready to do whatever the superiors would ask him to do.

"I am convinced," he said, "that by educating youth I can gain the same merits for my soul as I would if I were to go amongst unbelievers" ..

In his first year as a cleric the Superior sent him to Borgo San Martino, so that with no further material concerns to worry about, he could dedicate his time exclusively to study and also take special care of his health, which was beginning to be of concern. His style of life there is described in a few words by Fr J. Bonetti, the Director.

"Cleric Louis Ghione," he wrote, "was a model of piety, and as such much respected not only by his confreres but by others living in there who were edified by him. He was especially devoted to the Blessed Sacrament and collected books on the subject which he avidly read, despite the fact the he seemed to have a constant headache. He would rarely miss holy Communion, and if we did not see him approach the altar rails we knew that it was his health that prevented him. After he died, amongst his things we found a book of poems, all in praise of Mary, that he had gathered from various authors and had written down himself. He used to like reciting them to the boys, seeking to encourage devotion to the great Mother of God this way, and to pass on some of his own burning love for Mary".

So he could be of more use to souls and be more united with God, he yearned to be admitted to the priesthood. Despite his poor health, the Superior allowed him to receive minor orders and soon after, Subdiaconate. He was hoping to receive Diaconate and Priesthood following this but God had decreed otherwise.

He had begun to have nosebleeds but put up with all this with the resignation of the saints; he breathed his last and entered the Lord's embrace on 13 July 1874 having received all the comforts of our holy Religion; he was 24 years of age.

In this confrere of ours we can see a portrait of St Aloysius Gonzaga, or St Stanislaus Kosta, and say of him what others have already said of these Saints: *Brevi vivens tempore explevit tempora multa*. His life was short, filled with many good works, and his soul found such favour in God's sight that he called him to release him from life's perils and, as we fondly hope, bring him to possess the true delights of heaven.

Fr Dominic Pestarino

Fr Dominic Pestarino was born in Mornese on 5 January 1817. His parents were well off in worldly goods but even wealthier when it came to the riches of a holy fear of God. His father was John Baptist, his mother Rosa Gastaldi. When he turned 8 he was taken to Acqui for private schooling. He said that while he was boarding there he often had to suffer hunger, but never complained about it.

Two years later he came back to Mornese and at the end of the holidays that year his mother decided to put him in the Seminary at Genoa. He was made welcome by his Superiors, put himself in their hands and made such progress in study and piety that all his companions pointed to him as a rare model of virtue. There are many things to recall about him. To encourage his friends to do good and with permission from his Superiors he would often lead them off to Church for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, propose mortification, encourage them to be obedient, so at that young age he could already be called a little preacher and a particular example of every virtue.

At holiday time he came home only out of obedience and after just two or three days would beg his parents to send him back soon to the Seminary. When he was an older cleric he was made Prefect at the Seminary, a job that was only entrusted to someone whom the Superiors and the other seminarians considered to be outstanding for piety and study. He continued doing this even after he became a priest. One thing everyone noticed (many of his colleagues assure me) was that for the twelve years Fr Pestarino lived at the Seminary there was a flourishing of piety and reception of the Sacraments. The learned Canon Alimonda, zealous and pious Fr Frassinetti and many other distinguished persons were amongst his close friends, and they always spoke of him as a model priest.

Called to Mornese, he accepted the invitation but on condition that his family leave him totally free to carry out his sacred ministry as he wished. Through the efforts of this holy priest, helped by the zeal of its Parish Priest, Fr Carlo Valle, this town changed in its approach to piety, as Bishop Modesto Contratto said in his pastoral visitation there: "Mornese is the garden of my Diocese". When Fr Pestarino went to Mornese, it would have been a miracle to see just one person going to Communion during the week. A few years later most of the men and women in the town went to daily Communion.

He was all things to all people, but he had a special love for the youth. He had all kinds of ways over the last days of Carnival time to keep young people away from the problems and perils of this event. He would gather them in his home, and at his own expense see that they could be kept busy in various good games, then with something to drink, eat and whatever else was needed for honest good fun. Fr Pestarino was always there amongst them.

Towards evening they would all go to the parish church for prayers, after which they would all head off quietly to rest. Before saying good night to them he would let them

know what was happening tomorrow, invite them to go to Mass say the Rosary, receive the Sacraments of Confession and Communion.

After lunch next day they would have the same fun as the previous day. So that's how Carnival days were spent, with games, some singing, maybe some skits or performances with a moral that could serve as little sermons.

He did much the same thing for the girls in another house under the direction of the teacher in the village, but always at his expense. Fr Dominic Pestarino was loved and obeyed like a good father by the young people. And if Mornese still stands out from other towns for its attachment to religion it is largely due to Fr Pestarino's zeal. Always in agreement with the zealous parish priest he tirelessly preached and heard confessions day and night. Sometimes he would spend fifteen hours in the confessional without a break. I recall being in the town when Fr Dominic had begun hearing confessions in the evening, continued all night and at midday next day was still to be found there. He loved everyone, did good to all, and was loved by all in return; he could be called a true friend of the people. People in the town elected him more than once as a town councillor. He measured up to their trust by constantly fostering their spiritual and temporal welfare. Not only the people from Mornese but neighbouring towns never took important decisions without asking Fr Pestarino.

He had heard people speak of Don Bosco, and wanted to get to know him, so he went to Turin in 1862 with that in mind. He was so enamoured of the spirit of the Salesian Congregation that he immediately wanted to add his name to it, and began to practise the Rule. Shortly afterwards he consecrated himself entirely to this Congregation and was one of its exemplary confreres. The Superior, to whom he gave his complete obedience, in view of the great good he was achieving where he was wanted him to continue there.

Fr Pestarino's wish was to establish some good institution which would remind his fellow townspeople, even after his death, of the affection he had for them, so in agreement with local authorities and with the consent of Don Bosco he laid the foundations for a building erected for the public good. It was the common desire that there should be a boarding school for boys, but not to go against the advice of the diocesan bishop, he thought it would be better to open a school for girls. And for that, naturally, he needed teachers of religion and other subjects, for discipline and civic education. This was the beginnings of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The purpose of this Institute is to do for girls what the Salesians do for boys.

To support so many works of charity, Fr Pestarino had already sold most of what he owned; so when he began this new institute he sought help from others, especially the Salesian Congregation, which had begun to consider any of Fr Pestarino's works as its own. With the same zeal as before he dedicated all his efforts to the new Institute for the remaining few years the Lord would grant him.

He finally saw his wish come true. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians' house, which he was appointed the director of, grew in numbers year by year, and it seemed that the time was fast approaching when the good priest could enjoy days of rest and peace. However God, who knows our merits as human beings, called his faithful servant to eternal rest just when nobody was expecting it, since he was in perfect health. He suffered no final illness. It was 15 May 1874 and he had just celebrated Mass. He died

suddenly and went to enjoy the reward of his labours and sacrifice. He was 57 years of age. He had been a wealthy man but made himself poor out of love for God; the Lord, who rewards virtue and not wealth, certainly has made him rich in eternal glory.

We too can learn not to take account of wealth and an easy life but to love poverty and work for the glory of God. In his preaching and ordinary conversation, Fr Pestarino often repeated the Saviour's words: *Quod superest, date pauperibus*. Give what you have over to the poor, and with your wealth, if you have it, you will never lack friends. Happy is he! We see other words of our Saviour verified in him: Those who become poor out of love for the Lord are sure of possessing the eternal riches of heaven: *Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum coelorum*.

Salesian confreres called to
eternal life in 1875

James Para

The hand of the Lord plucked one of the most beautiful flowers in the garden of the Salesian Congregation in 1875. He was the young James Para, born in Sampeyre, diocese of Saluzzo on 16 September 1850.

James unfortunately lost his father at a tender age; despite this he spent a happy childhood and grew up as a balanced and devout lad. His religious upbringing helped him very much through the dangerous years from fifteen to eighteen and he was able to resist the influence of passions and the scandalous behaviour of acquaintances and keep free from the problems that are so common for naive youngsters.

Young Para was always well-behaved, devout, zealous for God's honour and both very patient and penitent. These were virtues that he gave shining proof of both before and after he entered the Congregation.

While still a lay person and in the midst of the world, he was very zealous in introducing other young people in the parish to singing and especially hymns. Overcoming all human respect he sought out other companions, found an appropriate place for his teaching, found the time, and got a teacher to help him. He soon had the consolation of seeing his goal achieved, meaning praises sung to God, the Virgin, and attracting his friends away from their practice of singing bawdy songs as they walked along the roads and around the countryside.

This was not the limit to his religious devotion. He had to do manual work in the afternoons to earn a living, but like St Isidore the farmer, he did whatever he could to see that he could also attend Mass. So he would rise early in the mornings before the others and go off to church. While at work he would say some of his favourite prayers; during the day when there was time for a rest, after resting briefly he would occupy the rest of the time with reading from some devout book to strengthen his spirit with holy thoughts and religious affections. Sometimes while working very hard, bathed in perspiration, he would fill the air with the sound of his praises to the Blessed Virgin, encouraging and edifying his fellow workers.

Often, coming from or going to the fields he would be seen with cap off and hands joined around the hoe or spade he carried across his shoulders and could be heard saying the Rosary or other prayers that he could not say at other times. On Sundays he was not only at the parish functions, but before and after them you would have seen him book in hand, at the head of a group of other good people making the Stations of the Cross in a marvellously devout and recollected way. The people still recalled his father's outstanding piety and were happy to see it flourishing again in his son. As they always do they praised him much for this.

His older brother attests to the fact that he never caught James lying. He was very obedient; he would obey as soon as you opened your mouth to tell him something. He

was humble and gentle with all. Frequent Communion was his source of so much patience and meekness amidst any kind of setback.

From his earliest years he had always felt an inclination to religious life, the priestly state, and he had often asked his mother to put him into a boarding school where he could study for this purpose. But the difficult times the family was going through, which meant they needed him, meant his mother had to always say no. The young man was not discouraged, and keeping his vocation secretly in his heart, he asked the Lord to help him. Meanwhile, working at home and in the fields he tried to learn as much as he could through self-learning, and by attending the village school especially in the winter months.

He could spare very little time for study but any spare moment, and even late at night were times he used to great advantage and others marvelled at it. The following fact demonstrates his great desire to learn.

He was living in a hamlet that meant he had to walk five kilometres to get to school. He would cover as many as 20 kilometres on any school day. One day it was snowing heavily but instead of remaining at home he wanted to go to school. He set off through the snow with the courage of a lion, arriving there all covered in perspiration after an hour and a half of very difficult walking. But his body could not handle such an effort and after a few minutes at his desk the poor lad, who had been red in the face from his effort, suddenly went white and fainted. Once he had recovered he got back to work at the desk as if nothing had happened. An act of courage like this might give us an insight into mettle of this young confrere of ours, right from his childhood. God sought to reward such virtue and this is how.

He had already turned twenty when he heard about the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. "This place is for me," he said immediately, and he sought to be accepted there. His mother had already died a few years before, so he turned to his older brother, an uncle, the parish priest who helped him in the process and he was accepted at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. There could have been no better news for him and every delay before he could set out for Turin seemed like a thousand years to him.

When he left home it seemed like he was leaving for the place of greatest happiness, he was so content. When he arrived there and found out how easy it was for him to attend to things like the salvation of his soul, he said:

"I know the superiors will let me study, and I will be pleased about that; I know too they will want me to do other things and I will be just as happy, because I see that in this place there truly is the Lord's peace".

After some time his superiors came to recognise that young Para had a special aptitude for study and was adorned with rare virtue. So he was allowed to begin his studies and in September 1873 he was accepted as a novice in the Salesian Congregation. He was diligent, fulfilled all his duties, was fervent in his practices of piety, obedient in everything, and a model not only for the other novices but also the professed.

He wanted to consecrate himself completely to the Lord through religious vows so during his trial year, 1873-74, when he was making his retreat at Lanzo with the confreres, he asked the superior for permission to make his profession. His superiors, seeing his impeccable behaviour, gave him permission, although mostly this was not the case for

students until they had finished their grammar year (*Latinitas*). It was a special favour from his superior so that our dear confrere, who would soon finish his mortal course, could die consecrated to God as he so earnestly yearned to do.

This good young man always recognised this as a special favour and on his deathbed, an hour before he gave up his soul to God, speaking with the Rector of the House, he asked that when he told the Superior of his death he thank him for this favour of being able to make his profession a few months earlier, showing him special preference amongst his other companions. He combined great humility with this gratitude, saying:

"I think our Superior knew that I would soon die otherwise he would not have granted me such a special grace, and nor was I worthy of it. At any rate I am so grateful. Please tell him I will pray for him because of the great gift he has given me".

At the beginning of the 1874-75 school year at Borgo San Martino college they needed a good person to run the Reception, and James was appointed there. Although this good confrere was very sad to have to leave the father of his soul, as soon as he received his obedience he left without a word to the contrary. In the new college his virtue shone out as it had done at the oratory of St Francis, leaving an incomparable example of patience and exactness in fulfilment of his duties. But he was already ripe for heaven, and one only needed to apply the words of the Holy Spirit to him, that is, that in a short time he had accumulated more merit than others would barely have gained over a long life: *brevi vivens tempore eaplevit tempora multa*.

Para had been carrying out his task in Reception for three months, and at the same time studying his fourth year of secondary under a special teacher when his health suddenly began to deteriorate. Accustomed as he was to inconveniences of all kinds, without saying a word to anyone about it, and although he felt much worse and suffered fever day and night, he nevertheless continued to rise at five in the morning right in the depths of winter, to be there in Reception as if he was perfectly healthy. With manly, one could really say heroic courage, he managed to hide his illness for a good few days. Even with his reputation as a young man of great virtue, none of his confreres would have ever suspected, so perfect was his virtue, that he was suffering the shivers and hot flushes of unrelenting fever while standing there at his post.

Finally the superior became aware of his illness and ordered him to bed. He obeyed, but humbly replied:

"It is not the illness that has laid me low, but because I am unable to bear it for the love of God".

He stayed in bed that day but believing that the superior's order was only for that day and no longer, he was up the following morning at the usual hour. The infirmarian was the first one to see him:

"Why are you up?" he asked "when you are so ill?" and he replied,

"I was afraid that no one would have taken my place, and I didn't want something to go wrong because I was missing". He was told to get back to bed and wait for the doctor.

Unfortunately his illness quickly took on threatening dimensions and it did not take the doctor long to see that our dear James' life was in danger. The confreres, as well as the pupils at the college were distraught when they heard this, since they all saw

a faithful friend and a model of virtue in the young man. He was soon taken to the infirmary so he could have closer assistance. They tried all kinds of treatment, remedies and assistance but it was written in God's decree that this flower would be plucked from the earth and transplanted to heaven. He only survived another twenty hours but gave such an example of virtue in that time that he convinced us that we had an unknown saint in our midst.

The fever had reached such a peak that the entire bed shook from head to foot, and his breathing was so laboured that it moved us to pity. Despite this he was never heard to complain, not a groan or sigh to indicate the least impatience. He showed the same charitable interest in others and the same disregard with which he had always treated his own body, until the very end. Thinking only of others and not of himself he told the infirmarian: "You have other patients to look after. I just need some ice in a cup and you can put it on the bed. I can get it from there without disturbing you".

Had obedience allowed him, he would have died on his feet. He died on the night of 24 February, his body wasted, but not his soul. That morning he had confided in the confrere who was with him that he had had a dream and that he would soon be leaving this world. His friend, thinking that thoughts like this would only make things worse told him to trust in his treatment and in prayer and hope that recovery was not far off. Aware that the confrere with him was embarrassed he immediately told him:

"You think I am afraid to die: you are wrong. Far from fearing death I am waiting for it anxiously so I can be with the Lord".

We think we are right in believing that he had had some notice or at least some extraordinary inkling of his departure because three days before the symptoms of his illness had appeared, when he went as usual to pick up the mail from the post office, he told the postman:

"Someone else will be coming in two days time to pick up the mail".

"Why is that?" the postman asked. He answered:

"Because I will no longer be around".

When the director of the house saw that his illness rather than diminishing, as he had hoped, was progressing at a fearful pace, he plucked up courage and spoke to him, saying:

"Dear Para, if Our Blessed wants you with her in Paradise today, are you willing to go?"

At this question he looked at us and then answered affectionately:

"Oh! Willingly".

He needed few words because usually he went to Confession every week, each time as if it were the last time in his life; his conscience was at peace. He asked for Viaticum, which he received so devoutly and contentedly that everyone nearby was brought to tears. After two hours our dear confrere, with the crucifix in his hands, and kissing it with great love, went to sleep in the Lord like a child falls asleep in the bosom of its tender mother.

A more beautiful death you could not have. Oh! May heaven see that we can conclude our days in peace with a death like that!

Young James Para, in all the time he was with us, was a great model of Christian life and of religious observance; but the virtue which stood out most in him was his ready obedience, avoiding any expression that might seem to blame the superiors or detract

from his companions' reputation. Guided by this principle he willingly did whatever he was asked to. Not one of those who lived with him ever heard him offer a word of complaint or murmuring. In this he imitated our Patron Saint Francis de Sales, who teaches how, for every one of our neighbour's actions that might have a hundred sides to it of which ninety nine are bad and one good, we should accept the good and leave aside the other ninety nine. Para put this into practice and will now have received his just reward in heaven, as we fondly hope, leaving us, dear confreres, with a noble example to follow.

Yes, dear confreres, let us love obedience as something that generates and preserves all other virtues; but let us also try to avoid any kind of murmuring which has always been the fatal seed of destruction for religious institutes.

Anthony Lanteri

Anthony Lanteri was born on 9 March 1841 in Poaldo, in the parish of Briga on the coast, of Peter and Madeleine Alberti. His family were poor shepherds but they were upright and fervent Catholics who knew how to inspire Anthony with a special love for prayer and everything regarding our holy religion.

His parish priest attests to the fact that while still very young he stood out for his sense of reserve; he listened carefully to God's Word, often went to church even on his own and outside of regular functions, and was very regular with the Sacraments. He showed much zeal in encouraging his friends to be good and he tried to keep them from being idle by lending them good books to read.

And you had to admire his virtue when he took the sheep for pasture in the mountains. He did not give in to idleness, did not engage in dangerous conversations, but with a good book he would say his prayers, and would fill the hills with the sound of his hymns to Our Blessed Lady.

It seems that the Lord was pleased with his prayers and exercises of piety by granting him abundant graces and freeing him from serious dangers. One day he was running behind a lost sheep, and while he was distracted suddenly felt the ground disappear beneath his feet and he fell into a deep gully. He barely had time to exclaim: "Ah! Jesus and Mary, help me". Just then he saw a flash of light and he found himself at the bottom of the gully safe and without a single injury. He jumped up on his feet and with his eye measured the terrifying height he had fallen from. Recognising the great danger that Jesus and Mary had saved him from, he felt his heart filled with gratitude and said to himself: "This life that has been saved through grace from Jesus and Mary I want to dedicate to their service".

Meanwhile, in the winter he often had to leave his beloved solitude and go to the more populated and corrupt towns where he found himself mixing with people who spoke against religion and proper behaviour. It wounded his heart and seeing how difficult it was in the midst of this world to keep faithful to his promise to consecrate his life to the service of Jesus and Mary, he made the decision to leave home and join a religious congregation where he could see to saving his soul from the dangers of this world.

He arrived at the Oratory in September 1871, determined to renounce everything for the love of God, even his own will, which he would submit to his superiors under obedience. He would have liked to take up studies but the Director, given what seemed to be his poor health, thought it better for him to do house work thinking he would be more suited to manual work than study. He willingly adapted himself so well that after two months he was sent as a helper to the house at Marassi, then was assigned to San Pier d' Arena, where he edified everyone, always calm, blindly obedient, and especially devout. How he suffered if he knew of something that offended God but was unable to

prevent it!

Following his novitiate he was admitted to vows. He would have liked to make perpetual vows, but since he was not allowed to, "well," he said, "with my voice I will observe the Rule for three years, but in my heart it will be for all of my life".

At S. Pier d'Arena he was asked to look after the church. "I am so happy," he said "now I can serve the Lord from close up".

And this is to say nothing of the attention, diligence and ease with which he carried out this new task. He had an eye for everything, saw to neatness in the church and sacristy, looked after the altars and took great delight in decorating them and the church. And if at the beginning something might have escaped his attention, he only needed to be told once and you could be sure it would never be overlooked again. He treated people from outside charitably and courteously if they came to the sacristy for something; the common thought in the house and outside was that it would be difficult to find another sacristan so attentive and competent in his job as Lanteri was.

One day while working in the church he nearly slipped when he was up very high. When asked what went through his mind at that moment, he answered: "I would consider myself just too lucky to die while working in God's church. I went to Confession and Communion in the morning, so what could I fear?"

Any time he had left over after working in the church was given to other work around the house, and prayer. Whenever asked to do anything he never showed the least difficulty or repugnance in doing it. The only thing he would have found hard to do was to restrict the time he loved giving to his exercises of piety. Nevertheless he never overlooked a single thing asked of him out of obedience by doing practices of piety that he liked; instead he would make up with frequent aspirations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Lady during recreation and sometimes even during rest time.

But the climate at San Pier d' Arena was fatal for him. After about a year there he felt very severe stomach pains; coughing at night meant he could not sleep, and some serious bleeding was cause for real concern about his life. It was thought to send him to Turin to see if the air there would help. He regained his strength quickly and for a number of months was sacristan at the church of Mary Help of Christians. But his illness had just gone quiet, he hadn't recovered and as it got colder his stomach pains returned and he had to go to bed. He was always calm and peaceful and never complained about his illness. He was resigned to God's will but took whatever treatment was suggested, though thinking that they would not help him much he began to prepare himself well for his death.

The doctor advised him to spend some time at home. He wrote to his parish priest so he could keep the same Rule of the Congregation for prayers, recollection, going to church and the Sacraments. He was calm and serene until his death, which he willingly accepted from God's hand in August 1875.

Anthony Lanteri was a model of interior life; while constantly busy with work he would always have his mind and heart fixed on God. All his actions were for God's glory. We have every reason to believe that he is already enjoying the peace of the just, in possession of the God he always sought along this life's pilgrimage.

Defendente Barberia

Defendente was born in Cassinelle, in the diocese of Acqui, in 1855. He was raised by virtuous parents and grew up fully obedient to them. He always avoided bad companions and went to church. His parish priest recommended that he be accepted at the Oratory as a model young boy, saying: "Maybe there is no boy in the village of his age and circumstance who surpasses him in virtue". He never gave cause for us to doubt these beautiful words while he was with us; indeed he grew daily in virtues proper to his state and edified us all by his behaviour. When he came to the Oratory he immediately showed his fervour in the practices of piety, his desire to frequently receive holy Communion and make progress in his studies, because he told us he wanted to be a priest and work for the salvation of souls.

He soon asked if he could enter the Salesian Congregation, so he was accepted as an aspirant, and passed any of the tests we put him through with flying colours. While he earnestly wanted to make progress in his studies, because he was already on in years he was asked to work in the Reception at the outside Oratory and worked there until his clothing as a cleric, carrying out his tasks prudently and zealously in a way that made his superiors happy as well as anyone who had anything to do with him.

One thing he very much liked doing and he did to the admirable advantage of his pupils, was teaching catechism to the boys, especially the poorest and roughest of them. His pleasant approach attracted them, and he kept their attention with the little rewards he would promise them. We saw that the boys in his catechism class, attracted by his approach, were regular in attending and learned well.

Because of his many virtues, in time the superiors willingly admitted him to the Congregation and allowed him to be clothed as a cleric. He was so happy when he found out that this desire for this was to be satisfied. "Now I lack nothing," he used say "only that I now have to think seriously about honouring this cassock and adorning my heart with the virtues that unfortunately I do not have, but need".

He received holy Communion almost daily and with such devotion that he edified all his companions. He was often heard saying that nothing helped his soul more than frequent Communion. His obedience was also admirable; he was often seen halting immediately at the sound of the bell, to then go wherever obedience was calling him. When he was given a task he would immediately tackle it diligently and did his best to complete it exactly.

He was abstemious when it came to eating and drinking, and in fact had to be asked to look after himself more in that regard so he would not damage his health. He was never heard to complain about what was on the table and always looked for and took the worst portion. When he was occasionally overlooked by whoever was serving at table he did not ask but was happy this way to do some mortification without causing any

problem for others. He used to love hearing about the early days at the Oratory, and all the efforts needed to set it up. And then he would think immediately of the future and enjoyed thinking of what he might be able to do that could be useful for souls in the Salesian Congregation.

Dear Defendente! Yours was a good desire and certainly acceptable to the Lord; but the Lord already had other things in mind for you!

He was in the novitiate for just a few months when an old stomach problem and a terrible cough came back. Here at the Oratory he was given every treatment but the illness gradually took over. His patience was admirable; "The only thing I regret," he often said "is that I am a burden to the Oratory in this state and they are doing too much for me". The doctor advised him to see if the climate at home would help improve things and he went back to his parents, who were very much looking forward to that but in the end that did not help either.

He was like this for a number of months, edifying everyone with his patience and resignation to God's will. He passed from this life to eternity on 8 September 1875.

With permission of the ecclesiastical authorities.