

Dossier - March 2015

Biographical and spiritual profile

MARIA ORSOLA BUSSONE

Maria Orsola was born on October 2, 1954 at 22:30 in her maternal grandmother's house. Her parents welcomed the birth of their first-born child with great joy. She was baptized on October 10 by the parish priest, Fr. Giuseppe Michelotti. The family circle widened when her brother Giorgio was born on May 7, 1957. Later on in life, Maria Orsola and her brother shared a deep spiritual bond.

Maria Orsola grew up surrounded by a serene Christian family life where religious practice was accompanied by love, honesty, sincerity and work. This was her first school of Christian values. Her last year of nursery school was spent at the Monasterolo kindergarten run by the Cottolengo Sisters. Her elementary education at Vallo started on October 1, 1960 and finished on June 21, 1965. She received her first Holy Communion in her parish on April 23, 1961 and she was confirmed on July 11, 1965. She was a member of the Catholic Action and of the "Maria Goretti" Youth Group at the San Secondo parish in Vallo.

Being lively and spontaneous, she opted to frequent the oratory at Vallo. She played enthusiastically with everyone. During the summer months she participated in the school-camps organized by the parish, helping children who were younger than her.

During the year she happily joined other teenagers and children in drama activities. Her generosity helped her to overcome herself and be open to others.

Maria Orsola spent her middle school years, from autumn 1965 to summer 1968, at the "Federico Albert" Institute in Lanzo, run by the Vincenzine Sisters of Mary Immaculate¹. During this period, two particular happenings marked her young spiritual path.

The first one was in 1966 when she took part in a three-day retreat at the Institute of the Vincenzine Sisters of Mary Immaculate in Lanzo. The preacher was the parish priest Fr. Vincenzo Chiarle, and the theme was "the Glory of God". The pre-adolescent Maria Orsola was deeply struck by this message and felt that her life had to be a constant "*doing everything to give glory to God*".

The second one was in 1967 when she attended the first *Parish Movement*² Congress at Rocca di Papa (Rome). The impact with the Focolare Movement's spirituality of unity led the parish to embark on a journey of personal and community renewal. The parish became more intensely committed in its pastoral work, contacting other parish communities and youth groups through meetings with priests, seminaries, religious and diocesan communities. Maria Orsola was ready to give her share in any type of animation.

Together with her family, she started to live the spirituality of the charism of unity while she shared the journey of evangelical life initiated by the parish community. This young girl's life and her commitment in the parish were imbued by the grace of this charism that revolutionized her whole being.

Maria Orsola was very dynamic, enterprising and active, thus, without following any particular courses, but thanks to her strong will, she learnt to do various kinds of sport. She enjoyed skiing, swimming, skating, cycling, singing and playing the guitar.

¹ Known as Albertine Sisters.

² A branch of the Focolare Movement, known also as Work of Mary

In 1968 she started attending a school of music in Turin where she learnt to play the guitar and to sing. Together with friends, who were members of the youth parish band directed by Fr. Gigi Tarquini, the vice parish priest, she wanted to witness and share the joy of living the Gospel and the beauty of being a Christian community.

In October of the same year, Maria Orsola started attending the "Galileo Ferraris" State High School of Ciriè, a town 10 km. away from Vallo. She travelled daily to this town using the school bus.

During her first year at this school she won a national essay competition. She wrote about "*The European Community*" and was rewarded with a trip to Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg. Photos and a personal diary about this trip are safely kept.

The family and the parish were the first ones to instil in the Servant of God Maria Orsola Bussone the practice of popular spirituality. The family gave her a very sound Christian education together with religious practice. Sunday Mass, the rosary, the Eucharistic benediction, novenas, processions, love for the parish were an integral part of family life in pre-conciliar years. During her high school years, when Maria Orsola sent greeting cards to her parents, she thanked them for their exemplary Christian family life. In a card sent to her mother on Mother's Day 1970 she wrote:

"I want to thank you.....very specially for the spiritual life you have given me, for teaching me and showing me how to love God; God, who is our Father, who loves us, who loves us despite of our faults....God whom you taught me to love by doing His will, by loving as He loves my neighbour".

On Father's Day 1970 she wrote to her father:

"Thank you for..... educating me, for instructing me but, above all, thank you for making me know Christ and for helping me to live as a Christian....Today, I will ask Saint Joseph to help you be like him, to be always faithful to God and do His will. And I will ask Jesus and Mary to help our family be more like the family of Nazareth, where only Love reigned".

Some spontaneous prayers were found in her catechism notebooks. Here are two of them. The first prayer is addressed to Jesus: "*Thank you Jesus for becoming man, for sacrificing yourself and dying on the Cross to save us and to open Heaven for us. Make me always be good, do not let me make you suffer because of my sins, and I ask that one day I can enjoy your glory*".

The second prayer is addressed to Our Lady:

"Dear Mother, I am glad that you are the mother of Jesus, and I thank God for having chosen you to be the Mother of His Son".

Maria Orsola also jotted down her commitments for the month of May, the month dedicated to Mary: "*I try to do small sacrifices and good deeds, helping mother or mortifying bad habits; every evening I go for benediction and pray the rosary*"³.

Her journey of faith is closely related to the spiritual journey of her parish community and it cannot be separated from it. Fr. Vincenzo Chiarle, who assisted the parish priest of Vallo, Fr. Giuseppe Michelotti, and who succeeded him on December 8, 1967, felt the strong need to find ways to revitalize the parish life in all its expressions.

His personal experience with the Focolare Movement convinced him that this spirituality was vital for the parish's renewal according to Vatican Council II.

Together with his whole family and 44 people from Vallo and Varisella, he participated in the first Parish Movement Congress that took place from June 3-5, 1967. Maria Orsola was among the participants. These were days of light and great joy that shed new light on every aspect of christian life.

Understanding that *God is love* and that *Jesus in the midst* creates *Unity* and renews all things was the key to all this. It was a moment of grace and a calling to live the charism of unity.

On their return journey home after this experience, they visited the little town of Loppiano⁴ (Florence). This visit convinced them that the life of unity is possible and that it makes one experience the attractive life of early Christian communities.

³ Catechism - IV Elementary.

⁴ Loppiano is one of "the permanent little towns" of the Focolare Movement. It was founded by Chiara (Silvia) Lubich in 1964. The life of this little town is characterized by its commitment to live the ideal of Unity proposed by the Focolare Movement.

Maria Orsola was fertile ground for this charism: the spirituality of the Movement went well with the expectations of her soul. She started to live this spirituality focussing on the total choice of *God Love*.

This was definitely a personal decision.

However, this spiritual journey is radically a shared one, so one experiences the church that lives in time at a particular place, the church in the parish of Vallo. Maria Orsola was fully convinced of this.

When interviewed about the parish community, she said: *"For us young people, this is very important because we feel the need of a family where members love one another and understand our problems. I want to make it clear that I am not speaking about the natural family: I speak about a spiritual family where our difficulties are answered because we are helped to live the Word of Life and love Jesus Forsaken"*.

Several groups were born in the parish; among them a group of young girls who met to help one another live the Gospel and grow in that reciprocal love that generates *Jesus in the midst*, the essential presence for unity, while putting God in the first place to discern *His Will*.

The sacramental life and the life of prayer of the Servant of God intensified, as her diary testifies: *"Daily mass and communion, weekly confession, morning and evening prayers, meditation, rosary, Word of Life, (present moment)"*.

In April 1968 she participated in first European *Gen Movement*⁵ Congress (Gen Movement is the youth branch of the Focolare Movement) at Rocca di Papa. She was deeply touched by Chiara (Silvia) Lubich's message. She felt the need to thank her and share her life programme:

"I have understood that the key to our joy is the cross, it is Jesus Forsaken. Chiara, I want to love, to love always, to be the first one to love, without expecting anything in return. I want to be a tool in God's hands following His will, and I want to do all I can, because this is the only thing worth living for. I want all young people to discover what is true happiness and to love God" ⁶.

The choice of Jesus Forsaken marked the second stage of her ascetic life. Her letters show this: *"Do you know what you have to do, what we have to do together? We have to choose God, not in His glory, but in His Crucifixion"* ⁷.

"Jesus, I am ready to suffer and offer for the Church, the Pope, the Bishop, the parish, for M, for G." ⁸

Jesus Forsaken (Jesus on the cross who felt the extreme suffering of being forsaken by the Father, and thus the profound solitude of his redemptive gesture) gave her a vision of *Universality*, which boomeranged and opened her heart to the constant desire of being His witness and of making others, especially youth, getting to know him.

She spoke about the mission of the Christian in a very brief significant way: *"giving God to others"*. Giving God to others personally, through example, word and exchange of letters; giving God to others as a community through various parish activities, particularly the music group that animated Mass, youth meetings and days of spirituality. She talked to her friend Maria about the orientation of the musical group of which she formed part: *"We keep going from one place to another giving to others God Love whom we have discovered and we try to live"*⁹.

"See Jesus in others – give God to others – do God's will" - this is what she wrote in her diary on July 21, 1969. These three important commitments were her life programme.

Meanwhile, motivations of deep faith drawn from the spirituality and charism of the Focolare Movement were like springboards in her spiritual journey; she gave them her personal touch and made them her own.

Together with her brother Giorgio and a group of forty children from the parishes of Vallo and Varisella, she joined Fr. Vincenzo Chiarle to animate the school camp held at Fr. Marino Gambetta's house in Ca' Savio, Venice.

On Friday evening, July 10, 1970 she returned from the beach after a meeting of the Word of Life held at the end of the day. She animated this meeting by playing the guitar and singing. After having a shower, whilst using her hair-dryer to prepare herself for Mass, she suffered from an electric shock. It was about 8.00 in the evening when her cousin Marisa entered the room and found her lying on the ground.

⁵ "Gen" means "new generation".

⁶ From a letter to Chiara Lubich - April 1968.

⁷ From a letter to Maria Marcelli - 09/05/1969.

⁸ The letters M and G represent the names of two persons mentioned by Maria Orsola. These names have been purposely left out because these two persons are still alive..

⁹ From a letter written on 10/04/1969.

Artificial respiration and heart massage were to no avail. Maria Orsola departed for heaven at the age of 15 years 9 months.

On Monday July 13, 1970 more than 2000 people from 50 parishes were present for a concelebration, in which 30 priests participated: it was more a feast than a funeral! The small village of Vallo seemed to have been transformed into a sanctuary; there was such a prayerful atmosphere. Suffering was imbued by peace and serenity. Many felt that God was calling them to follow what is essential in life. Some said: *"We have tasted Heaven; we have understood what is Heaven"*.