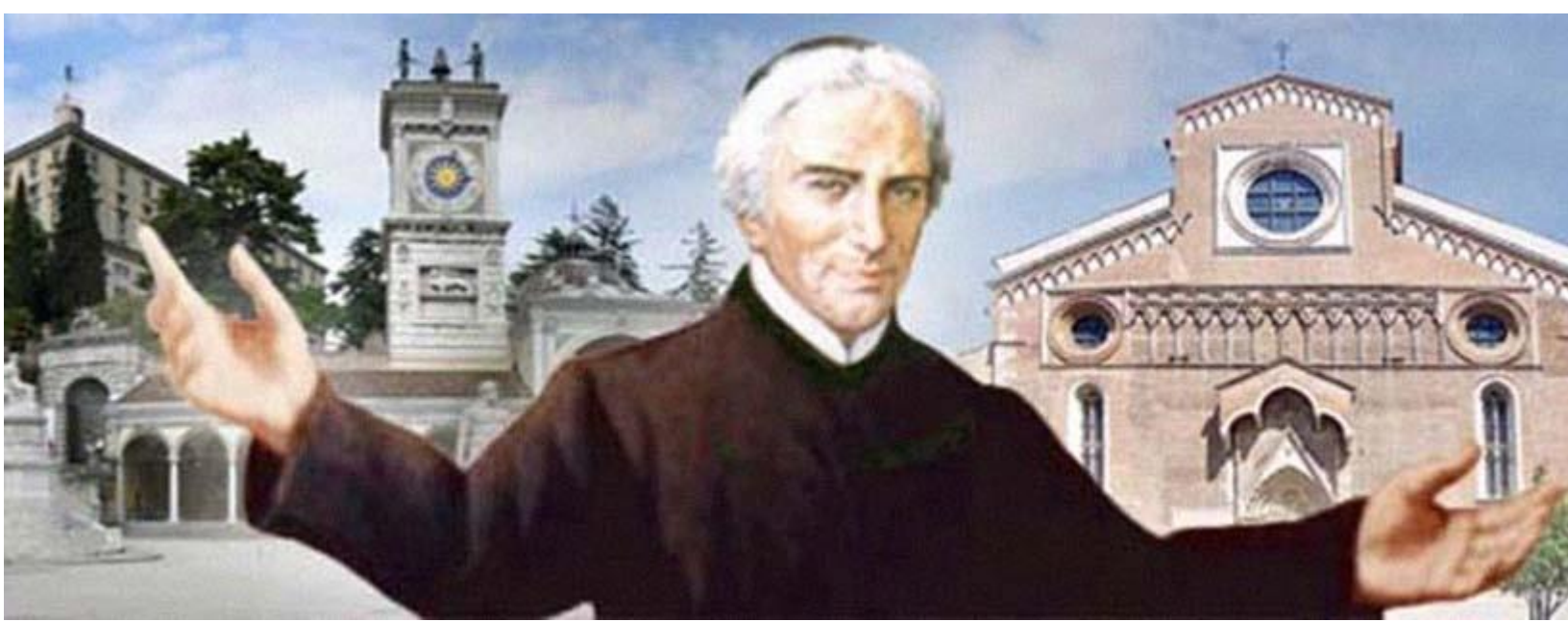


Father Louis Scrosoppi



Luigi Scrosoppi was born on 4 August 1804 in Udine, a city of Friuli, in north-east Italy. He grew up in a family environment full of faith and Christian charity. At the age of twelve he began preparing for the priesthood, joining the diocesan seminary in Udine and was ordained a priest in 1827, flanked by his both priest brothers, Carlo and Giovanni Battista.

The extremely poor background of Friuli in 1800, devastated by famine, wars and epidemics was like an appeal for Padre Luigi to take care of the weak. He devoted himself, with other priests and a group of young teachers, to providing hospitality and education to the "destitute", the lonely and the abandoned girls of Udine and its surrounding places. He made available to them his wealth, his energy, his affection; he did not set aside anything for himself, and when the need became more pressing, he went begging. He trusted in the help of the people and above all in the Lord. In fact, his life is a tangible sign of great trust in the divine Providence.

He thus wrote about the work of charity in which he was involved: "The Providence of God, that prepares the souls and turns the hearts in favour of her works, was the only source of this Institute... that loving Providence, never leaves in confusion those who trust in her". He didn't spare any opportunity to instil this confidence in the inmates and the young women dedicated to their education. They were called "teachers" because they were not only skilled in tailoring and embroidery but also were able to teach "reading, writing and to be worthwhile," as the saying went. They were women of different age and backgrounds, and in each of them gradually got matured the decision to place their lives in the hands of the Lord and consecrate themselves to him, serving him in "the family of destitute".

In the evening of 1 February 1837, the nine women, as a sign of final decision, placed in common their "jewels" and chose to live in poverty and total self-offering. It was in this

simplicity that the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence was born, the religious Family founded by Padre Luigi. Others got added to the first teachers. There were rich and poor, educated and illiterate, noble and those of humble origin: in the house of Providence there was room for all and all became sisters.

The founder encouraged them to make sacrifices and exhorted them to take care of the girls affectionately, considering them as the "apple of their eyes."

In the meantime, Luigi matured the need for a total consecration to the Lord. He was fascinated by the ideal of poverty and universal brotherhood of Francis of Assisi, but the events of life and history led him on the footsteps of St. Philip Neri, the saint of joy and freedom, the saint of prayer, humility and charity. The Oratorian vocation of Luigi took place in 1846, at a mature age of 42; he became a son of St. Philip: he learnt from him meekness and sweetness that would help him to be even more apt for the task of founder and father of the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence.

Deeply respectful and attentive to the human and spiritual growth of the Sisters, he neither spared assistance nor advice, nor exhortations. He closely examined their vocation, put to test their faith so that they became strong. He was not soft when found signs of vanity, the desire for external appearance; he was strict when saw attitudes of hypocrisy and superficiality. But knew to use paternal tenderness in moments of fragility and when there was need for understanding, support and comfort.

In Padre Luigi gradually took shape the essential features of a spiritual life centered on Jesus Christ: loved and imitated in the humility and poverty of his incarnation in Bethlehem, in the simple and industrious life at Nazareth, in the complete sacrifice on the cross on Calvary and in the silence of the Eucharist. Because, Jesus said: "Whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did it for me" (Mt 25, 40), it is to them that Padre Luigi dedicated the daily life with real commitment to seek first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness (cf. Mt 6, 33) certain that all the rest will be given, according to the promise of the Gospel.

All the works he launched during his life reflect this preferential option for the poor, the least and the abandoned. He had prophesied: "I will open twelve houses before my death," and so he did. In those houses, the Sisters of Providence dedicated themselves with humble, creative and joyful service towards the youth in danger, the poor, the neglected sick and the abandoned elderly people.

Moreover, so deeply motivated in doing good, Padre Luigi was not concerned only of his works, in which the Sisters collaborated with generous and willing people who gave them a hand, but offered enthusiastically spiritual and financial support to the initiatives taken by other people of good will in Udine. He supported all the activities of the Church and had a particular preference for the seminarians of Udine, especially the poorest.

The unification of Italy began to take place, region by region, in the second half of 1800. The political and military proceedings of this unification marked a difficult period, especially for

Udine and the whole of Friuli, being a borderland and place of easy passage between the North and the South Europe, between the East and the West.

Unfortunately, one of the consequences of the unification, in itself anticlerical, is the decree of suppression of the "House of Destitute" and the Congregation of the Oratorian Fathers of Udine. It marked for Padre Luigi a tough time to save the works in favors of the "destitute", where he succeeded, but he could not do anything to prevent the suppression of the Oratorian Congregation. Thus, the sad political situation succeeded in destroying the material structures of the Oratorian Congregation in Udine but it could not prevent Padre Luigi from remaining a faithful disciple of St. Philip forever.

By then old, with his usual spirit of openness, he realized that the time had come to hand over the leadership to the Sisters and he did it with serenity and hope. However, he maintained correspondence with every Sister, which helped strengthen the bonds of affection and love; in his fatherly concern, he never got tired of exhorting fellowship and trust.

Through his deep communion with God and long years of experience, Padre Luigi gained wisdom and rare spiritual insight that enabled him to read the hearts; sometimes he also showed the ability to know secret inner conditions and made them known only to the person concerned.

Towards the end of 1883, he was forced to suspend all the activities as his strength began to decline and was constantly tormented by a high fever. The illness progressed inexorably. He would exhort the Sisters not to be afraid of anything, "as it is God who raised and made grow the religious family, He would be the one to make it progress further."

When he felt that the end was close, he wanted to greet everyone; he addressed his last words to the Sisters: "After my death your congregation will have many tribulations, but having them overcome it will be reborn to a new life. Charity, charity! This is the spirit of your religious Family: to save souls and to save them with Charity."

His final union with Jesus took place on Thursday night, 3 April 1884. The whole Udine and the people of neighbouring places rushed to see him for the last time and ask for his protection from heaven.

He was canonized by Pope John Paul II on 10 June 2001. In the Roman Martyr logy his memorial is on 3 April. The Diocese of Udine and the Congregation founded by him celebrate his feast on 5 October.



The spirituality of the Sisters of Providence has its roots in the Gospel and is expressed in a pattern that characterizes their life and mission.

Jesus is the centre of their lives and is loved and imitated in the humility and poverty of his incarnation in Bethlehem, in the simple and industrious life at Nazareth, in the complete sacrifice on the cross on Calvary and in the silence of the Eucharist. Jesus said: "Whatever you did to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25, 40. 45); for this reason, the Sisters are called to dedicate their lives and to serve the lowly, the poor and the suffering with love.

In fact, the practice of Christian charity demands an attitude of concrete faith. It calls for total love and consistency: "Set your heart first on the kingdom and justice of God and all these things will also be given to you" (Mt 6, 33; cf. Lk 12, 31). This is an invitation to work with trust and joy and to dedicate ourselves with courage to love our neighbour, certain that God will provide our needs. In fact, it is the heavenly Father who guides the destiny of every creature on earth, He who cares for the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field (cf. Lk 12, 24-28)

Padre Luigi spent long hours in prayer, day and night. He entrusted to the Lord every little seed sown and looked forward confidently to the work of God. He taught the Sisters: "The providence of God is the only source of existence of this Institute. You, in this house, must consider yourself as daughters of Providence, who is your mother, the one who takes care of you at all times, both in good and bad times; abandon yourself always and completely to her".

Thus, a simple and essential way of life was fashioned, which urged for a constant attitude of trustful abandoning to Providence. An abandonment like that of "a child in the arms of its mother, with no other thought than of pleasing God alone, even at the sacrifice of one's own life."

St. Cajetan of Thiene, the saint of Providence, thus became the patron saint, invoked with faith by the founder and the Sisters and an example of total trust in God: he gave all his possessions

and spent his entire life for the incurables and the poor, trusting only in Providence. The Sisters often invoke also the intercession of St. Joseph, considered as the real treasurer of each house of Providence and sure guide on the path towards God.

The closest confidant in the heart of every Sister is always Mary. To her, their sweet mother, thoughtful towards her children, they ask for help in all their needs. They imitate her life of faith, obedience, simplicity and hard work. To her, Mother of divine Providence and humble collaborator in the work of God, they entrust themselves with deep filial devotion.



A brief history

Padre Luigi (as he is called by his religious daughters) and the first Sisters of Providence lived during a very difficult period of time. In fact, during the 1800, Friuli was plagued by social and political change and major cultural upheavals. In the first 70 years of that century Friuli suffered seven wars, which sowed famine and epidemic such as typhoid, plague, cholera, smallpox and tuberculosis; they caused wide spread misery and death.

Padre Luigi belonged to that land, those people, that history and he read the signs of a tormented society; thus chose to dedicate himself entirely to the works of charity. He undertook various initiatives, especially the empowerment of women, providing shelter for numerous needy, poor and/or orphan children, offering them a home and care; gave particular attention to their education and training. He also prepared many a youth in human and professional life, so that they could lead a dignified life.

He was generously present in the emergencies of the city: for the wounded during the wars, abandoned sick and the needy. Such emergencies would later determine further areas of service for his Sisters. Moreover, he did not neglect help to other needs that emerged in the city: physical and moral welfare of the people.

All these he did availing himself of the collaboration of some young women, who he trained as teachers and nurses. They would be the future Sisters of Providence, who would carry on, expand and continue, in the

course of time, the works of charity begun by him.

Today, the daughters of Fr. Luigi, following the footsteps of their founder, work in different parts of the world dedicating themselves to the cause of the poor with love and generosity.