

**Venerable Celeste Maria Ossoli (Sr. Annelvira)
(Italy/Congo) 1937-1995, Martyr of Charity**

Members of the Sisters of the Poor, Palazzolo Institute, composed mostly of experienced nurses, and founded in 1869 in Bergamo, Italy.

Professional Nursing Training, Rome, Italy, ~1957

Kikwit Civil Hospital, in Congo 1961 where she contracted Tuberculosis

Obstetric School in Rome → Nurse Midwife, 1969

Delivered 30-40 babies/day in Kingasani, a suburb of the capital Kinshasa

Honored with a nickname. "Woman of Life".

Served as Superior of the Community in Kikwit, 1977; Kingasani, 1990

Africa Provincial Superior, 1992. Traveled to Ivory Coast and Malawi.

5th sister to die from the 1995 Ebola Outbreak in Belgium Congo



Celeste Maria Ossoli (Sr. Annelvira) (1937-1995) was born on August 26, 1936, in Orzivecchi, Brescia, Italy, to Lodovico Ossoli and Elvira Zerbini. She was one of four children born to their union. Her father worked as a peddler of groceries and her mother worked in a grocery shop in the village. At a young age, Celeste learned how to knit. She spent her free time with the Poverelle Sisters in the town's oratory.

When Celeste turned 17, her father promised to purchase her a knitting machine. She informed him she did not need one since she planned to be a Poverelle Sister. He overreacted and slapped her so hard that he knocked out a tooth, and she fell to the ground. He later repented of his action and gave her permission to depart to the Poverelle Mother House in Bergamo.

Celeste entered the Sister of the Poor on October 5, 1953. Following her postulancy, she took the name Sister Annelvira. She made her first vows at age 20, in 1957. She was then sent to Rome to obtain a diploma as a professional nurse. She completed nursing training and training in nursing administration. In January 1960, she was assigned to the Milan retirement home at via Aldini and worked there for about a year.

Sister Annelvira and was sent to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (previously the Belgian Congo) on November 1, 1961, to work at the Kikwit Civil Hospital. She generously gave herself to her work until she contracted pulmonary tuberculosis. She soon recovered and refused to complete the TB antibiotic regimen, believing it unfair that those suffering from TB in the hospital did not have access to the same treatment.

She returned to Italy and attended the obstetrics school in Rome, graduating in 1969 as a nurse midwife. She returned to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and worked in Kingasani, a suburb of the capital Kinshasa. She delivered 30-40 babies a day and was honored with a nickname. "Woman of Life".

In 1977, she served as Superior of the community in Kikwit. She suffered from severe pain in the knees, so much so, that she had to use a wheelchair. She returned to Bergamo. She had surgery and was able to return to Kikwit following her recovery. She work in the mission of Tumikia in 1988 and returned to Kingasani in 1990 as the Superior there. In her letters she expressed concern about the country's political instability.

Sister Annelvira was elected the Provincial Superior in Africa in 1992. She traveled to each of the missionary communities in the Congo, Ivory Coast and Malawi. When Sister Floralba was stricken ill, Sister Annelvira drove 310 miles (500 km) to be with her. After Sister Floralba died from the unknown virus, Sister Annelvira sensed danger and faxed the Mother General in Bergamo, Italy, telling her about the course of their illnesses and her dismay about the deaths.

Sister Annelvira began to feel ill on May 13. She developed a fever, and red patches formed on her arms. On May 19, she was quarantined in the little house where the sisters had died along with Sister Vitarosa Zorza. Both received the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick that afternoon. Sister Annelvira, Provincial Superior of the Poverelle Sisters in Africa, died at age 58, from Ebola on May 23, 1995, in Kikwit, Kwilu, Democratic Republic of the Congo, just a month after the first sister succumbed to the disease.

Servant of God Sister Annelvira Ossoli was declared venerable with the decree of heroic virtue on March 17, 2001, by Pope Francis.

*It is Jesus who must be at the center of our life and our apostolate.
Then we will do everything with love, finding and discovering,
and making known, Who and for Whom we are at the service.*



**Martyrs of Charity - Nurse Victims of the Ebola Epidemic,
Democratic Republic of the Congo/Zaire (Italy) - 1995**

*Died of the Ebola virus contracted while caring for victims of the hemorrhagic fever
in Kikwit, Kwilu, Democratic Republic of Congo.*

*Members of the Sisters of the Poor, Palazzolo Institute, composed
mostly of experienced nurses, and founded in 1869 in Bergamo, Italy.*

In 1995, a very aggressive virus that causes a terrible hemorrhagic fever, Ebola, ravaged Zaire, taking the lives of six nurses, missionary sisters from the Congregation of Sister of the Poor, Palazzolo Institute between April 25 and May 28, 1995. The religious sisters contracted the disease in the hospital wards and operating room while providing nursing care to those infected by the virus. The terrible Ebola virus killed them, along with thousands of people in Africa. In Kikwit, it affected 220 people and 176 died. The Bishop of Bergamo, Msgr. Francesco Beschi, described these nurses as “martyrs of charity,” stating, “There is no greater love than giving one’s life like Jesus.” They gave their lives to serve the sick and poor in the turbulent country known as the Belgian



Congo (1908-1960), Democratic Republic of the Congo (1960-1971), Zaire (1971-1997) and again DRC (1997 to the present).

In May 1995, after caring for victims of Ebola, as they began to succumb to the deadly effects of the virus, the Sisters faxed the Mother General in Bergamo, Italy:

We understand your trepidation, but we are totally in God's hands. No evacuation can be done. It is very hard for you and for us to accept this separation from the sisters. Painful events have overwhelmed us but the life of the Congregation must continue: the situation is quite dramatic, especially inside. But it is necessary to remain calm. In Kinshasa there are no outbreaks and all the roads towards the interior are blocked.¹

The United States of American Center for Disease Control and Prevention recorded the outbreak in a 1998 Emerging Infectious Disease letter.²

At the request of the Congregation, on April 28, 2013, Bishop Edouard Mununu, Bishop of Kikwit, initiated the Cause for Canonization of the six religious Sisters by opening the diocesan inquiry to ascertain their heroic virtues. Eight years later, Sister Floralba, Sister Clarangela, and Sister Dinarosa were declared venerable on February 20, 2021. And the next month, on March 17, 2021, Sister Danielangela, Sister Annelvira, and Sister Vitarosa were also declared venerable, all with the decree of heroic virtue³ promulgated by Pope Francis.

The remains of the six nurses, missionary, religious sisters, at the express request of the Bishop of Kikwit Monsignor Edouard Mununu, rest in front of the Cathedral of Kikwit.

Reference:

- 1) FarodiRoma (21 Feb 2021). Move forward towards the beatification of the nuns killed by Ebola. Accessed 29 April 2022. <https://www.farodiroma.it/passi-avanti-verso-la-beatificazione-delle-suore-uccise-dallebola/>
- 2) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Sep 1998). Unrecognized Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever at Mosango Hospital during the 1995 Epidemic in Kikwit, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Accessed 4 June 2022. https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/4/3/98-0349_article
- 3) Hagiography Circle: Martyrs of Charity. Accessed 28 April 2022. <http://newsaints.faithweb.com/martyrs/Kikwit.htm>
http://newsaints.faithweb.com/news_archives_2021.htm
- 4) Aleteia. Accessed 28 April 2022. <https://aleteia.org/2021/03/23/6-heroic-nuns-who-fought-the-ebola-pandemic-and-are-on-their-way-to-sainthood/>
- 5) "Venerable Celeste Maria Ossoli". CatholicSaints.Info. 26 June 2021. Web. 5 June 2022. <<https://catholicsaints.info/venerable-celeste-maria-ossoli/>>
- 6) Santi Beati. Venerable Annelvira (Celeste Maria) Ossoli, Sister of the Poverelle. <http://www.santiebeati.eu/dettaglio/96037>

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