

Holy people

Servants of God Mother Gesuina Seghezzi and Mother Dositea Bottani

Ursulines of Gandino's

On 27th Aprile 1991 in the Church of Saint Alessandro della Croce, the Bishop of Bergamo, Monsignor Giulio Oggioni solemnly opened the diocesan enquire about the cause of the canonization of the servants of God, sisters Gesuina Seghezzi and Dositea Bottani of the Institute of the Ursuline Sisters of the Holy Immaculate Virgin Mary. The diocesan phase ended on 14th December 1991, now the Positio super vita et virtutibus of the two nuns is being elaborated in the Congregation of the Saints' Causes.

The two causes started together because the two nuns' sanctity lives, shared for many years at the service of the Institute and of the Church, are a great prophetic witness for us today.

They lived in deep syntonny, though they had two very different personalities: Sister Gesuina was very linked to good traditions and she was very austere; sister Dositea was open to novelties and free in the law of love.

Their very diversity, capable of a serene and constructive dialogue with history and culture, enabled the Institute of the Ursuline of the Immaculate Virgin Mary to open with enthusiasm to the novelty of Concilio Vaticano II, prophetically anticipating its new contents.



Mother Gesuina Seghezzi (1882 – 1963)

Domenica was born in Premolo (BG) on 18th February 1882, from a family of humble farmers with nine children. At the end of the third year of Primary School she works in the fields and she helps her family, then she becomes a worker in the textile plants De Angeli – Frua in Ponte Nossa. At twelve, on 2nd February 1894, following her parish priest's advice she makes the vow of chastity and she definitely starts her way to sanctity. At 17 she is the president of Mary's Daughters, a women Catholic association with a high formative value, which is spreading to Bergamo parishes at the end of the XIXth century.

When she meets the Ursuline Sisters working in the workers' house of the textile plants, she realises she has a religious vocation and in 1903 she enters Gandino novitiate as a postulant.

On 21st October 1904, Saint Ursula's feast, she takes the veil, choosing the name of Sister Gesuina and on 21st March 1906 she devotes herself to Lord with her religious profession. She is a tall, strong, silent and hard working sister. She always seems to be concentrated and attracted towards an inward centre: Jesus, the deep meaning of her life.

At 24 she is the headmistress of the orphan girls of Gandino, and as such she reveals extraordinary abilities of relationship with the girls; with the great intuition of love, she changes the excessively strict educational systems of the orphanage, creating a family atmosphere rich of love.

In 1912, after her perennial profession, she is appointed teacher for the novices, a task she will have for 15 years. Among her 200 "daughters", fascinated by Mother Gesuina's radical sanctity and happy motherhood, Sister Dositea Bottani, her first biographer, stands out: "My mistress mother's sanctity of life was to me a school and a possibility of growth day after day, till death".

From 1926 to 1963, Mother Gesuina is at the service of the institute in various tasks, always together with Mother Dositea: general advisor (1926-1933), Vicary (1933-1939; 1952-1963), General Superior (1939-1952). During the last years of the Fascist dictatorship, during the tragedy of World war II and in the period of post-war reconstruction, Mother Gesuina's presence style in managing



the institute is characterized by a great capacity of reading the signs of times at the light of the teaching of the Church, faithful to tradition but with creativity, without being a victim of the fears caused by the emergencies of the present or by the anxiety of the future she encourages the Ursulines' communities to enthusiastically commit themselves to the education of young women's world so that they can be helped to accomplish a noble project of life.

In 1950 she visits missionaries in Eritrea together with the capucine Bishop Giangrisostomo Marinoni, Apostolic Vicary, on that occasion she encourages them to go from town to the most remote villages, to introduce Christ to as many people as possible. In her public and private exhortations she always teaches her sister to give more importance to the hidden life with Christ in God, so that the blazing inner fire can urge them to generously devote themselves to their brothers.

"pure love, pure suffering": in love with the Crucified Lord, she lives her last years witnessing the fecundity of the union with Christ who offers his life to save the world.

The young sisters and convent girls of the superior general house in Bergamo look at her, an elderly nun by then, as a fascinating model of woman's achievement, in the simplicity of daily life led in a continuous act of love.

Mother Gesuina dies in Bergamo in the evening of 30th March 1963. A lot of people visit her and they immediately proclaim her saint. Many are the favours that believers witness they have received by her intercession.

There are also some miracles that the church will carefully examine considering her beatification.

Mother Dositea Bottani (1896 – 1970)

Maria Domenica was born on 30th May 1896, the last daughter of Marietta Steffani and of Benedetto Bottani, emigrant from Pianca (Bergamo), returned from Argentina with a small fortune, the result of his work as a woodcutter in the forests. At 13 she leaves the small village in the Prealpi Orobiche and, thanks to the concern of her sister Pia who joined the Ursulines, she is accepted in the Boarding School of Figlie del Sacro Cuore in Endine, to complete the Primary School. With her confessor, don Angelo Madaschi, she starts to elaborate her project of life, attracted by Bartolomea Capitanio's sanctity.

She goes back to her family in 1911, she helps her parents in the housework and in the country, she helps her mother to prepare children to their First Communion. But, above all, she dreams of becoming a teacher.



Don Angelo, now parish priest in Peia, continues following her in her vocational decision by means of letters, leading her into the narrow route to Christian virtues: faith also in moments of difficulties, humbleness to fight the protagonist self, charity in giving oneself to others with total generosity.

On 26th September 1913 Domenica enters as a postulant the institute of the Ursuline Sisters, who have their mother house and novitiate in Gandino. She is only 17, she is a very intelligent and open minded girl, determined to reach sanctity, as she writes in 1914: "My Lord, I propose to make me a saint".

The Superior General Mother Vittoria Azzola moves her to the students' home in Bergamo with two other postulants to start studying in State secondary School. For six years Domenica devotes herself to hard study and she is always the best student, but she keeps herself naturally humble and she build happy relationships with a hundred boarders and with her school mates who love her and who want to have her as a friend.

During her Christmas and summer holidays she returns into Gandino novitiate, where she spiritually regenerates in silence, praying and talking to her teacher mother, the servant of God Sister Gesuina Seghezzi.

On 2nd October 1919 she becomes a novice with the name Sister Dositea Eucaristica; on 3rd October 1921 she has her first religious profession.

After getting her diploma as a teacher with top marks, she teaches in the State Primary School in Peia (1919 – 1922) and Chignolo d'Isola (1922 – 1927), showing extraordinary educational and relational qualities with the students and their families, with her colleagues and with the girls of Azione Cattolica.

In the village she is called “the beautiful sister” because of her beauty which expresses the maternal beauty of her heart.

In July 1927 she is appointed general secretary and she regretfully leaves the world she loves, the parish and the school.

On 3rd October 1927, in the liturgic memory of her favourite saint - Theresa of Infant Jesus – sister Dositea devotes herself to God forever with her perennial vows. For almost 20 years, the role of secretary closes her in the small space of the general house, but from there she is linked to all the Ursulines' communities; she is also headteacher of the primary schools and of the girls' boarding school, in contact with students and families. She naturally creates deep relationships with people of any age and condition: everybody feels he/she is unique in her heart of sister, mother, friend, spiritual guide. Among her many tasks, she finds the time to write the history of the Institute and of the founder, a precious book printed in 1929 and published again in 1934, with a letter written by the Apostolic Vicary in Bulgaria, Monsignor Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (later John XXIII). She reveals herself as a genial exegete of the Charisma of the Ursulines of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, able to interpret events and protagonists in the light of the Gospel.

After she is appointed as General Vicary in 1946, she starts travelling for the foundation of 30 new communities in Italy, Belgium, England or to visit with the General mother Gesuina Seghezzi the institutions that are considerably growing in the post war period.

From 1952 to 1970 she is General Superior of an Institute that counts more than 100 houses in 5 countries, about 700 nuns, a lot of novices and postulants.

Open to the best novelties of the years that precede and accompany the celebration of Vatican Council II, she makes of the Ursulines of Gandino a pilot institute in the renewal of religious life from the forming, cultural and apostolic point of view. She favours the setting of the Religious Italian Federation in Bergamo for the cooperation among religious women's institutes, in the general house she houses experimental initiatives of the diocese, such as the weekly magazine, the schools for theological and pastoral forming of nuns.

The efficacy of her intervention is favoured by her capacity to give confidence giving value to different gifts. To create an atmosphere of communion between clergy, nuns and laics, to look with wise optimism to the novelties of the present, audaciously open to the future.

Her weak health doesn't prevent her from giving the institute great vitality, because Mother Dositea is aware that God's spirit operates in human weakness and is attracted where there is brotherly communion.

Jesus' prayer during his last supper “father, let them be as one” is the deep desire of her long rule, her will to the Institute.

A few days before dying she, the one who for 40 years had had the most important responsibilities in the Institute, said to the Juniores' guide teacher. "one thing gives me consolation in this moment: the fact that I have always obeyed". In a wonderful prayer she composed for the Ursulines of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, she had written: "Let obedience be my infallible path".

In the night of 2nd September 1970, while dying she repeated "What a joy, what a joy!". It was written about her "Lord was pleased to make her a precious example of the creative power to his Holy Spirit: wise and tender spirit of love, of generous and kind strength, of charitable deaconate. And He gave her to men so that they could read the great parable of the Gospel Blessings, lovably and faithfully lived".