

**Blessed Assunta Marchetti:
Some traits of her spirituality**

Sr. Leocadia Mezzomo, mscs

English translation of the
original text in Portuguese published in:
Traditio Scalabriniana. Sussidi per l'approfondimento
n. 24 (November 2016)

What we mean by spirituality?

Spirituality is a path through which we seek God, so that He can shape our life in agreement with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. What really matters is being led by the Spirit, beyond the sentimental illusions or the relish for emotions, particularly today when we tend to prefer and exalt the subjective individualism!

The experience of God according to the Gospel does not reduce spirituality to a complicated theorem, but we cannot even mean it as a recipe ready to be used. God's experience becomes in the person a kind of "sap" which strengthens and yields fruit, similar to what happens to a tree planted on the edge of a stream (cf. Sal 1:1).

A few authors define spirituality as "thirst for absolute, thirst for God": this gives the idea that spirituality is an explicit relation with God. Others prefer to say that "spirituality is a way to be Christians". Therefore, we could say that: if people and society allowed to be driven by God's blow, we would have a spiritualized society, and if the Lord's Spirit governed people, we would have human dignity in a high degree¹.

Spirituality is a road open to adventure and love, in which God is the protagonist and the person is a free and aware subject, called to cooperate with the abundant grace that He "pours in the heart" (Rm 5:5) with the profitable action of His Spirit.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, we are comforted in thinking that every human being is "capable of God"², everyone can experiment His power of attraction and His sanctifying action. Besides, man is not free from temptation, from the necessity of strain and from defeat³. That is why we can say that the spiritual path is a succession of breakages and needs a constant determination to set oneself, ever and ever, in the perspective of the Gospel, in order to be discerning under the light of the Spirit, which shows the necessity of not being "modeled by ideologies", not corresponding to the

¹ USG, *A espiritualidade. Experiencia unifica dora da Vida Consagrada* [The spirituality. Unifying experience of the consecrated life], Ed. Paulinas, S. Paulo 1999, 10.11.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, N. 27.

³ *Ibid*, N° 1704; *Gaudium et Spes* 13,2.

dominating culture, which exalts the "self" to the detriment of the human and spiritual values that humanize and sanctify.

There are many spiritual roads and therefore many spiritualities (ignatian, carmelitan, franciscan, and so on). The spiritual lane proposed to us in the Scalabrinian *traditio* implies also significant moments and practices of "spiritual disciplines", such as: the centrality in the Eucharistic celebration, the *Lectio divina*, the Liturgy of the Hours, fasting, ascesis, and so on⁴.

The *Traditio* underlines also such virtues that deserve a special cultivation by the members of the Scalabrinian family, so that we can affirm that the Scalabrinian spirituality is not something intimist, but has to be translated into practical deeds; in a word: spirituality must lead us to express the abundance of spiritual life we cultivate as children of God! The virtues underlined in the Scalabrinian *Traditio* are: *welcoming, itinerancy, communion in diversity*. Every member of the Scalabrinian family has the responsibility of making them effectual in her own life.

“Every Christian spirituality is not only a way of praying, but also a way of seeing reality, of being in the world: this gives a "shape" to the human life and gives it a particular sensibility which projects itself also into a peculiar way of life. Actually, those who identify themselves with a spiritual path non only live their own faith, but also their own experience of life in the light of a particular charisma which involves all the aspects of existence”⁵. The Magisterium of the Catholic Church recommends that spirituality shall be well founded, because from it depends the apostolic fecundity, the generosity in the love for the poor, and the very vocational attraction over the new generations (cf. VC 93).

We think of the Blessed Maria Assunta Marchetti, who lived giving to those she served and loved in her long missionary life, first of all to her sisters and daughters "a spiritual color" released by God's Spirit, with the typical features of the spirituality lived already by the founder, the Blessed G.B. Scalabrini and by the co-founder, the Venerable Fr. Giuseppe Marchetti.

On observing the Blessed Assunta's life, we underline some of most important characteristics of her spiritual path, that we would like to describe briefly.

A. Love for the Eucharistic Jesus

Blessed Assunta, when she was a child, went with her mother to Mass. And, in the dawn of her consecrated religious life, we find her in the chapel of the bishop's palace in Piacenza, together with her early mates and her brother Fr. Giuseppe, taking part in the Eucharistic celebration presided by the founder G.B. Scalabrini. In that remarkable "cenacle of the origins" of the congregation of the *mcs*, after the Eucharistic celebration, in the rite of the religious profession, the "Servants of the Orphans and

⁴ *Constitution of the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo (mcs)*, N° 12 e 13.

⁵ A. Spadaro, *Per una spiritualità dello studio* [For a spirituality of the study], "La Civiltà Cattolica", 2009, 160, 3811, 29.

Abandoned Abroad"⁶ said in their vow formula: "Oh my God, whom I worship here under the Eucharistic species of bread and wine, alive, glorious, immortal, I entreat you to receive my final consecration to your godly service"⁷. Mother Assunta always saw in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist the force to be a disciple of that Jesus "who called those he wanted to" (Mk 3:13-14).

She knew how to be an Eucharistic person. The witnesses say they often met her in the chapel, mainly during the night, praying in the presence of our Lord in the Eucharist, as Dr. José Grellet wrote⁸. For her, as well as for the founder, "The Eucharist is the masterpiece of God's mind and heart, the center of our religion, the point of contact in where the infinite and the finite, nature and grace, come together in the ineffable embrace of truth and love itself [...]. On our altars we find the Golgotha, where we clasp the cross in tears; and we find the Tabor, where we build shelters to enjoy heavenly peace"⁹.

Mother Assunta left us this beautiful inheritance, not so much in her few writings, but in the deeds which she left imprinted with characters of love in those whom she met and loved with a generous charity, enlightened by Christ's light (1 John 1:5). That is why she had no difficulty in perceiving Him present under "the most different shapes of the human creature".

The spirituality that Assunta lived every day was not the one of a typical "thaumaturge", but a mere spirituality which everybody can feel. Therefore, we can say that her spiritual path is imitable, because it is normal, made of frequent and prolonged prayer, mainly by night, and of a precious and discreet texture of charity deeds, while assuming responsibly her daily duty, which included the heavy task of being Superior General of the congregation and manageress of the Houses of Mercy, as well as of attending the numerous necessities of the orphanages, until she seemed the last of the servants, giving herself in simplest house-works and with her presence in several missions and areas of the state of São Paulo and in South Rio Grande.

Her peaceful acceptance of the facts of life is evident, either in the misunderstandings and in the sacrifices met; nothing caused her to slow her rush to bring Christ particularly to the little, the migrants, the sick and the needful, in the geographical and existential outskirts of her time.

At Nuova Brescia, where there was no daily mass, she rose at dawn to be able to take the holy communion, according to the habit of the time, before the priest left to visit the different chapels, because she did not mean to stay one single day without the Holy Viaticum. We could apply to Mother Assunta the statement that John Paul II addressed to the Blessed Scalabrini on the day of his beatification: "Deeply in love with God and

⁶ Congregation of the Sisters of the St. Charles Borromeo, *Brevi Cenni* [Short Accounts], Roma, Sessennio 1989-1995, 12.

⁷ *Ibid*, 12.

⁸ L. Bondi, *Madre Assunta Marchetti. Uma vida missionária* [Mother Assunta Marchetti. A missionary life], Ed. Csem, Brasília 2011, 169.

⁹ G. B. Scalabrini, *La devozione al SS. Sacramento* [Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament], Piacenza 1902, 5-6, in *Scalabrini. A Living Voice*, 1987, 17-18.

extraordinarily devoted to the Eucharist"¹⁰. For her too the Eucharist was "the most beneficial of all the devotions"¹¹, because for her too "the Eucharistic sacrament and sacrifice are the Church's treasure, its absolute good, its supreme beauty"¹². That is why she had long periods of rest at the presence of our Lord in the Eucharist, either by day and by night, and to Him she brought the best flowers of the garden and used the most beautiful ornaments.

In fact, what happens when in a favourable moment Jesus talks to someone? This person is consumed by love for the wish to meet Him and shouts: "I am for my loved one, and my loved one is for me. My soul melts when my loved one speaks!"¹³. How brave the Saints are! What an energy gushes from their life of prayer! And then, all this turns into gestures of charity, solidarity and mercy for those who live in need.

It is this Holy Bread that forces the Saints to build a Church that "leaves the sacristy", as the Blessed Scalabrini used to say. It was doubtlessly this divine energy that made the Blessed Assunta the tender and demanding mother of so many orphans, the balm at the bedside of the dying poor, the comfort of the migrant and the 'holy' co-founder of the congregation of the sisters *mscs*!

B. Trust in the "very lovable heart of Jesus", the crucified.

Drenched in the spirituality of her time, Assunta has dedicated a particular devotion and trust to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In front of Him she decided to be a missionary forever, a "servant of the orphans and forsaken abroad", as the institute was called in the beginnings. Faithful to the co-founder's teachings, the famous "martyr of the apostolic exploits", and to the Constitutions he wrote in 1895: "The peculiar feature of the Servants is the spirit of faith that they get every day in Jesus' loving heart"¹⁴. This, as the witnesses say, was a constant commitment of the "Mother of the orphans and comforter of the migrants".

We can state that "Her devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was deep. She loved His heart, the center of all the hearts, tenderly and, in addition to loving Him, she copied all His virtues, because Mother Assunta's peculiar virtues were: a never denied humility and a burning charity"¹⁵. She obeyed Jesus' command: "Learn from me, because I am mild and humble in my heart" (Mt 11:29).

The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Church was never a temporary one, but it is present, as the liturgical calendar shows, which determines this devotion as a *liturgical solemnity*. That is why this devotion is important even today.

¹⁰ *Sermon of John Paul II*, 09.11.1997.

¹¹ G. B. Scalabrini, *I° discorso del 3° Sinodo*, Aug. 28, 1899, Piacenza 1900, 228-232, in *Scalabrini. A Living Voice*, 1987, 21.

¹² *Ibid.*, 28.

¹³ Cf. The Song of the songs 2,16.

¹⁴ Cf. the Constitutions of 1895, 5.

¹⁵ L. Bondi, *Virtudes da Serva de Deus Madre Assunta Marchetti* [Virtues of God's Servant Mother Assunta Marchetti], Ed. Loyola, S. Paulo 2007, 252.

We can say that one of the most beautiful commentaries about the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the one of Saint John Eudes (1601-1680):

"Our Savior's heart is a furnace burning with love for us; purifying love, enlightening love, sanctifying love, transforming love and deifying love. A purifying love, in which the hearts are purified more perfectly than gold in the fire. An enlightening heart, that disperses the darkness of hell which covers the earth, to take us to the astonishing lights of the sky: "He has called us from the darkness to His wonderful light" (1 Peter 1:4). A deifying love, that gives men divine prints, making them concerned in the very God's holiness, in his mercy, in patience, goodness, love, charity and other divine perfections: "concerned in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4)."

That is what we see in the peaceful life of the humble Blessed Mother Assunta. St. John Eudes continues his significant speech saying:

"Jesus' heart is a fire that spreads its flames in the sky, in the earth and in the whole universe. Fire and flames which burn the hearts of the seraphs and burn all the hearts of the earth, if the ice of sin does not resist Him. He feels an extraordinary love for all people, both for the friends, as for the enemies, for whom he nurtures such a burning charity that not even all the streams of their sins can extinguish".

It was in this "burning furnace of love" that the Blessed Assunta placed all her trust, especially in the moments in which her mission became more needful, as when she had to endeavor to manage as a Superior General the humble congregation, when in 1927 this was getting out of the failure with the so called Clemens-Sisters¹⁶.

We seem to hear her muttering in those endless conversations with the Sacred Heart of Jesus: "Confirm me, oh adorable and loving Jesus' heart: make me your worthy bride, all yours, irrevocably, without any reservation"¹⁷. And she always trusted herself into His hands, accomplishing His will. In Him she sought the force to live and summon her sisters with the usual: "God strains us, but does not forsake us. Let us trust into His hands and make His will".

Acceptance of the cross, renunciation of herself, bound in the absolute trust for God, which leads us to believe that Assunta, just like Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, she knew that: "After the King of the kings was raised on the cross, it is in the shadow of the cross that we must fight and get the victory"¹⁸. Assunta, as a matter of fact, left us the testimony of a special devotion to the Crucifix, praying every day the *Stations of the Cross* and meditating about the seven last words of Jesus on the cross. Words that she herself wrote in one of her prayer books [which now lies on the table beside her death-bed]¹⁹.

¹⁶ Cf. L. Bondi, *Madre Assunta Marchetti. Una vida missionária* [Mother Assunta Marchetti. A missionary life], Ed. Csem, Brasília 2011, 190-191.

¹⁷ Congregation of the Sisters of the St. Charles Borromeo, *Brevi Cenni* [Short Accounts], Roma, Sessennio 1989-1995, 9.

¹⁸ Quoted by D. Auzenet, in *O amor in treze etapas* [Love in thirteen steps], Ed. Ave Maria, S. Paulo 2008, 147.

¹⁹ Memorial of the blessed Assunta Marchetti. Book of prayers: words written by her manually.

It is clear that for Assunta following the calls of the Spirit meant tuning and accomplishing God's will. It is sufficient to read with the eyes of the heart the collection of letters she wrote, from which we will quote a few segments: "Come on! Let us put ourselves in the hands of God and make his will".

Putting herself in the hands of God was for her a practical way to express that she wanted Him to have the command of her life, that is of everyday details, in affections and decisions and everything. It was a way to have "Jesus as a mirror, Jesus as a model..."²⁰.

In a different circumstance she wrote: "Our life is in the holy hands of Him who does everything for our good"²¹. As the Blessed Scalabrini explained, putting oneself into God's hands and doing His will means deciding that He "must pronounce judgement, mark out the paths, and make decisions. He is to govern, to direct, and to rule our life"²² and that He "completes the work already begun" (Psalm 138:8) in us and in the people that He Himself calls us to serve.

Putting oneself, abandoning oneself in His divine hands is nothing else than always deciding again that it is faith, "the obedience to faith" (Rm 1:5), which governs one's life, being able to say every day: "Insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me" (Gal 2:20b).

Accomplishing God's will meant for the co-founder a kind of reverence to God who reveals himself through human mediation and through the facts of life. Doing God's will was for her much more than stopping doing Her own will. As the theologian A. Pigna says: "The religious obedience implies the complete abandon of oneself to God"²³, just like Jesus did, so that it is possible to say with him: "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own" (John 10:18).

Making the will of a crucified God meant also acting for the accomplishing of the legally approved Constitutions, either in a life of prayer and in the brotherly coexistence or in the apostolate. The witnesses state that Assunta made God's will in the brotherly coexistence, committing herself and trying to help in every service²⁴, washing her sisters' dirty shoes²⁵, correcting them when necessary²⁶, curing the most loathsome sick²⁷, and so on.

²⁰ G. B. Scalabrini, *Lettera Pastorale per la Santa Quaresima del 1878* [Pastoral Letter for Lent in 1878], Piacenza 1878, 33-34, in *Scalabrini. A Living Voice*, 1987, 14.

²¹ L. Bondi, *Virtudes da Serva de Deus Madre Assunta Marchetti* [Virtues of God's Servant Mother Assunta Marchetti], Ed. Loyola, S. Paulo 2007, 228.

²² G. B. Scalabrini, *Lettera Pastorale per la Santa Quaresima del 1878* [Pastoral Letter for Lent in 1878], Piacenza 1878, 33-34, in *Scalabrini. A Living Voice*, 1987, 14.

²³ Quoted by L. Bondi, *Virtudes da Serva de Deus Madre Assunta Marchetti* [Virtues of God's Servant Mother Assunta Marchetti], Ed. Loyola, S. Paulo 2007, 229.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 204.210.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 245.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

Mother Assunta knew very well that charity is the queen of all virtues and "makes the yoke so easy and the burden of law and life so light. Charity strews the arduous path of this our exile with flowers. Charity is the balm for so many wounds, the relief of so many hearts"²⁸; that is why she asked her sisters: "Feel always the sweetest charity for one another, so that you can entreat the grace from Heaven"²⁹.

She did God's will by serving Him in the least of His brothers and sisters: orphans, poorest migrants, visiting the huts of the Italian and Poles who lived near the orphanage "Cristoforo Colombo" in Vila Prudente³⁰. Not just this, but also towards the sick forsaken in the different places where she "poured the balm of Christ's love on the example of the good Samaritan" (cf. Lc 10:32-35). This was her behavior, almost natural, an overwhelming fruit of her union with Jesus, the merciful face of the Father.

The witnesses say also that she was so detached from herself and from the material goods that she could give them to the needful³¹, because she was deeply fastened to the One whom she worshipped as "the most lovable Sacred Heart of Jesus". Having as a motto the accomplishment of God's will implies the decision to listen to the voice of the Spirit with an attentive heart. It means deprive oneself of what is old and of selfishness, and trying to conjugate one's will with the aspirations of the Spirit who intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings (cf. Rm 8:26); it means living without searching acknowledgment and glory, relating everything to God.

The virtuous Assunta lived as a humble servant of the sisters, the migrants, the orphans and the sick. Not because she had not the force to assert herself and asking acknowledgment, but because the real humble ones, those who have incarnated the *humilitas*, can bend without breaking and serve without feeling humiliated.

Therefore, her spirituality was that of the "anawim of Yahweh" who put themselves in His hands and trust in Him: "I reposed all my trust in the most lovable Sacred Heart of Jesus"³². Day after day she let God to be the God of her life!

C. Filial love towards the virgin Mary

It is hard to find a saint who had no special affection for God's Holy Mother. We can say that in the "identity card" of most Christian people there is a filial relation with the Virgin Mary.

²⁸ Words spoken by G. B. Scalabrini on the occasion of the disaster on the island of Ischia, Aug. 4, 1883, in *Scalabrini. A Living Voice*, 1987, 136.

²⁹ L. Bondi, *Madre Assunta Marchetti. Uma vida missionária* [Mother Assunta Marchetti. A missionary life], Ed. Csem, Brasília 2011, 206.

³⁰ L. Bondi, *Virtudes da Serva de Deus Madre Assunta Marchetti* [Virtues of God's Servant Mother Assunta Marchetti], Ed. Loyola, S. Paulo 2007, 213.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 214-215.

³² L. Bondi, *Madre Assunta Marchetti. Uma vida missionária* [Mother Assunta Marchetti. A missionary life], Ed. Csem, Brasília 2011, 191.

Born on the feast day of the Assumption of Mary, Assunta took her name from her namesake and learned to worship God's Holy Mother from the first age and grew in this veneration throughout her missionary life.

During the years, we can contemplate her more and more devote, more and more attentive to "copy his virtues". While she wandered from a bedside to another, to orphans and sick, she held in her hands the rosary, praying for herself and for those the Lord gave her.

She had a peculiar devotion towards our Lady of the Assumption and our Lady of Lourdes, to whom she dedicated several caves: among these, one in Nova Brescia, another in Vila Prudente, SP. Mother Assunta lived a kind of "communion with Mary of Nazareth" and "copied" Her virtues, particularly humility, obedience, service and gratefulness to the Lord: "everything for God's greatest glory"³³.

She knew how to celebrate the feasts of Jesus' Mother, she recommended the same behavior to her sisters and taught the cooperators of the House of Mercy how to pray the rosary³⁴.

And when she could not work anymore and was compelled to move on a wheeling chair, she kept on repeating: "Hail Mary full of grace...". And perhaps, with a greater emphasis, she still prayed: " Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, pray for me now... and in the hour of death. Until He takes us to Heaven".

*The progress we make in Scalabrinian spirituality –
which is our effective way to holiness – will bear fruit
in the place where we are called to be and to work.
(Basic text of the Scalabrinian Traditio, 5)*

[Translated from Italian to English by Prof. Mauro Cotone]

³³ *Ibid.*, 191.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 221-224.