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La tua NENNOLINA



Antonietta Meo:

Biographic summary

Introduction

The essence of Nennolina Meo can be covered by two great words that begin the Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, “Hope and Joy”.

Our Lord who gives His Holiness to men, has given through Nennolina, this message to all of us who live in a century rich in material resources, but poor in spiritual joy and hope.

To narrate the story of a child who lives only to be six and a half years old seems simple. But if we take the time out to listen, we discover an unexpected radiance in this small existence. A person’s life can’t be valued by her age, but by the importance and density of the events that has characterize it. *Nennolina* belongs to this kind of extraordinary person, as we can see throughout her *letters*.

Jesus has answered and continues to answer these “little letters” keeping *Nennolina’s* memory alive, as well as her message of love and devotion. This absolute love and devotion, is an extreme and total message.

This correspondence reached a mystical dialogue, and around of it the grace of God makes the witness of our times. *Nennolina* is an example of holiness for everybody, a little friend who is waiting for our answer of faith.

It is beautiful to look at the world through “the eyes of a child” and then start to do our best to make it better.

Nennolina speaks about herself through her family, her photos, her closest objects which became symbols of the testimony of those who knew her.

She only asks us to listen.

FIRST SECTION

Antonietta: a normal child

“ Because the name Antonietta seemed to long, we thought we should give her a nickname and after several options we decide to call her *Nenne*, and then the name will be transformed in “*Nennolina*” (Maria Meo, *Reminiscences of Nennolina’s mom*, AVE, Roma 2002,p.19)

Nennolina was born in Rome on December 15, 1930. She was the fourth child of Maria and Michele Meo, her sister Margherita is the oldest one, she also had a sister and a brother: Carmela and Giovanni who died soon after birth. On December 28, the holy day of the Saintly Innocents, she received the Baptism in her parish Basilica of Holy Cross in Jerusalem, at Rome.

Her story is deeply signed by the cross of Christ, and is also defined by extraordinary facts, really unusual, since Antonietta is a normal child.

While the canonical process goes on, the testimonial of acknowledgement multiplies. For a few years it seemed that the interest was lower, but suddenly the interest blossomed more than ever. The Basilica of Holy Cross received requests of images and relics.

It is just in the Basilica that preserves the relics of the Passion of Jesus that her mortal remains were transferred. It was July 5th, 1999, 62 years after her funeral. If the canonical process will go on quickly, this young roman child will be soon the youngest no-martyr saint elevated to the honours of altars. The youngest in the history of Christianity.

These words of saint Augustine have been joined to Nennolina's life: **“My Lord, I don't ask you why you've taken her away; I thank you for the time she has been with us.”**

The photos portray her with a pageboy hair cut, her great big eyes, and a trowel playing with other children at the beach. In another one she is having fun in a rowing boat at a small lake in Villa Borghese.

“My sister – recall *Margherita* – was a happy, sprightly little girl like all children of her age”. In October 1933, she went to a catholic kindergarten near our home. “She went willingly, and often when we were playing together she would say: “I have a great time at school ... I would even go during the night!” She loved soon her teacher, and the nuns used to tell my mother: “Nothing stops her! But she is bright and learns quickly. She is mature for her age.”. When she was four years old she was enrolled in the young section “*Little ones*” of Catholic Action. At five she went to “*Beniamine*” of Girls Youth.

Nennolina showed soon the desire to pray and dialogue with Jesus, feeling Him nearly as a friend.

“One day, she was only three years old, - her mother tells us - she added to her prayers: “Jesus give me the grace to die before I commit a mortal sin”. I felt my heart become heavy”. She still wasn't five when her parents noticed her left knee swelling, but they thought that it was one of her usual falls. After wrong diagnosis and treatments the sentence: *Osteo-sarcoma*.

SECOND SECTION

“*Antonietta and Jesus*” – *The Calvary and the Cross*

“Dear Eucharist Jesus, I am very, very happy that you have come to my heart. Don't leave my hearth anymore and stay always, always with me. Jesus I love you so much, I want to abandon myself in your arms and you can do what you want with me.”

On April 25 1936, Antonietta underwent the amputation of her left leg. Her “Via Crucis” began, but also her extraordinary experience with God.

It was really hard for her parents and even for her to overcome this first period. Although with difficulty after the operation, the orthopaedist prosthesis permitted her to move, play and kneel to pray, she continued her normal daily life.

Nennolina accepted this handicap by giving her little leg to Jesus, and then, she comforted her father with this letter on November 4, 1936: “I am very happy that Jesus has sent me this problem, so I can be his dearest one”.

Her parents decided to bring forward the date for her Holy Communion and every evening her mom started to teach her catechism.

From that moment *Antonietta* began, first to dictate to her mother or her older sister, and then to write with her own hands the letters. Every evening she placed them underneath a small statue of the Holy Child at the foot of her bed, so that “He would come and read them during the night.”

The first letter is dated September 15, 1936: “Dear Jesus, today I’ll go for a walk to visit my sisters, and I’ll tell them that I want to receive my Holy Communion at Christmas. Jesus come soon into my heart, and I will hold You strongly and kiss You. Oh Jesus I want You to stay always in my heart.” And after some days: “Dear Jesus, I love You so much, I want to repeat to You that I love you so much. Dear Madonna, you are so kind, take my heart, and give it to Jesus.”

As soon as she learned how to use a pen, the first year at primary school, she wanted to sign her letters by hand: “*Antonietta and Jesus*”. “My dear Jesus, today I have learned how to make the “O”, so soon I will write by myself”. The handwriting and the mistakes in her letters are typical of one who has just learned to write.

Antonietta talks to Jesus and Mary with confidential tenderness. Her letters will always end with hugs, caresses and kisses to her heavenly addressee. Of this tender confidence the nuns are witness. Many times they saw her before leaving the church going near to the tabernacle and exclaiming: “Jesus come and play with me!”.

But there was something really uncommon for a little five years old girl, she would often ask: “Dear Good Jesus, give me souls, give me many of them, I ask you willingly. I ask you because that way, you can make them become good and go with you to Paradise”.

THIRD SECTION

Antonietta of Jesus - the mystical dialogue

“Dear Jesus, tomorrow when you will be in my heart, think that my soul is like an apple and, similar to the inside of an apple where are the black seeds, inside my soul you can make a locker. Beneath the black peel of the seed is white, inside the locker you can leave your grace, that it will be like the white seed”. This is how she dictates to her mother the day before receiving her Holy Communion.

Her mom stops her: “Antonietta what are you saying? What do you mean by “inside”? What do you mean?”. She tried in vain to dissuade her. Antonietta finally explained: “Mom: my soul is like an apple. Inside the apple there are those small black things, the seeds. Then, beneath the black skin of the seeds there is that white stuff, right? Well, think of it as the grace”.

“ The metaphor that I didn’t know—said her mom- seemed profound to me, but I didn’t want to give up and I asked her: ‘Who told you this? Maybe your teacher at school showed you an apple to make you understand?...’”. “No, mommy, she didn’t, I have thought about it by myself”. Then she completed her thought: “Jesus will make this grace stay with me forever’ ”.

FIFTH SECTION

Nennolina: Servant of God

“Then we spoke about Heaven – remembers her mother – and she said: “I will not amuse myself in Paradise, I want to work for the souls”. “Yes – I answered – like St. Teresa who promised a rain of roses...an you, what will you send?” and staring she answered: “I’ll send a shower of lilies”.

Nennolina was only six and half years old when she died. Many conversions and graces followed her death. Cards with prayers and thanks will cover her tomb at the cemetery. In a year’s time two biographies were published. In the following years others will appear in many languages.

On December 1938, her father asked to move the leg that had been amputated and buried and to put it with the corpse. After thirty one months the leg was found intact, it had been enclosed in a little box, and buried near to her body.

Nennolina’s fame of holiness have been propagated so spontaneously and immediately that it crossed not only her Parish Church, but also Italy’s frontiers.

In 1941, The Women’s Youth Catholic Action , promoted strongly the process of Beatification wanted by Armida Barelli, at that time national president of AC. The process was opened in 1942, and ended its diocesan period in 1972.

Even though there are no Canonical laws concerning the age limits for beatification, the process was confusing and encountered many difficulties because of the girl’s young age.

It was only in 1981 that the Sacred Congregation of the causes of Saints with a special *Declaration* writes that the Church fully recognizes that even young children are able to realize heroic acts of faith, hope and charity, therefore can be proclaimed Saints.

Antonietta Meo received the grace to live faithfully with her vocation. A gift that she has received faithfully like it is typical in children.

With her existence, she has given to the history of the Church a new example of holiness possible at any age. A Holiness recognized first by the people of God, than by the official Church.

When she was still alive people asked Antonietta to pray for others who recognized in her the goodness of a suffering child. But after her death people have continued to ask for her intercession. Her prophecy: “I will send showers of lilies” it’s still coming true. The miraculous interventions succeed.

MISSIONS: “Today I’ll go to do the missionary in Africa”

Nennolina after having an amputation offered her suffering to the Pope, the Church, the missionaries, the African children, the peace in the world, and the salvation of the sinners.

When she had to undergo several painful treatments and medications, she always harped the same string: “Today I will go and become a missionary in Africa”.

And today, it’s exactly there in Africa, that Nennolina can see her prophetic vision realized, the “small miracle” of The MEO institute in Burundi, Bujumbura.

“The Meo Institute was “founded” by Michele Faloci the responsible of the AVSI projects -ASSOCIATION VOLONTAIRES SERVICE INTERNATIONAL- in Burundi and in Congo. “Mères, Enfants, Orphelins” (Mothers, Children, Orphans) explains the abbreviation MEO.

But it’s not all, Michele would dedicate this institution to a little child who dies in the odour of sanctity, in Rome on 1937– at seven years old– suffering terribly because of the cancer that tore her, and now proclaimed “Servant of God” Antonietta Meo, called Nennolina. No proselytism about it or catechesis meetings. Just a little photo hanging on the wall, a photo of a little girl like so many others that keep moving in our courtyard. Michele’s heart beats in that way. God’s heart beats for the children which He couldn’t say no. We feel this protection that accompany and will make the institution grow up thanks to the generous open heart of many friends.

The Meo Institute consists of a rent house paid with a modest honorarium like is usual in those places. It’s not and it doesn’t want to be an “Institute of excellence”, rich, unattainable, outsize as regards of what surrounds it.

THE CHILDRENS CHOIR: “LE MATITE COLORATE”

Also the “Matite Colorate” (The Coloured Pencils) children's choir can be considered a sprout from the bud cultivated by Nennolina. She, who loved to draw and to colour inspired several songs of Fr. Luca Zecchetto the artistic manager of the choir.

At the moment the choir is composed by 80 young children, aged from 4 to 16 years old. It intends, through music, to educate his choristers to sensibility, fraternity and to the meet people, following two important aims: to promote and diffuse the correct musical education among children and young people, and to give a warm welcome to the congregation of children coming from different ethnicities and different social and cultural conditions, reserving a particular attention to those who bear a handicap.

It is not by chance that the logo of the smiling pencils represents the five like the continents.

Nennolina receives her Holy Communion at the midnight Holy Mass on Christmas Day in 1936.

That night, even if the prosthesis was very painful, who saw her noticed that even when the Holy Mass was over, she stayed in her knees without moving, with her hands joined in prayer, for more than one hour.

Her signature in the letters sometimes changes from “Antonietta of Jesus” to “Antonietta Jesus”. The Expressions are repetitive and the thoughts go on unfasten, like in the typical expression way of children, but with that expression, the thoughts of Nennolina are really deep.

The thing that still today disconcerts psychologists and theologians, is that God could enriched from special graces a little child and obtained from her an exquisite keenness about the spirit affairs. Her heroic attitude to accept sufferings is hard to find even in ripe age persons and after a long way of faith.

On October 16, 1936 Antonietta affirms: “I see the Virgin Mary, not the picture”; and on January 1937: “Sometimes I see Jesus”; when her mother asks her: “and how do you see Him”, Antonietta answers: “On the Cross”.

In March she had another vision: “Yesterday I saw Jesus resuscitate”. Then Jesus will not appear anymore and Antonietta on April writes: “Dear Jesus I wish so much that I could see you and I wish that everybody could see you, then indeed everybody will love you more”. In May, while she dictate one of her letters, she stops as if by magic; her mother shakes her and when she comes to her senses, she says: “Do you know I have seen Jesus in the corner of the room”.

On July 2, after her last Holy Communion, she confides to her mother: “I saw Him this morning when I was receiving my Communion”.

Antonietta will write 105 letters to Jesus, she will address other one’s to Mary, to the God Father, to the Holy Spirit, one to Saint Agnes and one to Saint Theresa of Holy Child. To Jesus she will always ask for the help of his grace, for those who are near to her, for those who ask for her prayers and for the sinners.

In May Antonietta receives the Confirmation. Those are the last days of her life. Her mother tells: “After the confirmation Antonietta starts getting worse. Breathlessness and coughing didn’t give her peace at all. She was even unable to sit down anymore and she had to stay in bed. Even if she suffered she always said: “I feel well!” and even when it was difficult, she always wanted to say her morning and evening prayers. She asked for a priest, to bring her the Holy Communion every day, and the hours that followed were always quieter [...] As soon as she was able, she asked me to write her letters”.

The last letter is dated June 2nd. And it’s going to be the letter that had finished in the hands of Pius XI. Her mom remembers this: << I seat beside her bed and write what she tells me with difficulty: “Dear crucified Jesus, I love you so much, but so much!

I want to stay with you on Calvary. Dear Jesus, tell the God Father that I love Him so much too. Dear Jesus, give me the strength I need to bear these pains that I offer for sinners". In that moment, Antonietta had a violent attack of cough and vomit, but when it passed she wanted to continue: "Dear Jesus, tell the Holy Spirit to lighten me with love and fill me with His Seven Gifts. Dear Jesus tell the Virgin Mary that I love Her very much and I want to stay near by Her. Dear Jesus I want to repeat to you that I love you very, very much. My good Jesus I commend to you my spiritual father, please give him all the graces that he needs. Dear Jesus I commend to you my parents and Margherita. Your little girl sends you a lot of kisses...". I suddenly had a sense of rebellion seeing how she was suffering and with great anger I rolled up that sheet of paper and I threw it into a drawer.

A few days later, Professor Milani, the Pontifical Archiatra called by the Doctor Vecchi for a consultation, came to visit Antonietta. He said that the condition of the child was very serious and that she had to be transfer to the hospital for another operation. The professor stayed to talk with her, and he was astonished by how Antonietta bore those pains without groaning. My husband told him about the Letters she wrote. He asked to see the last one, and I didn't have the courage to refuse. I took the letter from where I had thrown it that day, and I showed it to him. After reading it he said that he wanted to speak to the Pope about Antonietta, and asked for permission to take the letter with him. Hesitating I answered: "But... I don't know ... if...". "My lady – he said – we are talking about the Pope!"

The next day a car from the Vatican stopped in front of our house. A delegate, who was personally sent by the Holy Father , came to bring the Apostolic Blessing to the little girl. He told us that His Holiness had been very touched when he read the letter. He left us a note from Prof.Milani where he asked Antonietta to remind him in her prayers to the Lord, and asked for him the same gifts that she had asked for herself."

On June 12 Antonietta got worse. She was breathing with great difficulty. Some fluid was extracted from her lungs. On June 23, she underwent the resection of three ribs using only local anaesthesia because of her general bad condition. Her mother says: "I can't tell you the severe pain of that tortured little body. That day holding back my tears I told her: "You'll see my little one... when you'll get better we're going to go on holiday to the sea... you like so much the sea, you could take a bath, you know? ...". She looked at me tenderly and said: "Mom, be happy... I'll be out of here in less than ten days." In that moment her mother couldn't know that Antonietta had told her exactly the day and the hour of her death.

The following days, with disarming strength she always smiled to the nurses that came to dress her wound, although the metastasis had invaded and devastated her little body. All people at her side will testify the disconcertment in front of her extraordinary serenity. Her mother even will doubt that the child suffered: "I will go to the Doctor and say: "Doctor, I don't think... tell me the

truth, tell me truly...Antonietta suffers very much?" "But lady, what are you asking for? Be quiet! The pain is terrible".

I will come back to her room... with trembling voice and asked her: "Antonietta, bless your mother...Antonietta, bless mommy". Doing an effort she signals me with the cross with her hand".

Her father testified: "One day she got worse and I decided to ask for a Priest to give her the Extreme Unction. I asked Antonietta:" Do you know what the extreme unction is?" "The sacrament that moribunds receive" she answers. I didn't want her to get upset so I added: "Sometimes it brings the health to the body...". Antonietta refused. "It's too soon" she said and I didn't insist. But when later the priest told her that the Extreme Unction increased the grace, she said: "Yes I want it".

She answered with tranquillity to all the prayers, she said the act of contrition, then she opened her hands to the priest who anointed it... She kissed tenderly her Holy Communion crucifix. Everything happened with simplicity and peace. Her mother remembers to have seen Antonietta in a dream, the night before her death. She was standing wearing a long white dress: "When she saw me amazed about her being healed, she said: "No mommy, I am not healed, I have died; but in a few hours I will die again, but I will not suffer anymore, and you shouldn't cry. I should have lived a few days longer, but S. Theresa of Holy Child said: it's enough".

At dawn on, July 3rd 1937, when her father came near her to mend her cushion and kiss her cheek, Antonietta whispered: "Jesus, Mary ... mom, dad ...". She cast her eyes in front of her -remembers her mom – she smiled, then the last one deep long breath".

On July 5th, the small white coffin was carried away, touched by a multitude, into her Parish Church, The Basilica Of The Holy Cross In Jerusalem.

FOURTH SECTION

Nennolina "the New Fruits"

"Even in my heart, as in the fields , new good fruits have sprung up."

THE NENNOLINA ASSOCIATION:

Founded in 1999, to promote knowledge and research about the brief life and thoughts of the young Servant of God Antonietta Meo. It proliferates the results. It provides materially for the *Cause of Beatification*, and undertakes social and Christian solidarity enterprises for the neighbors around the world. It takes active part in diffusing the deep spirit of love that animated Nennolina, in the simplicity but with the totality of her existence.