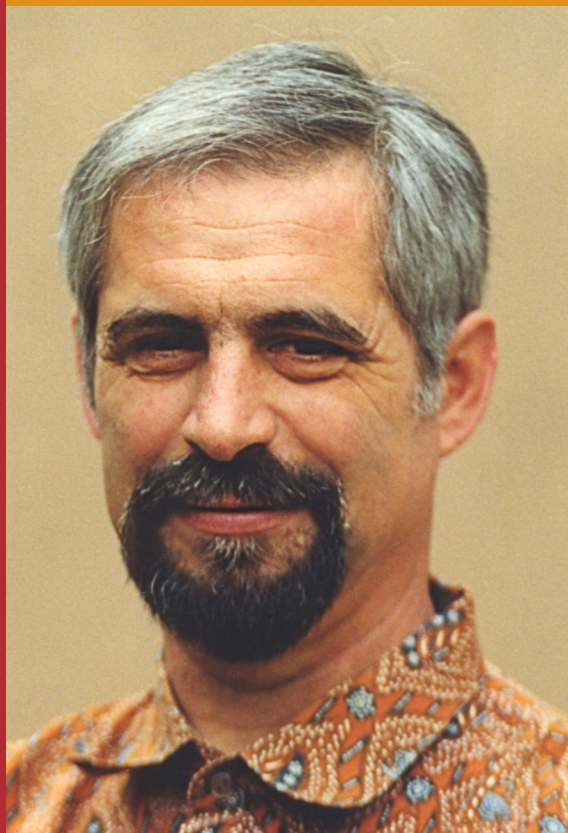


04/2016

# In memoriam

Profili biografici saveriani



Fr. Giuseppe Gallo

27 August 1946 ~ 9 June 2016



# In memoriam

## Fr. Giuseppe Gallo

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*Zianigo (VE – Italy)*  
*27 August 1946*

*Parma (Italy)*  
*9 June 2016*

Fr. Giuseppe Gallo died at 7:30 pm on 9 June 2016. Fr. Vito Scagliuso writes: «Earlier that afternoon, he had taken his place in the Conforti Sanctuary to concelebrate at the closing Mass of the GAMS. He joined in the refreshments and a lottery in the refectory after the celebration. No more than two hours later, as we were watching the national news on television, we noticed that Fr. Giuseppe had not just fallen asleep on the armchair in the TV room, but had slipped away quietly to Heaven, his head resting on the back of his left hand. It seems that Fr. Giuseppe had had some premonition of his approaching end, having written down his thoughts on several pieces of paper that he distributed among his friends at the Mother House: “I leave it to the Lord to decide the day and the manner of my death”. Thus the Lord decide the time and the manner of his last farewell to our community».

Giuseppe was born into a large family in Zianigo, a hamlet of the town of Mirano, in the province of Venice, on 27 August 1946. He wrote about his family in *Missionari Saveriani* in June 1983: «God blessed my family with nine children (six brothers and three sisters). I learned early on to live with others and get along with them. I am still learning from my father, who is

rich in faith, and my mother who is endowed with a rare human equilibrium. God alone knows how many sacrifices they made for their large family. Today, when my grandparents Pietro and Irene, gather for feast and celebrations, their house is filled with children, daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law, nephews, nieces and grandchildren ».

The Gallo family was well-known in the village. Both parents were devout Catholics and excellent formators of their children, whom they raised to respect religious principles and human values. Prayer, in a special way, was their trusted companion for overcoming life's difficulties and it never let them down.

The parents were "exemplary guardians of the home": Irene, the mother, lived her role as the "woman of the house" with a joyful dignity, attentive to each one of the children and open to the problems of the wider world outside the home; Pietro, the father, was a bricklayer by profession, a very religious man of firm principles. Giuseppe often told how he distributed material on the Apostolate of Prayer to passers-by at the railroad station of Venice. He was proud of father, his faith and his poems.

Both parents gave a shining example to their children and grandchildren of attendance at Mass and participation in the spiritual life of the parish. Giuseppe once said: «I learned how to practice a "living" faith in Zianigo when I was a very small child. When I returned home after serving morning Mass, I used to stop and contemplate the rising sun. Perhaps I did not yet understand the Word well, but I felt that I had met Jesus and the world seemed more beautiful to me, people were my friends and I was experiencing an intense communion with nature, its sounds and colors; the sun too seemed so huge, bright, gigantic».



Priestly vocations are usually born in a community context, such as the family, in which the young candidate has had a significant faith experience. This was the case of Fr. Giuseppe.

One day, his mother asked him how he wanted to spend his life. Young Giuseppe climbed on to a chair and declared: «I want to be a missionary». He later recalled how he had «read about the "Paris foreign missions" when I was seven or eight years old and I began to dream...».

His mother would have liked a priest son who would remain close to her, but she never opposed her son's choice; she accompanied his vocation with discretion, experiencing the joy of a child given to God, the Church's mission and humanity.

He joined the Xaverian Institute on 7 October 1957, attending junior high school in Vicenza and senior high school in Zelarino (VE). In presenting him to Novitiate, (which Giuseppe did in San Pietro in Vincoli, RA), Fr. Lucino Piacere, the rector of the minor seminary in Zelarino, observed: «His delicate health and a certain nervous disposition could be a cause for concern. I believe that a clear doctrine on love and trust in God can help to sustain his rich and sensitive personality. I think the Lord has reserved this seminarian “solely” for Himself».

He resumed his studies after he made his First Profession: three years of Lyceum in Tavernerio (CO) and a satisfactory report from his formators: «[Giuseppe Gallo] has always made a good impression. He showed a sufficient commitment to piety, study and community life». He went on to the Introductory year in Parma and served as Prefect for two years in Cremona (1967–68) and Salerno (1968–69). In connection with this, Fr. Nicola Colasuonno writes:

Joe and I not only had in common the Adriatic coast (he was from Vicenza and I from Bari), but also a Xaverian missionary spirit that looked to the future. I met Joe for the first time in Parma at the Introductory year and later in Cremona and Salerno, where we had been sent as Prefects. They were two years of intense activity and initiatives: Joe was the football coach and taught physical education, while I taught singing and theater.

Thinking back to the period of formation in Zelarino, Giuseppe wrote to his friends in June 1983:

I could remember many confreres who were very close to me during the years of my formation. I believe that you, the friends of Zelarino, have never forgotten Fr. Lucino Piacere, who was the rector of the minor seminary for several years. He confirmed me in my faith experience and, above all, he made me understand that God is love.

Fr. Piacere was excellent in forming the character of the missionary aspirants. He used to say to them: «Never forget what I am telling you now: even if the world falls apart, be certain of one thing: God loves you!».

In September 1969, Giuseppe was assigned to the Xaverian province of the United States of America, where he made the Final Profession on 3 October 1969. His confreres and others admired «his skill in learning English, but also in relationships and friendships. He bonded very well with the rest of the community. His quick and sharp wit made him very likeable».

After the first two years of Theology in Franklin, WI, he was sent to the Democratic Republic of Congo for a six-months direct Mission experience

with Nick Colasuonno, who writes: «After just two years of Theology, we were lucky to spend six months in the Congo on a pastoral missionary stage, in Baraka, Ushanga wa Ubembe, on Lake Tanganyika. Fr. Palmiro Cima thrilled us with his tales and celebrations. We also went to Burundi. Everyone remembers how we tricked Fr. Ernesto Tomè into believing that we were lost American benefactors who were willing to help him in his mission».

Fr. Giuseppe wrote about this stage in a letter to the General Councilor, Fr. Lucino Piacere, on 28 May 1972:

I felt very privileged when I heard I was being given the opportunity to go to the Missions. I believe the same can be said about Nick, with whom I spent six unforgettable months in Baraka. Perhaps we were even the first Xaverian students of the Second Year of Theology to go to the Missions before ordination to the Priesthood [...].

My brief African experience was personally very useful to me. I believe that my vocation gained in quality and richness of perspectives. My sense of adaptation was undoubtedly put to the test, perhaps more from a psychological than a material perspective [...].

I settled down quickly to the place and with the people. At a certain point I no longer felt that I was in the “mysterious African land”, but in a corner of the world like any other, where there were people who needed me [...].

I don't look upon the missionary as a “factotum” because I believe that volunteers and lay people can satisfy many practical needs; nevertheless, I have seen the necessity of having some rudimentary notions of building, mechanics, electricity and medicine.

I now have a new idea of the missionary, forged perhaps by the example of the confreres and lay people I have seen at work, an idea I would like to make my own in a few years: the missionary as one who is intent on bringing the Gospel message, and not himself, his mentality and personal perspective; one who misses no opportunity to help others with every means and who, with great patience, values and listens to his confreres; one does not consider it a waste of time to chat with a man, a woman and even a group of children. It is the idea of a man who knows how to begin again, and to love others again at the start of each new day.



Giuseppe resumed his studies on his return to the USA, where he obtained two MAS: one in “Divinity” in Milwaukee, WI, and the other in “Education”, at the state University of Orange.

He was ordained priest on 26 May 1973 in Milwaukee. For about four years he worked in vocation promotion, first in Franklin, WI, (1973–74) and then in Wayne, NJ, (1974–78). He wrote about this work:

In my ministry as a deacon among young Americans and Mexican immigrants, I have had the opportunity to observe the truth and efficacy of trusting in God's love.

Although human beings may be fragile, sinners, slaves or marginalized, once they become aware of God's love for them, they free themselves from inner and outer impositions, from egoism and fatalistic lethargy.

The person who experiences God's love — and I could tell so many personal experiences of this — rises up again and becomes a "protagonist" with God for himself and others.

Fr. Giuseppe wrote to Fr. Lucino Piacere on 13 January 1977:

I have always been frank with you and I must tell you that I am finding it very difficult to endure and overcome a strange physical and mental situation.

I find it difficult to concentrate and my nervous system seems to be in a state of upheaval; I swing from a state of lethargy to one of frenetic activity, when I strive to shake myself out of it with an effort of the will.

Until last year I was certainly in control. Perhaps I have tried to do more than I was able? Is the Lord trying to tell me something? I pray often and I ask for the grace to heal because I truly want to do His will and to be a holy priest and missionary [...].

My work continues almost as usual, with the highs and lows of the job. Let us also hope that a good number of young men will enter Milwaukee and Chicago.

Pray for me and ask others to pray for me too, that God's will may be done.

This letter was a cry for help following the outbreak of his illness, which marked the beginning of his forty-year journey to Calvary in union with the Crucified Christ, amid highs and lows, the darkness of the mind and bursts of light.

It was certainly not easy for him to accept this cross, which meant he had to give up the mission and a normal pastoral life, perhaps forever. Nevertheless, he never gave into hopelessness: the Lord would watch over him, he would not abandon him, and he would comfort him in his illness (cf. *Ps* 40:3–4).

He returned to the Mother House for treatment in July 1978. In the meantime, he made himself available for the translation of the Congregation's documents into English.

His physical and psychological situation improved and, on 27 April 1981, he asked the Superior General, Fr. Gabriele Ferrari, to assign him to the mission of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Superior General replied on 9 May 1981:

I presented your request to the General Council. We weighed up the pros and cons of the request, which we believe to be more than reasonable and which we will be happy to approve, once we have the opinion of a doctor who will be consulted by Fr. Meo. If the doctor says that we can try, have no fear that we will do so.

In the meantime stay serene. I believe I understand the state of mind behind your letter dated 27 April [1981], and which you shared with me in all simplicity during our recent conversation in Parma. I understand you and assure you of my solidarity.

Let us ask the Lord to grant you the health you need to leave for the missions and, in any case, a great faith to always see, in every circumstance, the loving hand of God who guides each one of us personally along the path we are to take.

After two years without a reply of any kind to his request to leave for the Congo, on 28 March 1981, he wrote to the general Councilor, Fr. Francesco Signorelli:

I am writing to tell you that everything is going well and that my treatment will end in a few weeks.

I have never wanted so much to resume my work in Africa as I do now. The doctor does not seem to have any objections; recently, I have been more sick with nostalgia for Africa than for anything else.

I therefore inform you, once again, of my willingness to leave for the missions. The years are passing for me too and I believe I can work in Italy in the future, enriched by a true experience of mission. I don't know what others will say, but this is my conviction and determination before the Lord [...].

I say it sincerely: I feel almost like a fish out of water in Italy and I am convinced that I will settle down well quite quickly in the Congo, which I left not so long ago, and in which I remember affectionately all the confreres who are working in the ministry, the "safaris" or in the Seminary [...]. I feel readier than ever before to give my life to the Lord in direct mission work.



This is all I wanted to say to you: to clarify how things are going and what I think. I hope that this letter will help to explain my state of mind and also my current situation.

Fr. Signorelli replied immediately on behalf of the General Direction:

After discussing and reflecting on your request, while we praise and admire your great availability and love for the missions, we must fraternally confess that we need time to reflect further and, for the time being, we are unable to give you a positive response. We can, however, tell you that one thing is clear to us: we cannot prudently let you leave in a short time [...].

I therefore ask you to have patience and to wait a little longer. We do not want to deprive you of the hope of a possible return, but we also wish to tell you, in all frankness and fraternal charity, that for the moment it would not be at all prudent.

We are truly concerned about your health and your wellbeing and, at the same time, we would be more than happy to help you fulfill your missionary “dream” which, it goes without saying, we have the clear duty to support and encourage, provided the circumstances are favorable.

In 1983, after a certified improvement in his physical and psychological health, Fr. Giuseppe was assigned to the Xaverian Region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. He did a refresher French study course in Paris and arrived in the Congo in August 1983. He wrote to his friends to inform them of his departure for the Congo:

In going to the Zaire (today’s Democratic Republic of Congo, *ed. note*), I have no great plans in mind. I was there for some months as a volunteer in 1971 and I know the Kivu region a little. I go back willingly and expect that many things await me there.

My wish is that many young people reflect on making a choice like mine to serve among our faraway and needy brothers and sisters. I am aware that I will have a lot to learn, but also one great thing to give: «Beloved people of Africa, I want to come to you. I know you will receive me as a guest as only you know how. Do not be afraid! The color of your skin does not matter to me. I want like to shake your hand and call you by name. We will speak about the One who created you and who keeps us alive. I will tell you all about Christ. Let me dance with you!».



Just four months had passed since the beginning of his service in the Congo when the “dance” with his African brothers was abruptly interrupted. His illness had reared its head once again and his return to Italy was inevitable.

He spent a period receiving treatment in the Mother House (1983–85) and was then assigned to the Xaverian Region of Italy on 30 May 1985. In connection with this, Fr. Signorelli wrote to him:

This morning, during the Council meeting, we assigned you to the Region of Italy.

Upon your return from the mission of Zaire, you offered your contribution in the Central Delegation for the translation of Xaverian publications and documents, along with some priestly ministry in the Diocese of Parma. We are truly grateful to you for your availability.

Since you have settled down well in the Zelarino community, thanks to the fraternal and relaxed atmosphere and the priestly ministry, which you have carried out with great satisfaction and competence, we believe you should be a more permanent part of that community [...].

You should continue to have your periodical medical checkups and prudently dose your strength in the work and the tasks that will be entrusted to you.

From 1985 until 1992 he worked hard in Zelarino in the pastoral ministry and vocation promotion; at the same time he also worked in the “benefactors” office. From 1992 until 2016 he was in the Mother House, Parma, where he did some pastoral work, some translations into English and sorted stamps, while he continued to look after his health, «keeping his medicines always close to hand». His illness was always lurking, ready to ambush him. By that time, Fr. Giuseppe had become a «pilgrim», a person who places his trust in God and asks for His help.

At Christmas 1993, in a wave of new enthusiasm, Fr. Giuseppe wrote to the General Direction:

It is important to me to remind you that I wrote to you last year about my possible departure for the missions, but I did not receive a reply [...]. Despite the fact that I have been in Italy for many years now, I still dream about returning to Zaire.

My health is quite good now and I believe that a place like Bukavu or Kavimvira would be suitable for my conditions.

I do not wish to twist your arm and I therefore ask you to place my request before the crib and ask the newborn Christ to grant me this grace.

The Superior General, Fr. Francesco Marini, replied: «The waiting will cost you a little, but it is part of the sacrifice that we accepted when we made ourselves available for serving the Gospel. Try to serve the mission concretely in the work you are doing in Parma. Our vocation does not change with when our circumstances change, but only the ways in which we fulfill it».

Contrary to what Fr. Giuseppe believed, his health was not very good, and he was deceiving himself to think that it would only be a matter of time before the Superiors approved his request! In connection with his health, Fr. Gabriele Guarnieri, who had spent a week in Parma during the winter of 2009 for medical checkups, remembers: «We had known each other since his time in Zelarino, but during that week he kept asking me politely: “Who are you?”, “In what mission do you work?”, “Where were you born?” and “What are you doing here in Parma?”; I saw how he would eat quickly, get up from the table to play the piano, and then stop abruptly and move away».

Illness, and Fr. Giuseppe’s illness in particular, «is an awkward friend and terrible guest, a jealous spouse that never leaves, forcing us to allow for everything, even death». Yet by this point Fr. Giuseppe awaited death with great serenity; he was now aware that neither life nor death were in his hands, but in the hands of God, and that he had to entrust himself fully to Him. Because «the eternal God, Lord of life, cannot let those who love him fall into nothingness». This is the Testament of Fr. Giuseppe: «God will ransom my soul from the clutches of Sheol, for he will receive me» (*Ps* 49:16).



Fr. Ercole Marcelli writes: «I met Fr. Giuseppe Gallo «when he returned sick from the Congo to Parma. After a few days he was admitted to the Monticelli clinic.

I was with him when Pope John Paul II was elected and the people were celebrating in St. Peter’s Square. The people in front of the television in the clinic were very excited.

Fr. Giuseppe and I were walking in the corridor. Hearing the clamor in St. Peter’s Square, he said with annoyance: “Do you see how they are deriding the Catholic Church?”. I believe he suffered a lot during the years he spent in the USA because of the polemics between Catholics and Protestants. He thus bore witness to his attachment to the Church.

He was a profoundly religious man, perhaps in the spirit of his father who, in his desire to spread the Apostolate of Prayer, used to distribute religious material on the buses and steamboats.

Fr. Giuseppe bore his illness for forty years, well aware of his affliction, but always with the desire to do something as a missionary. A great desire to work! He was in the habit of saying: “I am a worker”.

His illness sometimes made him depressed or aggressive, but his profound religious instinct led him to pray. How many Rosaries he prayed and how many hours he spent in the Blessed Sacrament chapel of the Conforti Sanctuary!

When there was a celebration in the Sanctuary, he would be ready in his place, dressed in alb and stole, some hours beforehand.

The mighty duration of his “martyrdom” earned him respect and admiration. We thank the Lord who, in his mysterious Providence, created and shaped him thus».

“All is grace”. The Lord transformed the witness of Fr. Giuseppe Gallo into a «seed of the Gospel» during the long years of the illness which became his Calvary.

*by Fr. Domenico Calarco, S.X.*



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