



**Rev. Father Amilcare Boccio,
apostle of mercy,
founder of the Little Daughters of the Sacred Heart
of Jesus**

Mons. Amilcare Boccio was born in Sale on March 12, 1891 and was baptized in the parish church of S. Maria and S. Siro in Sale (one of the three parishes at the time, suppressed in 1937) on March 19 by the parish vicar Rev. Father Luis Rivabella.



The Father, Angelo (1868-1918), a gentle and serene man, optimistic and a good worker, had a small workshop where he worked as a blacksmith; from him Amilcare learned the spirit of fortitude and sacrifice for love.

His mother Giuseppina Pasino (1868-1944), an energetic and determined woman, dedicated herself to the seasonal cultivation of silkworms to supplement the meager family budget; of lively and ardent faith, she taught Amilcare to "pray always", to "love God and neighbor", to trust in the Sacred Heart and Mary, to adore the Eucharist and to esteem priests.

In the circular of July 1939, written to the Sisters on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his priestly ordination, Rev. Fr. Boccio himself wrote: "The Lord has fused in me the character of my father: sweet, serene, optimistic, and that of my mother: strong, imperious, decisive".

On January 9, 1894, his brother Giovanni was born, towards whom he always had a truly fraternal affection, and when on March 7, 1931, following wounds received in the war, the brave officer died, leaving his wife and two small children, Rev. Father Boccio was very close to the grieving family and showed them an authentic fatherly love.



When Amilcare was five and a half years old (autumn 1896) the family moved to Tortona, where in his parish, S. Michele, he had the opportunity to "serve Mass" to Saint Luigi Orione (1872-1940). Speaking of the Sacred Heart with eyes blazing with love, he used to repeat: "He is hungry for souls and thirsty for love"; those words aroused in Amilcare's heart the immediate desire to respond with love to Love: "Oh, Lord, could I take away this hunger and this thirst!".

On May 30, 1898, Amilcare was confirmed in the Cathedral of Tortona by the Bishop, His Excellency Monsignor Igino Bandi.

At the age of nine (1900), as we read in one of his homilies, "by special concession" he was able to make his first Communion.

Two years later, on November 29, 1902, the first day of the novena of the Immaculate Conception, he wore the habit of cleric in the Parish of S. Michele, at the hands of the Provost, Rev. Fr. Carlo Milanese.

And on December 2, 1902, helped by the Bishop for his humble conditions, he was welcomed in the Leone XIII Seminary of Stazzano. He then attended the five-year gymnasium (1902-1907), the three-year high school (philosophy: 1907-1910) revealing himself to be "all love of God and study". He then moved on to the four-year theological course (1910-1914) at the Major Seminary of Tortona, returning to the Sanctuary of the Sacred Heart for the summer periods of "Holiday". He was in his last years prefect and vice-prefect.



Again in the circular of July 1939, Rev. Fr. Boccio expressed with these words the special gifts received there from the Sacred Heart of Jesus in view of his mission: "The Sacred Heart of Jesus led me to Stazzano and from there continued to persecute me with a delicacy, with a divine finesse, with a power of goodness that only my Angel has measured; and so he made me victorious, without any merit of mine, in the years of the critical age of youth, and he even used his uncommon inclination for music to occupy me absolutely and not let me deviate; until 2 February 1911, with a powerful voice and a transforming action he took me totally into His Heart and began to give me those special graces that, making me ever smaller, now I understand, brought me ever closer to Him". On February 2, 1911, therefore, in the chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the major Seminary in Tortona, Amilcare received the "first great grace" of the call: Christ, "with a powerful voice and a transforming action", took him "totally into His Heart". He

responded with an "unreserved 'yes'" and sacrificed his passion for music with the motto: "May I live only to love you and to make you loved".



Two years later, in his personal notes, he wrote: "Oh! I remember the day February 2, 1911 ... then I promised to follow you to the ends of the earth..." (DSp Sept. 30, 1913). Yes, since he was a child he was fascinated by the life of the martyrs and at twenty, following the example of Saint Theophan Vénard (1829-1861), he dreamed of being a missionary in distant lands. They were years of research, of discernment of his vocation.

In the same year 1911, reading the life of Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897), Amilcare felt the invitation to follow her, to lead souls along the path of trust, simplicity and love. Meanwhile, his devotion to the Sacred Heart grew in him, which led him to discover his "special vocation".

On August 16, 1911, the Holy Spirit inspired in the young seminarian the "first thought of the practice of union with God". Thus, in August 1912, some clerics, including Monsignor Carlo Angeleri, later Auxiliary Bishop of Tortona, agreed to offer to the Sacred Heart every single hour of the day, with the aim of keeping themselves more constantly united with God, "to be able to console the Sacred Heart, despised, offended, pierced in His love by so much coldness and ingratitude of bad Christians and to hasten the establishment of His Kingdom in all hearts".

Thus, on August 26, 1912, the Pious Union was born and the Practice of union with God was welcomed by the Clerics of the Seminary with the approval of their spiritual Director (January 6, 1913).

Throughout the year 1913 the cleric invoked the Lord for light and strength to answer him wherever he wanted; even if he were a missionary in India, in China ...: "Is it You who want it?". Meanwhile, on February 11, 1913 during the Holy Spiritual Exercises, a certain Father Rossi with a note confirmed Amilcare in his priestly vocation and on April 26 he chose St. Therese as his very special protector and he considered her his Sister and began to feel compelled to consecrate himself totally to the Sacred Heart.

On January 2, 1914, the cleric Amilcare made his profession as a Franciscan Tertiary; on January 18, after long months (July-December '13) spent as a soldier in the barracks in Tortona and Voghera, the Director told him that he could apply for Ordination.

Thus, on March 28, 1914, he received the subdiaconate, with which he consecrated himself totally to the Lord; then on the following June 6, in the Episcopal Chapel, the diaconal ordination and on July 5, 1914, at the end of the episcopate of Mons. Igino Bandi (1847-1914), he was ordained a priest by the Auxiliary Bishop, Mons. Pietro Andrea Viganó (1858-1921), in the church of St Simone in Tortona.



In the year 1914-1915 he remained in Tortona in the Ecclesiastical Boarding School, founded by Mons. Igino Bandi for the improvement of the young clergy and for the rest of the elderly clergy, thus being able to attend a course in dogmatics and morals.

When the First World War broke out, the young priest was immediately called to arms. It was May 23, 1915, the Solemnity of Pentecost. The following day, the feast of Mary Help of Christians, he presented himself at the Military Hospital of Alessandria and on June 2, he left with the 15th hospital of Alessandria in the direction of Udine.

In the war of 1915-1918, Rev. Fr. Amilcare, who had become a chaplain "with a living and heartfelt faith", instilled trust and courageous love in the Alpine troops, arousing the admiration, respect and affection of the officers and soldiers, who used to say to him: "Capelan, let him come with us, so that if he does, we will not die."

"Contemtpuous of danger and of any shelter, always first among the first in every circumstance, he brought his words of comfort and faith where the fighting was bloodiest, inspiring the soldiers with his example and his courage". For this he was awarded two recognitions on the field: the war cross and the silver medal for military valor. He was seriously wounded on December 12, 1917 and hospitalized first in Busto Arsizio (MI) and then at the "Santa Corona" in Milan.

On January 4, 1918, during his convalescence in Busto Arsizio, Amilcare was granted "the first great light" "on what the Sacred Heart wants for our times": "generous souls" who cooperate "in the establishment of his Kingdom of mercy".

It is the call to spread the "practice of union" between consecrated persons and lay people, creating a wonderful network of communion.

Thus, that day, the first Friday of the month, he communicated the "practice of union" to the nuns of the hospital and in the following days he wrote to Guglielmina Remotti, spoke to her of his inspiration and invited her to become a zealot of the new "apostolate of spiritual charity".

Transferred to the "Santa Corona" hospital, in the first ten days of February he reread "Story of a Soul" - the autobiography of Therese of Lisieux - and had the "first clear thought" on the future Congregation. For this reason, the saint was later considered the inspirer and first sister of the new foundation.

Monsignor Simon Pietro Grassi, Bishop of Tortona, approved the new Association on February 23, 1918 and reconfirmed it on January 7, 1920 on the occasion of the first edition of the Booklet: Practice of Union with God and Prayers for the Triumph of the Sacred Heart: "Let us pray that the number of members of this Pious Practice will grow, that its spirit of faith, charity, and that sincere humility which is the secret of the fruitfulness and duration of every most beautiful initiative will be maintained, and even intensified more and more ... "The Bishop's wish was fully accepted: in fact, the "Pious Practice" spread to various regions of Italy: Piedmont, Lombardy, Emilia, Veneto, Liguria, and Tuscany.

On March 1, 1918, following an operation, his father Angelo, who was just 50 years old, died in the embrace of his wife and son, at the hospital in Tortona.

Amilcare was able to assist him in his last days and administer the sacrament of Extreme Unction.

On August 6, 1918, once again at the front, in the Tonale area, the young priest renewed the total offering of his life: "I voluntarily renounce life if one day this voluntarily were not only for you ... yes ... I desire to live after the war, because it seems to me that I can find myself in more secluded places ... because it seems to me that I can do some good to souls for you ... if so it is and will be, save me, if it pleases you, oh Lord, otherwise oh! Console my grieving mother [...]"

In October 1918, Don Amilcare met Saint Luigi Orione, who confidently encouraged him in his intention to found a congregation dedicated to the Sacred Heart.

After the war, in 1919 - still a young priest, he was 28 years old - the Bishop entrusted Rev. Fr. Amilcare with the role of spiritual director at the Leo XIII minor seminary in Stazzano, a task that he fulfilled with great care, with a mother's heart. This mission at the Sanctuary of the Sacred Heart allowed him long periods of prayer and reflection.

On the night of February 2 to 3 (first Friday) of 1922, Amilcare had a dream: the new era of justice, truth, love, peace will come. He was certain of the triumph of Love, prepared by Mary, "true dawn of the NEW ERA of God's overwhelming Mercy".

In September 1922, the future Founder went to Rome to ask for approval and indulgences for the "practice of union". He visited the Sanctuary of Mary, Mother of Good Counsel, in Genazzano, asking for the grace of an audience with the Pope and promising her special veneration. Thus, on 12 September, received in audience by Pius XI (1922-1939), he received special blessings on his "intentions".

The written approval of the Association is dated September 27, 1922, confirmed the deep pleasure for "this new flowering of love and devotion towards the Adorable Heart of Jesus" and hoped for happy and abundant fruits.

On 6 July 1923, Giacomo Remotti, Guglielmina's father, died. Through the kindness of mother Margherita Massardo, their home, in Via Carlo Giacobini, in Sale, was then made available to welcome the first young women who soon would consecrate themselves totally to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Between November 16 and December 5, 1923, Amilcare wrote the General Principles for the "Fundamental Constitutions" of the "Souls Victims of Love" for the Triumph of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. They were then delivered to His Excellency, and on January 28, 1924 the revised text was returned to him, annotated and accompanied by a rescript from the hand of Monsignor Simon Pietro Grassi.

This delivery gave rise to the concrete creation of today's Congregation of the Little Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

On March 25, 1924, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, Rev. Fr. Amilcare founded the new Institution. The first four young women, before the exposed Blessed Sacrament, made vows of chastity, obedience and special Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for his nearest triumph, with the formal promise of poverty, to be renewed on the first Friday of May and then on every first Friday of the month, for the entire time of the novitiate.

Present at this new beginning were the Archpriest of the parish of San Calocero, where the house was built, the Most Reverend Father Giuseppe Teologo Rognoni and the Most Reverend Father Luigi Boveri, already a distinguished benefactor of the Opera.

Having taken the floor, the Most Reverend Director and Founder mentioned the purpose of the Little Institution, invited the spirit of sacrifice and voluntary immolation, so that the vocation may be fruitful, so that the election and predilection of God may be certain, promising the most abundant fruits, the most perfect gifts, and concluded with the wish for the nearest triumph of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

On June 24, 1924, the Founder celebrated Holy Mass for the first time in the chapel of the Institute. On the same day, the "Bulletin of the Sacred Heart" was published for the first time, born at the Sanctuary of the Sacred Heart in Stazzano, an instrument to make known the Practice of union with God.

The Bulletin, of which Rev. Father Amilcare was the Editor-in-Chief, was suspended in 1933 with the hope of resuming its publication with greater vigor.

On November 18, 1924, the first seven young women, determined to consecrate their entire lives as Victims of Love for the Triumph of the Merciful Love of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, made their Vestment and their first religious Profession in the presence of Rev. Fr. Amilcare and other priests.

On August 15, 1929, the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into heaven, Rev. Fr. Amilcare brought the Blessed Sacrament to the new house, the current Mother House, where the first Sisters had moved the day before.

On the Solemnity of the Annunciation 1934 (April 9), to the great joy of the Founder, the reading by Monsignor Giuseppe Roveda, Moniale Vicar, of the Decree of erection of the Institute (diocesan approval) and of the change of the original name, a change foreseen by the Founder himself, took place.

On May 22, 1934, Rev. Fr. Amilcare, as episcopal delegate, accepted the perpetual vows of Mother Guglielmina and nineteen other Sisters.

On October 31, 1934, her beloved Bishop, Monsignor Simon Pietro Grassi, died.

On December 28, 1934, the Founder left for Nola, invited by Monsignor Egisto Domenico Melchiori, Bishop of that diocese destined for the episcopal see of Tortona, and on January 2, 1935, he returned with the communication that it was the desire of that Prelate to unite the nuns founded by him to the new Institution that arose in Sale. So Rev. Fr. Amilcare went back to Nola on February 5, 1935, the day in which the sixteen nuns took their habit and made their profession.

On March 6, 1935, the feast of Saint Marziano, patron of the Cathedral Church of Tortona, Monsignor Egisto Domenico Melchiori entered the diocese.

On August 3, 1935, the Bishop assigned Rev. Fr. Amilcare new offices: Rector of the Ecclesiastical Boarding School; Professor of the new priests; Diocesan ecclesiastical assistant for Catholic youth and men.

On August 10, 1935, at the age of 44, after sixteen years of service among the clerics of Stazzano, he began his ministry in Tortona.

On May 27, 1936, Rev. Fr. Amilcare was appointed Canon Penitential of the Cathedral Church. The investiture ceremony took place a month and a half later, on July 11.



In December 1936 he suffered the onset of asphyxia; Extreme Unction was administered to him. He was first admitted to the hospital in Tortona, then remained for eight months convalescing in Castelnovo ne' Monti (RE). Only on October 22, 1937 did he resume his service in the diocese.

On March 8, 1944 his mother *Giuseppina* died, assisted by her beloved son and her nephew *Gabriele*, a priest for a few months.

In 1946, with the end of the war, Rev. Fr. Amilcare "wanted to dedicate himself completely to his Congregation" and the Bishop "felt it right to accept his request". He had attended to "every office" that had been entrusted to him in the diocese "with commitment, exemplary conduct, virtue". So he withdrew into a silent and fervent retreat.

He felt called to resume that initial bud of the twenties, that is, the priestly branch of the Opera. Already during the Spiritual Exercises of April 1941 he wrote down: "Practical thoughts and determinations for the Constitutions", and in the following years he repeatedly drafted a Statute-Constitutions for the "*Societas apostolica divini Cordis Jesu*". It was a project that united some priests for a while in their ministry, but then remained a project in their hearts and on paper.

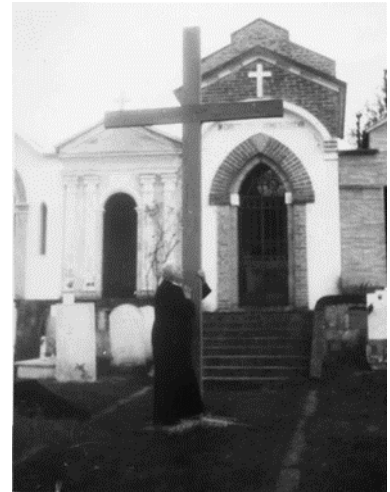
On July 17, 1950, he received the nomination of Monsignor, listed as a Supernumerary Chamberlain of His Holiness, in recognition of his good priestly life, his generous work, and the services rendered to the Seminary and the Diocese.

On November 1, 1950, Rev. Fr. Amilcare was in Rome with great joy for the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption, a day that he considered the dawn of a new era, the era of mercy, of which he loved to speak.

On February 21, 1956, the Congregation of the Little Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus obtained the *Decretum Laudis* and became a Pontifical Congregation.

On September 3, 1958, Monsignor Carlo Ferrari, Bishop of Monopoli, was appointed "apostolic delegate for our Congregation" and on September 11, 1958, it became, according to Rev. Fr. Amilcare himself, "the beginning of the "great sufferings". Thus, in the last two years, absorbed in himself and in God, he exercised the hidden and fruitful apostolate of suffering.

On Tuesday, November 15, 1960, at 3:45 p.m. on the Alessandria - Tortona state road, near Torregarofoli, his car - a Fiat 600 - crashed into a small truck traveling in the opposite direction.



Extracted from the wreckage, still alive - he was transported to the Civil Hospital of Tortona, where, despite the attentive care of the health workers, he ceased to live at around 4:30 p.m. In a moment of consciousness - while the Chaplain, Monsignor Lorenzo Ferrarazzo, gave him the Anointing of the Sick - he murmured "My Jesus, Mercy" and with this invocation on his lips he closed his earthly experience and was welcomed definitively into the embrace of the FATHER.

It was the bells of Tortona Cathedral, with a slow and austere ring, that first gave the official announcement, to the city and the diocese, of the tragic death of Monsignor Amilcare Boccio. The mourning poster, which appeared immediately after along the city streets, spoke with emotion of his faithfulness to the last appointment with God, who had come to meet him on the public road. But in this meeting with the Lord, Rev. Fr. Boccio found himself surrounded by countless ranks of priests, friends, admirers, religious souls who had loved and benefited him in life.

The painful news picked up by the press spread like wildfire and attracted an uninterrupted series of visitors to Sale, where in the meantime his body had been laid to rest in the special mortuary chapel set up with fervent devotion within the Sacred Heart Institute. The devout and moving pilgrimage continued until late at night, while the register for signatures was filling up with the most diverse names, belonging to all social categories from every area of the Diocese and from countless locations, even very distant ones.

The funeral was held on Thursday morning, November 17, 1960. Sale became a compact river of people, blackening in the thick fog, who had come spontaneously to accompany (for the final journey) the mortal remains of D. Boccio. The white mitre of Mons. Angeleri, the Auxiliary Bishop, stood out on the black pontifical vestments, who

preceded the coffin carried on the shoulders of some priests. About two hundred priests were present, over three hundred "Little Daughters of the Sacred Heart", more than a thousand people paid their last respects, transforming his funeral into a plebiscite of affection and esteem.

Mons. Egisto Melchiori, Bishop of Tortona, unable to be present due to health problems, wrote in his letter of condolence to his nephew Don Gabriele: "When he had already suffered and deserved it sufficiently, death suddenly came upon him" (11.16.1960).

Saturday, November 17, 2007, became a memorable day for the Congregation of the Little Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Solemnly and with great emotion, on that grey November morning, the mortal remains of Monsignor Amilcare Boccio and Mother Guglielmina Remotti were received in the Chapel of the Mother House to be placed in the place prepared in the little chapel of the Madonna,



adjacent to the large Chapel. The Celebration was presided over by Monsignor Martino Canessa, Bishop of Tortona, and in addition to the Sisters, the Alpine troops and a good representation of the population of Salento were present.