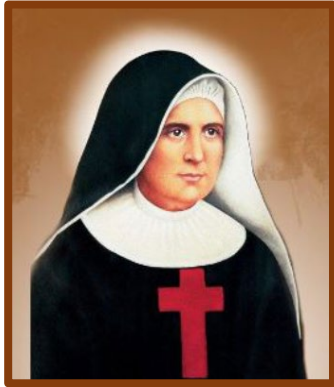


St. Giuseppina Vannini
(Italy) 1859-1911

*Foundress of the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Camillus.
Her vision of charity was: care for the sick; charity towards the poor;
prayer and atonement for the sins of men.
Cared for the physical and spiritual needs of the sick at home,
in hospitals, leprosariums and nursing homes.*



Giuditta Adelaide Agata Vannini was born on July 7, 1859, in Rome to Angelo and Annunziata Papi. She was the second of three children. Giuditta was baptized at the Church of Sant' Andrea delle Fratte. Her father died when she was four years old on August 18, 1863. Three years later her mother died on November 6, 1866. At the age of seven she was left orphaned along with her two siblings who were then separated from each other forever.

Giuditta was raised in an orphanage run by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul called the Torlonia Conservatory. At the conservatory she learned domestic skills and received her education. At the age of 13, on March 19, 1873, she received her First Holy Communion and the Sacrament of Confirmation. Completing her education, Giuditta learned to speak and write in perfect French and eventually obtained her teacher's diploma. She experienced a call to religious life.

Giuditta, at age 21, received permission to enter the Vincentians. Therefore, the first congregation she entered was the Daughters of Charity beginning the novitiate at the central house in Siena on March 3, 1883, at the age of 23. Usually a 6-12 month trial period precedes the novitiate, called a postulancy, where the religious discerns their call to the specific community occurs. However, within two months of beginning the novitiate, Giuditta was sent to Rome for an additional trial period, to live a year with an acquaintance of the sisters and earn a living with doing embroidery work. She, again, entered the novitiate on September 20, 1884, having returned to the formation house in Siena after 6 months. On that day she made her first profession and received the religious habit of the Daughters of Charity. Over the next four years she worked in Rome, Perugia, Montenero, Siena and Bracciano. Unfortunately, she was discharged from the Daughters of Charity on June 26, 1888, for reasons of ill health.

Giuditta returned to Rome, and there she took the veil of the Sacramentine Sisters. She did not feel that this was the place for her. Leaving this second religious order, she obtained a position teaching kindergarten in Portici, Naples, Italy. Again she is restless, feeling this is not her vocation. She returned to Rome to live with her maternal aunt, Anna Maria Papi, who was also her godmother.

Fortuitously, there in Rome, at the age of 32, she met a Camillian priest, Blessed Luigi Tezza, who was then the Procurator General of the Ministers of the Sick (Camillians), while on a retreat sponsored by the religious of Our Lady of the Cenacle for French-speaking ladies. There she discussed with him her challenges with discerning God's will for her life. He suggested to her several other religious orders, each of which she dismissed. Finally he shared with her his desire to re-establish a Camillian Order for women and asks if she would consider being a founder. [On March 23, 1852, His Holiness Pope Pius IX had granted Oblate Nursing Sisters

founded by Blessed Maria Domenica Bruns Barbantini the name of “Ministers of the Sick” and officially decreed the spiritual communion between the Order of Camillian religious and the Congregation of Maria Domenica. However, at the time of their founders death on May 22, 1868, the women’s order was small and operated mostly in the city of Lucca. This was also during a time when the secular world opposed the church and religious orders.]

The meeting between Fr. Tezza and Giuditta was providential because Fr. Tezza was not scheduled to preach at the retreat. He only did so because the priest scheduled had cancelled, and he was known to the sisters having spoken at the retreat the year prior. It appeared that Divine Providence ordained their meeting.

Giuditta replied, “Father! Let me pray and think, and in a few days I will give an answer.” At the end of the retreat exercises, Giuditta informed father the following: “I am not capable of anything (...). However, I trust in God who helps those who abandon themselves to Him. Guided by your wisdom and goodness, I do not despair of being able, with holy grace, to accomplish the work to which I feel called by heaven.” Thus in collaboration with Fr. Luigi Tezza, Giuditta embarked on a mission for which she did not feel wholly qualified placing, instead, her trust in God and Fr. Tezza.

On February 2, 1892, in the room where St. Camillus had died, Giuditta and two other women receive the cape with the red cross of St. Camillus as aspirants from Father Giovanni Mattis, Superior General of the Ministers of the Sick (Camillians). They were housed on Via Merulana, near the hospital. On March 19, 1895, at the age of 35, Giuditta received the religious habit and took the name of Sister Maria Giuseppina. A year later on March 19, 1893, she privately made the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and the fourth vow of service to the sick even at the risk of her own life. On December 8, 1895, she made her perpetual vows before God and Cardinal Vicar, Lucido Maria Parocchi. Elections were held by a secret ballot and Mother Giuseppina was officially elected Superior General. St. Camillus had invited his religious to serve the sick with the heart of a mother. He had the insight that care of the sick appealed to those qualities and attitudes that are typical of the “female soul”: receptivity, readiness to help, tenderness, welcome, a capacity for listening, insight, sensitivity in understanding situations, an aptitude for taking responsibility for other people’s problems, an inclination to offer help (Angelo Brusco in Camillianis, n. 80 Year VIII - September-October 1994). These gifts, along with the philosophy to “always see in the sick the image of the suffering Jesus,” Giuditta Vannini and her companions put into practice every day in their care for the sick.

Difficulty arose in 1892 and 1893 when the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII, refused to sanction the religious order twice because he had decided not to allow the foundation of new religious communities. The local ordinary, through the intercession of Cardinal Vicar, Lucido Maria Parocchi, elevated the religious family to a Conservatory dependent upon the Ordinary on January 24, 1894. Another great difficulty arose when his brother and a friend, P. Ferrini, made false accusations against Father Luigi Tezza. He was forbidden to confess the sisters or enter the sisters’ community. He faced the unjust accusations in silence. Fr. Tezza received an assignment to move to France in May, 1899. A year later on May 3, 1900, he was instructed to leave for Lima, Peru. There he remained until his death on September 26, 1923. The Congregations of the Daughters of Saint Camillus received official approval in 1909.

As the young Institute was developing rapidly, Mother Giuseppina was left to manage the new community. Mother Giuseppina was wholly dedicated to teaching the religious to serve Jesus in the person of their neighbor. Her vision of charity was: care for the sick; charity towards the poor; prayer and atonement for the sins of men. She often recommended to the sisters the virtue of humility. She would state that, “the only basis of holiness is humility.” The mission of the sisters was the physical and spiritual care of the sick at home, in hospitals, leprosariums and nursing homes. In addition to providing nursing care to the sick in Rome, Mother Giuseppina

and the Daughters expanded in Italy to Cremona (1893), Mesagne (1894), Brescia, Rieti; Bonsecours, France; in Italy: Monticelli d'Ongina, Capriola and Buenos Aires, Argentina. Many women religious gave their lives in the exercise of this ministry because of the hard work and contagion that occurred when helping the sick.

In 1909, two years prior to her death, Mother Giuseppina Vannini reported to the diocesan ecclesiastical authority in Rome that the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Camillus had 124 religious sisters and 16 houses. That year the "Rules and Constitutions of the Daughters of St. Camillus" were approved by the Cardinal Vicar in Rome on June 21, 1909. This elevated the Pious Conservatory to a Congregation of diocesan right.

Mother Giuseppina led the Institute for eighteen years. She died on February 23, 1911, in Rome at the age of 51 from heart disease. By then, the congregation she founded had 156 professed religious and 16 religious houses between Europe and America. Twenty years after her death on June 17, 1931, the decree of papal approval was conferred. Blessed Giuseppina Vannini is buried in the Generalate of the Daughters of St. Camillus located on via Anagnina in Grottaferrata, Rome, next to that of the co-founder, Father Luigi Tezza.

The decree of heroic virtue was issued by His Holiness Pope St. John Paul II on March 7, 1992. Mother Giuseppina Vannini was beatified by Pope St. John Paul II on October 16, 1994. She was canonized by Pope Francis on Sunday, October 13, 2019, in St. Peter's Square. (Memorial - February 23).

"Always see in the sick the image of the suffering Jesus."

"The only basis of holiness is humility."

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Note: This biography is for all desiring to grow in holiness and follow His Holiness Pope Pius XI address to 2000 nurses assembled at Castel Gondolfo on August 27, 1935 for the II World Congress of Catholic Nurses (www.ciciams.org / www.nacn-usa.org): *to first and foremost bring the Christian supernatural, Christ to our patients, bring salvation to souls*. May it also help nursing students with your Nursing History course. Source: Diana L. Ruzicka (2022). *The Book of Nurse Saints*. Available at www.lulu.com/spotlight/Ruzicka