

SECTION FIVE
ZEAL FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS
DON BOSCO'S MODELS

Presentation

Efforts to reform society along Christian lines, undertaken in the Turin diocese after the fall of Napoleon's Empire, in addition to taking up systematic parish catechesis once more, fostering popular missions, the Forty Hours and retreats for all kinds of groups, focused above all on reform of the clergy, beginning with more careful selection of candidates for the priesthood and diligent care in their preparation. With this in mind diocesan authorities first reorganised the seminary in the capital (1819), strengthening disciplinary and spiritual aspects, and encouraged the initiatives of Fr Luigi Guala, approving the Rule for the Pastoral Institute [Convitto ecclesiastico] (1821), then extended the seminary at Bra (1824-1825), and finally set up a new seminary in Chieri (1829) in the old house which belonged to the Oratorians (St Philip Neri's priests), putting trusted formators in charge¹¹⁴. The model of formation espoused by the archbishop, the Camaldolese Colombano Chiaveroti (1754-1831), drew its inspiration from priestly ideals belonging to post-Tridentine Catholic tradition, with a strong emphasis on apostolic charity and pastoral sacrifice (the priest had to be a "victima charitatis")¹¹⁵. Meanwhile groups of generous clergy, supporting his reform efforts, made themselves available for preaching to the people, the ministry of confessions and spiritual direction, along with some orders and congregations that had been set up once more after the suppression in the French era.

This effort at formation gradually showed results. Beginning from the 1840s a band of young priests, well prepared and motivated, entered the parishes and

¹¹⁴ Cf. Aldo GIRAUDO, *Clero, seminario e società. Aspetti della Restaurazione religiosa a Torino*. Roma, LAS 1993, pp. 177-213.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 245-254, 277-288.

charitable institutes in the diocese, and contributed effectively to the spiritual renewal of society and the revival of religious practice amongst the population. New apostolic frontiers opened up. New pastoral, educational and welfare institutions came into being.

Don Bosco, who grew up over these years, drank in the spiritual and apostolic fervour of the settings where he was formed. Reference models were the holy pastors of the Catholic Reformation—St Philip Neri, St Charles Borromeo, St Francis de Sales and St Vincent de Paul—especially their ardent apostolic energy and practical charity.

Joseph Cafasso, collaborator and successor of Guala at the Pastoral Institute, stood out for his extraordinary talent as a spiritual guide of priests and a teacher of moral theology. He was a much appreciated spiritual director, a zealous preacher, tireless and enlightened confessor, and apostle of charity at the prisons and with the very poor, and by the example of his priestly life, the charisms he was gifted with and the zeal of his charity, he played a decisive role in the spiritual and pastoral regeneration of Piedmontese clergy and laity. He died, utterly worn out from his efforts, at 49 years of age. Don Bosco had him as a teacher and guide, a model of encouragement. It was he who directed him and encouraged him in his ministry to poor and abandoned boys. It was from him that Don Bosco drew lessons for his spiritual life, along with the passion for salvation of souls, tireless charity, zealous faith, pastoral courage.

In this fifth section we include two splendid sermons of Don Bosco's, one on Fr Cafasso (no. 295), the other on St Philip Neri (no. 296), from which emerges the spiritual importance of their choices and the apostolic energy they gave to Salesian work, of these reference models who were so radical and ardent in their dedication.

295. Funeral eulogy for Fr Joseph Cafasso

Critical ed. in Giovanni BOSCO, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Cafasso esposta in due ragionamenti funebri*. Torino, Tip. G. B. Paravia e Comp. 1860, pp. 9-45
(OE XII, 359-395)¹¹⁶.

1. Opening

I do not know, dear boys and respected gentlemen, I do not know if this morning's topic should be considered sorrowful or consoling. Certainly if we think of the loss of a benefactor for poor humankind in the death of Fr Cafasso we have serious reasons for sorrow and weeping as if we were struck by a terrible tragedy. A tragedy for good people, a misfortune for the poor, a disaster for the clergy, and a public calamity for Religion.

But if we judge this loss from the perspective of faith we have good reason to turn our distress into consolation, for although we have lost a man who did so much good on earth, we have the firm faith of having acquired a protector with God in heaven.

In fact if we cast an eye over Fr Cafasso's life, his innocent habits, his zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, his faith, hope, charity, humility and penitence, we have to conclude that with so many virtues he has been given a great reward and that by dying all he has done is to leave this mortal life with all its miseries to fly to the possession of heavenly bliss.

Moreover, according to St Paul, mortal man's virtues are imperfect and not worthy of comparison with heavenly ones. Therefore if Fr Cafasso's charity was

¹¹⁶ This was held on July 10, 1860 in the church of St Francis de Sales, at the end of the funeral Mass celebrated seventeen days after Cafasso's death (G. BOSCO, *Biografia del sacerdote Giuseppe Cafasso...*, p. 3). Cleric Domenico Ruffino (1840-1865) wrote in his diary: "10 July. The funeral mass for Fr Cafasso by the boys at the Oratory was held. They wanted to offer their holy communions. ... At 6 ½ a sung Mass prepared and celebrated by Fr Borel began; Don Bosco said the funeral oration afterwards, in fact he read them otherwise his emotions would not have allowed him to continue. Despite this he wept copiously and what he said and his entire sermon fascinated his listeners who saw him conclude in tears. But he promised he would write up his life at length." (ASC A0120201 *Cronaca dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales N. 1, 1860*, ms by Domenico Ruffino, p. 23).

great on earth, how much more will it be now that we believe he is in heaven? So if he benefited us just as one person here on earth, in heaven he will benefit us as ten, a hundred, a thousand. How lucky were they who benefited from Fr Cafasso's charity when he was on earth, but how much luckier are those who now recognise him as their protector with God in heaven.

So we can be convinced of what I am saying, I would ask you to give me your compassionate attention while I explain the principal activities in the life of this wonderful man. I say I will explain only the principal activities, because most of them are yet unknown, and over time we will gather them up so we can offer a glorious collection for history purposes. I will limit myself only to the things I have seen or heard. And for the sake of brevity in a sermon like this I must even leave some of these out, also because many of them would cause me to become too emotional and leave me unable to talk about them. However, given the brevity of this sermon and keeping only to the things mostly known to those who knew him, I think they will be enough to persuade us that Father Joseph Cafasso lived a holy life, followed by a holy death.

These are the first two thoughts that first came to mind as I recalled our late dear friend and these two thoughts are the matters I will deal with here. Meanwhile, while recalling the virtuous actions and the precious death of Father Cafasso, let me say that he was a master of how to live well and a model for all those who wish to have a holy death.

2. Father Cafasso's boyhood

It happens to many young boys that because they fall in with bad companions, or because of the neglect of parents or even by their own character they are often unfaithful to a good upbringing from an early age. They become the unfortunate prey of vice, thus losing the inestimable treasure of their innocence before having known the value of it, and become slaves of Satan without even being able to enjoy the delights of the children of God. This was not the case for Fr Cafasso. He was born in January 1811 in Castelnuovo d'Asti of an upright farming family. The young Cafasso's docile nature, obedience, reserve, love for study and piety, meant that he soon became the object of much pleasure for his parents and teachers.

The characteristic feature of his youthful age was his reserve and the irrepressible urge to do good for his neighbour. It was the happiest day for him when he could give good advice, or do something good and prevent something bad from happening. By the age of ten he was already a little apostle at home. He was often seen leaving the house to go in search of his companions, relatives and friends. Big and small, young and old were invited home then he would get them to kneel down and say a brief prayer. Then he would get up on a chair which became his pulpit and he would give a sermon from it, repeating what he had heard in church or telling them edifying stories. He was small of stature and his body was almost completely in his voice. Anyone who looked at his angelic face, his mouth from which came words and speeches far superior to his age, was filled with wonder, exclaiming with the same words those who looked at the young St John the Baptist: “Whatever will become of this child?” “*Quis putas puer iste erit?*” [Lk 1:66].

So you people from Castelnuovo, astonished at hearing the child Cafasso, were asking what would become of him, and at that time you did not know, but now I am able to satisfy you. That boy would be a model of virtue in class, someone his teachers would offer as an example of diligence to his classmates. He would be the very image of devotion, and would guide so many troublesome people on the way of virtue, confirm so many good people on the way to doing good. He would be the father of the poor, the delight of parents. He was the one who in such a short time achieved such a degree of virtue that he knew no other path than the one that led to the church and the classroom. He would be the one who after having spent fifteen years in study and virtue resolved to give himself entirely to God in the ecclesiastical state, working solely for the glory of God. He would be the one who one day would become a teacher for the clergy and would provide many worthy ministers for the Church and gain many souls for heaven.

3. Fr Cafasso's clerical life

Brevity here obliges me to omit many facts so I can quickly come to the fortunate moment when I personally met him for the first time. It was in 1827

in Murialdo, a hamlet of Castelnuovo d'Asti, which was celebrating the Motherhood of Mary which was the principal solemnity for the inhabitants. Everyone was busy getting things ready at home or in the church, while others were spectators or taking part in games or different amusements.

I saw just one person standing apart from all these events and it was a cleric, slight in stature, bright-eyed, personable, with an angelic face. He was leaning against the door of the church. I was fascinated by his appearance and although I was only twelve, I nevertheless felt the urge to speak to him, so I approached him and said to him: "Father, do you want to see some of the shows that are part of our festivities? I will be very happy to take you wherever you want to go."

He made a gracious sign for me to come closer and he began asking me how old I was, if I was studying, if I had already made my first communion, how often I went to confession, whether I was attending catechism and the like. I was captivated by his edifying way of speaking and replied willingly to each question. Then almost by way of thanking him for his kindness, I repeated my offer to accompany him as he visited some of the shows.

"My dear friend," he replied "the functions in church are performances for priests; the better they are celebrated, the more pleasing these performances are for us. Our novelties are the practice of religion, always new and therefore to be attended diligently. I am simply waiting for the church to open."

I was encouraged to continue talking to him and added: "What you say is true but there is a time for everything; a time for going to church and a time for recreation."

He began laughing and concluded with these memorable words which were like the plan of action for his entire life: "Whoever embraces the ecclesiastical state sells himself to the Lord. And whatever is happening in the world, the only thing he should have at heart is what is for the greater glory of God and the benefit of souls."

I was amazed and wanted to know the name of this cleric whose words and behaviour manifested the spirit of the Lord in such a way. I came to know

that he was a seminarian, Joseph Cafasso in his 1st year of theology, and I had often heard him spoken of as a paragon of virtue.

If I ever have time to give a detailed account of the outstanding virtues he showed in his time as a cleric, either when he was in his village, or when he was in the seminary at Chieri, how many interesting and edifying details I would be telling you! Let me just say that his charity towards his companions, his submissiveness to his superiors, his patience in bearing with the faults of others, his effort never to offend anyone, the pleasant way he dealt with, advised, encouraged his companions, his indifference to whatever was served at table, his resignation to the ups and downs of the seasons, his readiness to teach catechism to children, his uplifting demeanour everywhere, his concern for study and things to do with piety are the qualities that adorned Fr Cafasso's life as a cleric. He practised these gifts in a heroic way and his companions, family and friends commonly said that it seemed that Cafasso the cleric was not affected by original sin.

Having got this far again I am forced to omit a long series of edifying deeds that cleric Cafasso did so I can have time to speak of his priestly life.

4. Fr Cafasso's public priestly life

But who are you, I ask myself, to pretend that you can speak about the marvellous deeds of this hero? Do you not know that the most beautiful actions are those that are only known to God? And do you not know that the most learned writers would need to write huge volumes to speak worthily of things that are known to the world? I know all this and I assure you that I feel like the boy who goes into a garden in order to make a bouquet of flowers and finds such beautiful and varied kinds of flowers in every part of it that he is confused and does not know where to start. It is the same with me when I speak of Fr Cafasso's priestly virtues. I do not know where to start and what should follow what. So I shall just bring together a few of the virtues that stood out most resplendently in his priestly public life and in his private and mortified existence. Let us begin with his public life.

His zeal, his ease in expounding the Word of God, the success of his sermons meant he was sought out everywhere to give triduum, novenas, retreats and missions to the people of various towns. He courageously tried to be everything for everyone to win everyone over to Jesus Christ. But after a few years he could no longer stand up to such serious and continuous efforts and had to limit himself to preaching to the clergy, who seemed to be that portion of human society which Divine Providence had entrusted to him in a special way. Who could enumerate here the great good he did through his retreats, the public and private conferences he gave, the books he distributed, financial help he gave to priests of poor means so they could complete their studies and so worthily exercise their sacred ministry?

The concern he had for poor boys belonged especially to Fr Cafasso's public life. He instructed them in the truths of the faith, provided them with clothes that enabled them to go to church decently dressed and helped them find work with an upright employer. For others he paid the cost of their schooling or gave them bread until they could earn their own through their own efforts. He began practising this burning spirit of charity when he was still a layman and continued when he became a cleric. He redoubled his zeal and it stood out resplendently when he became a priest. Fr Cafasso was the first catechist at our Oratory and was its constant promoter and benefactor in life and remains so after his death.

Also belonging to Fr Cafasso's public life are entire days spent in the prisons preaching, comforting, catechising the unfortunate detainees and hearing their confessions. Here I do not know if it is his courage or his charity that is worthy of the most praise. Or should we say that his burning charity inspired his heroic courage. Of the many deeds of which I was a witness, I choose the following; listen to it because it is interesting.

To prepare the prisoners to celebrate a Feast of Our Lady, he had spent an entire week instructing and encouraging the prisoners in a large room where there were around forty five of the worst ones. Almost all of them had promised to go to confession on the vigil of the solemnity. But when the day came, no one wanted to be the first to start. He renewed his invitation, reminded them

briefly of what he had told them the previous days, and reminded them of the promise they had given him. But maybe because of human respect, or the snares of the devil or some other vain pretext, no one wanted to go to confession. So what was he to do?

Fr Cafasso's inventive charity knew what to do. Smiling, he approached the one who seemed to be the biggest, strongest, most robust of the prisoners. Without saying a word, he took hold of the man's thick, long beard in his small hands. First he thought that Fr Cafasso was having fun with him, so in a polite way, as much as you could expect from someone of the kind he said: "You can take everything I have but leave me my beard."

"I am not going to let you go until you go to confession."

"But I'm not going to go."

"Well then, I'm not going to let go."

"But ... I don't want to go to confession."

"Say what you like, you are not going to escape and I'm not going to let go until you confess."

"I am not ready."

"I will get you ready."

Of course, if the prisoner had wanted to, he could have broken free from Fr Cafasso's hands with the slightest push, but either out of respect for his person or as the result of God's grace, the fact is that the prisoner gave up and allowed Fr Cafasso to take him off to a corner of the dormitory. The venerable priest sat down on a pallet and prepared his friend for confession. How did it happen? To be brief, the man became emotional and between tears and sighs, as soon as he could he ended up by confessing his sins.

Then a wonderful miracle took place. The one who began by cursing and refusing to go to confession then went to the other inmates and told them he had never felt so happy in his life. He acted and spoke in such a way that they all went to make their confession.

This fact, which I choose from thousands of such, whether you want to call it a miracle of God's grace or say it was a miracle of Fr Cafasso's charity it shows us how the hand of the Lord intervened (¹¹⁷).

The rest of the public life of Fr Cafasso can be told by many priests and lay people, rich and poor who are in debt to him, for their knowledge, the means of achieving it, or for the happiness they find in their family, for the trade they are working at, for the bread they eat (¹¹⁸).

Many who were sick and were comforted by him can tell their story, or the dying he assisted, the long line of penitents of every age and circumstance who on any day or at any time found in him a pious, learned and prudent spiritual director.

The story can also be told by so many unfortunate people sentenced to death who in their despair would not hear of religion. But they were assisted

¹¹⁷ It would be good to note here that on that day Fr Cafasso heard confessions late into the night, and since the prison gates and exits were closed, he was on the point of having to sleep there with the prisoners. But at a certain hour of the night the policemen and wardens armed with rifles, pistols and sabres came, and they started doing their usual rounds, holding tapers at the ends of some long iron rods. They were checking here and there looking for any cracks appearing on the walls or the floor, and to see if there were any plots or other disorders among the inmates. When they saw someone they did not know they began shouting: "Who goes there?" And without waiting for an answer they surrounded him and threatened him, asking him what he was doing, what he was thinking of doing there, who he was, where he wanted to go. Fr Cafasso wanted to speak but it wasn't possible because the guards were shouting: "Stop, stop!" And "Tell us who you are". "I am Fr Cafasso." "Fr Cafasso...! How come ... at this hour ... why didn't you leave on time? We can't let you out without reporting this to the director of prisons." "That doesn't worry me. You can report to whoever you want to, but be careful because when nightfall comes you were supposed to come round and see who did not belong here and let them leave. This was your duty and it is your fault for not doing it." Then they all fell silent and taking the good Fr Cafasso they begged him not to talk about what had happened. They opened the door and to ingratiate themselves further, they accompanied him down to his house (note in the original text).

¹¹⁸ I know of many people who because of their poor circumstances or major difficulties in the family could not take up any career. Some of those are now parish priests, assistant priests, school teachers. Some are notaries, lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, legal advisers. Others work in the country, own shops, are businessmen, and while in Fr Cafasso they lament the loss of a tender father, they give glory to truth by saying: "Fr Cafasso was our benefactor, he helped us to clothe ourselves, pay our rent, sit for our exams. He advised us, recommended us, supported us spiritually and bodily. To him we owe our honour, study, employment, the bread we eat (note in the original text).

and, I would say, won over by the irresistible charity of Fr Cafasso and died in the most consoling fashion, leaving us with the moral certainty of their eternal salvation.

Oh! If heaven were to tell the story of the public life of Fr Cafasso there would be, I believe, thousands and thousands of souls who would loudly say: “If we are saved, if we enjoy the glory of heaven, we are debtors to the charity, zeal and efforts of Fr Cafasso. He saved us from danger, guided us on the way of virtue. He pulled us back from the brink of hell and sent us to heaven.”

5. Fr Cafasso's private priestly life

Let's pause from speaking about Fr Cafasso's public life to speak for a moment about his private life. By private life I mean especially the virtues he practised in familiar occupations, the things that mostly seem worthless in the world's eyes, but are perhaps the most meritorious before God. And here there is a wide range of edifying deeds, shining virtues presented for our consideration! How many mortifications, penances, abstinences, prayers, fasts took place between the walls of his dwelling. Every moment he had free from his sacred ministry was employed in lengthy sessions for listening to people, that you could say were without limits. He was always ready to receive, console, advise, hear confession in his room. Sometimes he was so tired he could not make his voice heard and not infrequently he had to deal with rude people who understood nothing or were not satisfied with anything. However, he was always calm, his words kind, without ever allowing a word, or action showing any sign of impatience.

If only the walls of that room could speak, how many virtues, how many acts of kindness, patience, suffering they would give glorious testimony to! Always affable, kindly, he never let anyone leave without consoling them with spiritual or temporal comforts, or at least without having first suggested something to them of maximum profit for their soul. The multitude of people wanting to talk to him meant he had to be quick. So without getting lost in compliments or ceremony he came straight to the point and with surprising ease understood at the least inkling what they wanted to say and gave a

prompt, frank and complete response. But it was with humility, respect and with such rapidity that a respected individual had only this to say about Fr Cafasso: "His interest in human beings was charity and nothing else."

He knew and preached that every moment of time was a treasure, so he benefited from every moment and opportunity to do good. Going up or down stairs, coming or going from visits to the sick or prisoners he was mostly accompanied by someone talking about matters to do with the sacred ministry or giving words of comfort to someone whom he would not have been able to speak with otherwise.

He had some recreation after meals, and this was the time for Fr Cafasso to give some wonderful lessons. Here his students absorbed his beautiful way of being in company as if sucking milk. He showed how to deal with the world without being a slave to the world and how to become true priests with the necessary virtues to train ministers to be able to give to Caesar what is Caesar's, to God what is God's.

But nothing was more wonderful in Fr Cafasso's private life than his exact observance of the rules of the Pastoral Institute of St Francis. As superior he could have dispensed himself of many things, whether because of his poor health, or because of the seriousness and sheer number of tasks which were weighing on him. But he had fixed in his mind that the most effective command of a superior is good example, and being better than his subjects in the performance of their duties. Therefore, in the smallest things, the practices of piety, being there for conferences, at meditation, mealtimes, he was like a machine that the sound of the bell brought almost instantly to the fulfilment of that particular duty.

I recall one day when he needed water and someone brought him a glass. He had it in his hand when the bell sounded for rosary. He did not hesitate but put it down and went immediately to the practices of piety. "Drink it," I told him "and you can still be in time for prayer." He answered me: "Would you prefer a glass of water to such a precious prayer as the rosary we say in honour of Mary Most Holy?"

6. Fr Cafasso's life of mortification

Part of Fr Cafasso's private life was his secret but constant mortification. Here we see the great art he employed in becoming a saint. There is solid basis for saying he used a hair shirt, put objects in his bed to make it uncomfortable, and did other serious penances. I shall leave these things aside for now. But I will tell you what I and others knew and saw. However tired he was he never leaned on his elbows or anything else to rest. He never crossed his legs and at table never said: "I prefer this or not that", since he ate everything. Since a young age he had set aside certain days for special acts of mortification. Saturday was a strict fast for Mary. But while I am saying he fasted on Saturday, I am saying that every week, every month, the whole year was a strict and fearful fast. Firstly he reduced the number of meals and finally only ate once a day, and his meal was soup and a small second course. Some who saw such prolonged austerity chided him respectfully indicating the damage he would do to his health. "Have some respect for yourself," they told him "and if you do not want to do it out of love for yourself, then do so out of love for others." He smiled and answered: "I am even healthier by doing it this way." But as he noted his strength failing more and more each day he then said: "O paradise! Paradise! What strength and health you give to those who would enter there!" If he was numb with cold, suffocating in the heat, covered in sweat he never sought comfort, and no one ever heard a word of complaint or pain.

At any time of the year he would spend many hours listening to the confessions of the faithful and often went into the confessional at six in the morning and came out at twelve. Staying still so long even when the cold was so bad meant that when he left to go to the sacristy he could not walk straight and had to lean from bench to bench in order not to fall and sometimes in the middle of the church he was forced to kneel or sit. Seeing that everyone felt sorry for him and some wanted to buy a small foot warmer for him at their own expense, for him to rest his feet on and so recover a bit from the harshness of the season. For fear that he would not allow it if someone were to mention it beforehand, the sacristan bought the item and without its owner knowing brought it to the confessional before he got there. When he saw that object of affluence, as he called it, he pushed it aside with his foot to a corner of the

confessional and later ordered that it not be returned there saying: "These things are useless, they give the idea of too much respect for a priest who does not need it."

He said various other things, but neither in this nor in any other circumstance was it possible to get him to temper his desire for penance that certainly contributed to consuming his precious life so much.

He was adverse to any kind of entertainment. In the thirty two years I knew him I never saw him playing cards, tarot cards, chess, billiards or other game. If he was occasionally invited to join in he would say, "I have very different things to amuse myself with. When there is nothing else pressing, I will play."

"When is that likely to be?"

"When we are in heaven."

Other than the regular mortification of his bodily feelings, he was the sworn enemy of any kind of habit, no matter how harmless. "The only habit we should have is doing good", he used to say. "Our body is insatiable. The more we give it the more it wants, the less we give it the less it wants."

So he was never in the habit of taking tobacco or sweets or special drinks, except under doctor's orders. While studying at college, in the seminary he did not want to take coffee or fruit at breakfast or for a snack.

He had already been at the Pastoral Institute for ten years, was prefect of the conference, yet his breakfast still consisted of a few slices of dry bread. In view of all his hard work, one day I told him to take something more suited to his delicate constitution. "Unfortunately," he said smiling, "the time will come when I will need to give into the body in some way but I don't want to satisfy it until I find I can do no other."

Just a few years later he was forced by obedience to temper such a rigid lifestyle. But despite his weak constitution and dubious health, he never wanted to get into the habit of eating certain foods, and in fact kept decreasing the amounts until, as I have already said, he came down to just one meal a

day of soup and a second course. Although subject to many ills he did not want to lengthen his ordinary sleep regime which was a scarce five hours a night. In the cold of winter, even when he suffered stomach pains, headache or toothache which made it hard for him to even be on his feet, before four in the morning he was already kneeling at prayer, meditating or carrying out some task.

This tenor of life—hard working, penitent, a life of prayer and charity, hardship and self-denial he practised until death which came to him just when we needed him most, at a time we least expected but which he had calmly awaited. His entire life had been in preparation for it.

Ah time! Why do you fly so fast and force me to remain silent about so many things I would still like to say? Although my talk has been rather long already, I hope you can still be patient for a moment to listen to the story of Fr Cafasso's final hours. I will do this after a short break.

7. His holy death

Let's draw a curtain over the events that certainly contributed to depriving us of such a dear, helpful and precious individual. Let us just say that so pure and holy a life so similar to that of the Saviour also had to be met with ingratitude by the world which did not know him; a world for the benefit of which he had spent all he had, his health and his life. In all of this we adore the decree of Divine Providence.

It is a truth of Faith that at the moment of death a man reaps what he has sown throughout life: *quae seminaverit homo, haec et metet* [Gal 6:8]. Since Fr Cafasso had lived a life full of good and holy works, his death too had to be good and holy. He had a familiar saying and he used to often repeat it especially in moral conferences: "Fortunate is the priest who has consumed his life for the good of souls, and more fortunate still is the one who dies working for the glory of God. He will certainly have a great reward from the supreme master for whom he works."

We can now use those same words to say: "How fortunate you are, Fr Cafasso, since your entire life was consumed by working for the glory of God

and the salvation of souls. You are very fortunate because your life ended while you were in the midst of the labours of the sacred ministry.”

We have good reason to believe that God had given him a special revelation of the day and hour of his death, and he gave clear signs of that to those of us who in recent days had the good fortune to speak with him. He would usually settle affairs each day as if he were at the vigil of his death. Before going to bed each evening he would arrange things in the house as if that night were to be the last of his life. The three days before his illness he spent almost all in his room, the door closed. He settled everything that had to do with the smooth running of the Institute. He gave timely orders to family members, answered some letters, put all his written material in order. He made sure every piece of paper was in its proper place, added a few items to his will then made the exercise for a happy death which he would always do once a month without fail.

Meanwhile the morning of Monday June 11 this year arrived and what did Fr Cafasso do? Everything had been fixed up, and all was in readiness for his trip to eternity. He was walking around his room waiting for the Lord's voice to say to him: “Come.” How did it happen? Thinking of his condition, he believed he could still spend a little time on behalf of souls. Cheerfully, but with effort, he left his room to go to the confessional and spent some hours there hearing the confessions of the faithful, people he had guided on the way to heaven with his singular learning, prudence and piety. But it was noticed that his way of hearing confessions was not the same as usual. He recommended them all to detach their hearts from earthly things, love God their Creator with all their strength and ask him to take us soon from the worries of life and give us beautiful paradise. “Oh paradise, paradise,” he told one penitent, “why are you not sought out and desired by all? Why do you still delay, why, why ...?” But he was only one man and while the zeal for winning souls for God continued in his great soul his strength had failed him. He had to leave the confessional where over some twenty five years he had been the faithful dispenser of heavenly favours for so many souls. He had to now leave this confessional and would never return.

He slowly went back to his room. Before lying down on the bed he knelt down and said these memorable words which he had with him in writing: “The sorrow that I feel, Lord, for not having loved you, and the great desire that I have to love you more, make this life exceedingly dull and heavy. I beg you to shorten my days on earth and release me from purgatory in the afterlife so I can quickly go to enjoy heaven ...” He could say no more and to prevent himself from fainting he lay down on the bed around eleven in the morning.

The illness was a lung infection and bleeding in the stomach. The doctors did what they could but all in vain. For some days it seemed there was some improvement, but in reality, as he said, the moment for him to fly to heaven was fast approaching.

From the first day of his illness he spoke frankly saying he would not recover and that he wanted to go to heaven.

If someone asked him if he was feeling better, if he had slept well, he always answered: “As God wills.” He recommended himself to everyone’s prayers. One day he told me to see that special prayers were said in our house by the boys. “We have already done that,” I told him “and we will continue to pray. But I told the boys you would come one day and given them Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.” “That’s ok,” he said, “go and pray and tell the boys I will bless them all from paradise.”

When I asked if he had something he wanted to put in writing, some memory, or leave some task for someone, he looked at me smiling and said: “Just imagine if I had left it to this late hour to adjust my affairs. Everything has been done for this world and now all that remains is to fix up things with God. In his great mercy he soon wants to take me to paradise.”

One particular thing was noted by everyone and this was how he welcomed everyone who came to his bedside with the usual kindness but a few minutes later would suggest they go. He did not want anyone to spend more time with him than was strictly needed. So sometimes after leaving him I stood for a moment just outside the door to his room. I saw him join his hands, kiss the crucifix then kiss it again, then looking to heaven he would pray unceasingly but in a most familiar way.

That convinced me that he wanted to be alone so he could speak with God more freely. One day when I was alone with him I plucked up courage to tell him that I thought it would be better for him to have someone by his bedside, both to help him with the things he frequently needed, and also to receive some words of comfort. “No,” he quickly answered, “no.” Then raising his eyes to heaven he said in a strong voice: “Don’t you know that every word said by a man is a word stolen from the Lord?”

Even when the illness threatened his life and he was in agony he loved to be alone. He was not even happy when someone suggested brief prayers for him to say, almost as though these were interrupting the ordinary colloquy which he was certainly having with God. But he asked everyone to pray for him and recommend him to the protection of the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph. One person of some authority who used to visit Fr Cafasso during his lifetime, visited him more frequently during his illness and after seeing how he acted, how much he said and did, offered this frank opinion: “Fr Cafasso has no need of our suggestions. He is in direct communion with God and spends time in familiar conversation with the Mother of our Saviour, his Guardian Angel and St Joseph.”

I could tell you many things about his admirable patience in putting up with his illness, the things he said to his friends, the many blessings he gave especially to those living with him. Also about the edifying way he received the last sacraments; but these things make me too emotional and maybe I would not be able to control myself while talking about them.

I will tell you only that if we compare the illness and death of Fr Cafasso with that of Saint Charles Borromeo, Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Philip Neri and other great Saints, it seems to me that we could say it was equally precious in God’s eyes. And how could it be otherwise? If he led a holy life why should he not also die a holy death?

He was greatly devoted to Mary and constantly promoted devotion to our heavenly Mother. Every day and we could say every moment, he did something or said a brief prayer in her honour. Saturday was all for Mary. He spent it by fasting rigorously; anything he asked her on that day was promptly

granted. Many times he had expressed the desire to die on a Saturday. Often during life he said this and he left it in writing: “How wonderful it would be to die for love of Mary. To die calling on Mary’s name. To die on a day dedicated to Mary. To die at a time that was most glorious for Mary. To expire in Mary’s arms. To leave for paradise with Mary. To enjoy eternity close to Mary.”

O fortunate soul you are! All your desires were satisfied: it was the 13th day of your illness; it was Saturday, Mary’s day and you had received the sacred Body of Jesus shortly beforehand. Then Jesus called to give you the paradise you so much desired, and for which you had spent your entire life. May Mary your Mother, to whom you were so devoted in life, now assist you and lead you with her to heaven. Our Fr Cafasso smiled ... and breathed his last ... His soul was with Jesus and Mary and flew to heavenly bliss.

We have every reason to hope that after a death so precious in God’s eyes Fr Cafasso’s soul would not even have felt the pains of purgatory and would have flown immediately to heaven. For this reason, instead of inviting you to pray for him, I suggest rather that you have recourse to his heavenly intercession. But since God is so holy and pure that he finds some stain even in the angels themselves, we fulfil a duty of gratitude and friendship by offering God our prayers, communions, alms, works of charity in suffrage for our beloved benefactor’s soul. And if such works are no longer necessary to free him from the pains of purgatory, they will serve as suffrage for other souls there for whose relief he worked so much in life and for whom he so often asked us to pray.

Courage, good listeners, just one more moment. Amongst Fr Cafasso’s final words were the following and they are truly worth remembering forever: “When I have gone to my grave,” he said “I want and I ask the Lord to wipe out my memory on earth, so that no one should ever need to think of me again except for the faithful, who in their charity would, I hope, want to pray for my soul. I accept as a penance for my sins everything the world might want to say against me after death.”

Dear Fr Cafasso, this prayer of yours will not be heard; you wished to humiliate yourself so that your glory would go to the grave with you. But God wants otherwise. God wants your great humility to be exalted and for you to be crowned with glory in heaven. Your memory is the memory of the just that lasts forever. *In memoria aeterna erit iustus* [Ps 111:7].

Your memory will endure amongst priests because you were their model in holiness of life and their teacher in the knowledge of the Lord. Your memory will endure amongst the poor who weep over your death as the death of a tender father. It will endure amongst those who doubt for you gave them holy and salutary advice. It will endure amongst the afflicted to whom you brought consolation in so many ways. It will endure amongst those who were in agony and you brought them comfort. It will endure in the prisons where you helped so many unfortunates. It will endure amongst so many condemned to death for your charity which sent them to heaven. It will endure amongst your friends, and your friends are all those who knew you. It will endure amongst all who respect the great benefactors of humankind as you were throughout your mortal life. And finally it will endure amongst us because the love you showed us on earth assures us that you will be our protector with God now that you are glorious in heaven.

So live eternally with God great and faithful soul. Your time of suffering is past; no more pain, no more affliction, no more illness, no more displeasure, no more death, no more. God is your reward; you are in Him and with Him and with Him you enjoy everything that is good, in heaven. Mary, the heavenly mother you so much loved and made loved on earth, now she wants you with her to give you due reward for the filial affection you showed her. But in your glory please cast a compassionate eye on us who have been left poor and orphaned by your departure. Intercede for us and see that by living according to the advice you gave us, by following your shining example of virtue you left us, we too one day may come into possession of the glory that with Jesus and Mary, with all the Saints in heaven you are enjoying forever and ever. Amen.

296. Panegyric in honour of St Philip Neri

ASC A2250704, original ms by don Bosco¹¹⁹ (cf. MB IX, 213-221).

[I. Opening]

Although the virtues and actions of the saints are all directed to the same end, which is the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls, there are different ways of achieving the sublime degree of holiness which God called them to. The reason seems to be this: in the wonderful dispensation of God's gifts and different ways and diverse paths he calls us to himself so that all the various virtues contributing to adorn and beautify our holy religion cover, so to speak, the holy Church with the mantle of variety that the face appear in the eyes of the heavenly bridegroom as a queen seated on the throne of glory and majesty. In fact, we admire the fervour of many individuals who are either distrustful of themselves in time of persecution or fear shipwreck in the world and abandoned home, relatives, friends, and anything they owned to go into barren and barely habitable deserts. Others, who were also courageous soldiers of the King of Heaven, faced every danger and disregarding sword, fire and death itself joyfully offered their lives, confessing Jesus Christ and sealing with their own blood the truths they so greatly proclaimed. Then there were groups driven by the desire to save souls who went to distant lands, while many others added splendour after splendour to the Church of Jesus Christ among us by study, preaching, and reserve, and practising other virtues. Then there were some made after God's heart who covered such a range of virtues, knowledge, courage and heroic actions which make it so very clear that God is wonderful in his saints: *Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis* (Ps 66:36). Every era of the Church has been glorified by some hero of the Faith. Amongst others in the sixteenth century there was St Philip Neri, whose virtues are the object of this respectable gathering and of our poor discourse.

But what could I possibly say about a saint whose actions collected only in a summary form take up huge volumes? Actions which alone are enough

¹¹⁹ The panegyric for St Philip Neri was given by Don Bosco to priests in the diocese of Alba (Cuneo), at the invitation of its bishop, bishop Eugenio Galletti in May 1868 (cf. MB II, 46-48).

to give a perfect model of virtue to the simple Christian, the fervent monk, the most hard working clergyman? For these reasons I do not intend to widely expound all the actions and all the virtues of Philip, because you, better than I, have already read, meditated on and imitated them. I will simply give you a hint of what it is like the cornerstone around which are built so to speak, all the other virtues; his zeal for the salvation of souls! This is the zeal recommended by the divine Saviour when he said: "I came to bring fire to the earth and how I wish it were already kindled, *Ignem veni mittere in terram et quid volo nisi ut accendatur?*" (Lk 12:49). Zeal that made the Apostle Paul exclaim that "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh, *Optabam ego ipse anathema esse a Christo pro fratribus meis*" (Rm 9:3).

But gentlemen, I have never put myself in such a critical position! I who could really be your pupil and am pretending now to be your teacher? It is true, and just to escape the accusation of being reckless I ask you first to kindly put up with me if the little I offer does not match your expectations. However, I hope in the Lord's grace and the protection of our saint.

[III. Philip in Rome]

As an introduction to the topic, listen to this interesting episode. It is about a young man just about twenty years of age who was moved by desire for the glory of God, and abandoned his parents. He was the only son and he renounced the substantial wealth of his father and of a rich uncle who wanted him to be the sole heir. Unbeknownst to anyone, without any means whatsoever, and depending only on Divine Providence he left Florence and went to Rome. Now look at him: he was taken in charitably by a fellow citizen (Caccia Galeotto). And there he was standing in one corner of the courtyard of the house, looking towards the city and caught up in deep thought. Let us go up to him and ask him.

"Young man, who are you and what are you so anxiously looking at?"

"I am a poor young foreigner. I am looking at this great city and one thought occupies my mind, but I fear that it is folly, and recklessness."

“What’s that?”

“Consecrating myself to the good of so many souls, so many poor boys who for want of religious instruction are on the road to perdition.”

“Do you have any learning?”

“I have hardly done primary school.”

“Do you have material means?”

“Nothing: I only have the load of bread that my master charitably gives me every day.”

“Do you have churches, houses?”

“All I have is a low, narrow room kindly given me to use. My wardrobe is a simple rope stretched from one wall, and from which I hang my clothes and all my gear.”

“How, then, without a name, no learning, no means and no place, can you undertake so huge an enterprise?”

“That is true: it is precisely this lack of means and merit that are occupying my thoughts. God of course, who has given me the courage, God who raised up Abraham’s children from the stones, this same God is the one who ...”

This poor young man, gentlemen, is Philip Neri who was thinking of reforming the Christians in Rome. He was looking at the city but alas! How does he see it! He sees that it has been the slave of foreigners for many years; he sees it horribly tormented by pestilence, misery; sees it after being besieged for three months, fought, conquered, plundered and destroyed, we can say. This city is the field where young Philip would harvest such abundant fruit. Let us see how he tackled the work.

With the usual aid of Divine Providence, he resumed his course of studies, did philosophy, theology, and following the advice of his director devoted himself to God in the priestly state. His ordination redoubled his zeal for the glory of God. Philip, by becoming a priest, agreed with St Ambrose that by zeal one acquires the faith and by zeal man is led to the possession of justice. “*Zelo fides acquiritur, zelo iustitia possidetur*” (sanctus Ambrosius, in *Ps. 118*).

Philip was convinced that no sacrifice was more pleasing to God than zeal for the salvation of souls. “*Nullum Deo gratius sacrificum offerri potest quam zelus animarum.*” (Greg. M. in *Ezech.*). Moved by these thoughts it seemed to him that crowds of Christians especially poor boys, were crying out against him in the words of the prophet: “*Parvuli petierunt panem, et non erat qui frangerit eis.*” (Lam 4:4). But when he was able to go to the public workshops, enter hospitals and prisons and saw people of every age and every condition given to fighting, cursing, theft and living enslaved by sin; when he began to think how many reviled God their Creator almost without knowing it, and did not observe the divine law because they were ignorant of it, then he remembered the sighs of Hosea (4:1-2), who says that because people do not know the things of eternal salvation the greatest, the most abominable crimes have flooded the earth. But how embittered was his innocent heart when he realised that most of those poor souls were lost only because they were not educated in the truths of the Faith. This people, he exclaimed with Isaiah, had no knowledge of the things of salvation, “Therefore Sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure. The nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude go down, her throng and all who exult in her”, “*Quia populus meus non habuit scientiam, propterea infernus aperuit os suum absque ullo termino; et descendunt fortes eius, et populus eius, et sublimes gloriosisque eius ad eum.*” (Is 5:13-14).

At the sight of the ever-increasing evils Philip followed the example of the Divine Saviour who had nothing in the world when he began his preaching except the great fire of divine charity which prompted him to come down from heaven to earth; or the example of the apostles who were devoid of any human means when they were sent to preach the gospel to the nations of the earth all miserably engulfed in idolatry, in all kinds of vice or, according to the Bible: “were buried in darkness and in the shadow of death.” Philip became all things to all men in the streets, squares, public workshops. He entered public and private establishments and with his polite, kind, pleasant manner suggestive of his charity towards his neighbour, he began to talk about virtue and religion to those who did not want to know about either. Imagine

the things that were being said about him! Some said he was stupid, others ignorant, others said he was drunk, and there was no lack of those who said he was mad.

Courageous Philip let them all say what they wanted; indeed the world's blame is assured for anyone who works for the glory of God, because what the world says is wisdom is foolishness for God. So he fearlessly continued his holy enterprise. And who can ever resist that terrible two-edged sword which is the Word of God? Or a priest who corresponds to the holiness of his ministry?

In a short time people of every age and condition, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, clergy and laity, from the highest class to apprentices, the scavengers, the ships boys, the youngest and the oldest bricklayers began to admire the zeal of the servant of God. They went to listen to him, knowledge of the Faith made its way into their hearts. Contempt became admiration, admiration became respect. So in Philip we see none other than the true friend of the people, a zealous minister of Jesus Christ won everyone over, conquered everything to the extent that it all fell fortunate victim to the charity of this new apostle. Rome changed; everyone wanted to be Philip's friend, they all praised Philip, spoke of Philip, wanted to see Philip. It was from this that wonderful conversions eventuated, sensational gains of so many obstinate sinners of which the author of the Saint's life speaks at length (see Bacci)¹²⁰.

[III. Philip as the apostle of youth]

But God had sent Philip especially for the youth, therefore he addressed his special concerns to them.

He looked at human kind as a great field to be cultivated. If good grain is sown in time it will have an abundant harvest; but if the sowing is out of season, all you get is straw and husks¹²¹. He also knew that in this mystical

¹²⁰ Pietro Giacomo BACCI, *Vita di S. Filippo Neri fondatore della congr. dell'Oratorio*. Monza, Tipografia dell'Istituto dei Paolini 1851.

¹²¹ DB uses an archaic term to indicate the shell of grain, chaff: things of little value, of no importance.

field there is a great hidden treasure, meaning the souls of so many young people most of them innocent and often corrupted without their knowing it. This treasure, Philip said in his heart, is totally entrusted to the priests and their salvation or damnation depends mostly on them.

Philip did not ignore that fact that it is up to the parents to look after their children; and up to employers to look after their workers, but when these cannot or are not able to or do not want to, should these souls be allowed to go to perdition? Especially since the priest's lips should be the guardian of knowledge and people have the right to seek from his mouth and not from someone else's?

One thing at first sight seemed to discourage Philip in educating poor boys, and it was their fickleness and the effects of this in doing bad things or worse. But he recovered from his panic and fear by considering that many were persevering in good, that repeat offenders were not overwhelming in number and that they themselves with patience, love and with the grace of the Lord, for the most part ended up on the right track and therefore the Word of God was a seed which sooner or later produced the longed-for fruit.

So following the example of the Saviour who taught his people every day: "*erat quotidie docens in templo*" (Lk 19:47), and was careful to call the wildest ones to himself, he went around everywhere saying: "Come to me, boys, and I will show you how to become rich but with real wealth that will never fail. I will teach you the holy fear of God, *Venite, filii, audite me: timorem Domini docebo vos.*" (Ps 33:11). These words, accompanied by his great charity and a life that was a compendium of all virtue, meant that crowds of boys flocked to the Saint from all over. He would speak to one and to another: he taught literature to the student, smithing to the blacksmith, made a master builder out of the carpenter, a real barber out of the barber, a master mason out of the bricklayer, a master cobbler of the cobbler. By being all things to all men he won over everyone for Jesus Christ. As a result those youngsters, enticed by his charitable ways, his edifying discourses, allowed themselves to be taken where Philip wanted. This happened to the unheard of extent that in the streets, squares, churches, the sacristy, his very room, at table and during prayer time

he was preceded or followed by youngsters who hung from his every word, listened to the examples he recounted, the principles of the catechism he was explaining.

And then? Listen. That mob of unruly and ignorant boys little by little were instructed in the catechism, asked to approach the sacraments of confession and communion. They sought to hear Mass, listen to sermons and gradually ceased swearing, lack of obedience and finally abandoned their vices, improved their morals. Thousands of hapless children who were already beating the path of disgrace and who might have ended their lives in prison or in shackles, to their eternal loss, were returned to their families because of Philip's zeal as docile, obedient, good Christians, on the way to heaven. Oh holy catholic Religion! Oh wonders of God's Word! What wonders do you not work through the minister who knows and performs the duties of his calling!

Someone will say: "Philip performed these wonders because he was a saint." I would put it differently: "Philip performed these wonders because he was a priest who corresponded to the spirit of his vocation." I believe that if we are animated by the spirit of zeal, confidence in God, we could imitate this saint as well and certainly get great results in gaining souls. Who among us cannot muster some children, give them a little catechism at home or in church, and if needs be also in some corner of a square or a street and instruct them in the Faith, and encourage them to go to confession. and when they need it, hear their confession? Could we not say with St Philip: "Boys, come to confession every week and go to communion following the advice of your confessor?" How come dissolute boys who like eating, drinking and playing can turn to matters of church and piety?

Philip found this secret. Listen. By imitating the kindness and meekness of the Saviour, Philip led them to be good, caressed them, gave some a sweet, others a medal, a holy picture, a book or similar. For the wilder and more ignorant ones who were unable to enjoy these sublime expressions of fatherly kindness, he prepared something more suited to them. As soon as he could get them around him he immediately began telling them interesting stories, invited them to sing, play, put on plays, jump, use games equipment of all kinds.

Finally the most reluctant, the most frivolous were as it were dragged into the recreation area by musical instruments, bowls, stilts, quoits, with offerings of fruit and small school lunches, breakfasts, snacks. Any expense, said Philip, any effort, disturbance, sacrifice is slight when it is a case of winning souls for God. So Phillip's room had almost become a shop, a place for public performances, but at the same time a holy house of prayer and place of sanctification. So Rome saw a man without titles, means or authority, armed only with charity combat fraud, deceit, licentiousness and every sort of vice, and overcome everything and everyone so that many whom the public called wolves became meek lambs. These serious efforts, these noises and disturbances which perhaps for us seem to be bearable for just a few minutes were the work and the delight of St Philip over more than sixty years, during his whole priestly life until extreme old age, until such time as God called him to enjoy the fruit of so many and such prolonged labours.

[IV. A plea: we must save souls]

Respectable gentlemen, is there something in this faithful servant that we can imitate? There certainly is. Each of us in his situation is educated enough, rich enough to imitate him if not in everything, at least in part. Let us not be deceived by the vain pretext that we sometimes happen to hear: "*It is not my problem, let the one who has to think about it do it.*" When they told Philip that since he did not have to take care of souls he did not need to do that work he replied: "Did my good Jesus have any obligation to shed his Blood for me? He died on the cross to save souls so should I as a minister refuse to put up with a little bother, some effort to correspond to that?"

Reverend gentlemen, let's get to work. Souls are in danger and we have to save them. We are obliged even as simple Christians whom God has commanded to look after our neighbour: "*Unicuique Deus mandavit de proximo suo*" (Sir 17:12). We are obliged since these are the souls of our brothers. We are all children of the same heavenly Father. We also should feel motivated to work in an exceptional way to save souls, because this is the holiest of holy actions: "*Divinarum divinissimum est cooperari Deo in salutem animarum.*" (The Areopagite). But what should absolutely urge us to fulfil

this task zealously is the strict account that we as ministers of Jesus Christ, will have to render to the Divine Judgement for the souls entrusted to us. Ah that great and terrible account that parents, employers, directors and all priests in general must render to Jesus Christ our Judge for all the souls entrusted to us! That supreme moment will come for all Christians, but let us not deceive ourselves, it will also come for us priests. As soon as we have been freed from the bonds of the body and stand before the divine judge we will see clearly what were the obligations of our state and what has been our negligence. Before our eyes will appear the immense glory of God prepared for his faithful and we will see the souls ... Yes so many souls that were to go there to enjoy and because of our negligence in instructing them in the Faith, were lost!

Gentlemen, what will we say to our Divine Saviour when he tells us that to save souls he left the right hand of the Father to come down to earth; “*erat quotidie docens in templo.*” [Lk 19:47]: that he paid no attention to the labours, the sweat, the hardships, humiliations, contradictions, to the distress, sufferings of all kinds, and finally that he shed the last drop of his blood to save souls? What can we answer if we enjoyed quiet rest and perhaps hobbies and perhaps worse?

What a terrible position it would be for a priest when he appears before the divine judge who tells him: “Look down on the world: how many souls walk the way of iniquity and take the road to perdition. They are there because of you; you did nothing to get them to hear the voice of duty, you did not seek them out, you did not save them. Others have gone from sin to sin by walking in ignorance and now they are cast into hell. Oh! See how many they are. These souls are crying out for vengeance against you. And now, unfaithful servant, *serve nequam*, render account for this. Render account for the precious treasure I entrusted to you, the treasure that cost me my passion, my blood, my death. Give me your souls for the soul of the one who was lost through your fault: *Erit anima tua pro anima illius.*”

But no, my good Jesus, we hope in your grace and your infinite mercy that this reprimand will never be ours. We are deeply convinced of the great duty that binds us to educate souls, so that they are not lost through our fault. So

for the future, for all the days of our mortal life, we will take the greatest care to ensure that no soul has to be lost through our fault. Will we have to bear toil, hardship, poverty, sorrow, persecution and even death? We will gladly do so because of the shining example you gave us. But you, O God of goodness and mercy, infuse into our hearts the true priestly zeal and see that we are consistent followers of the Saint whom we choose today as our model, and when the great day comes when we present ourselves to your divine tribunal to be judged may we not hear blame and reproach but a word of comfort and consolation.

And you, O glorious St Philip, deign to intercede for me, your unworthy devotee, intercede for all of these zealous priests who had the goodness to listen to me and see that at the end of our life we can all hear those consoling words: You saved a soul, you have saved your own: *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti.*