

**Venerable Teresa Santa Belleri (Sr. Dinarosa)  
(Italy/Congo) 1936-1995, 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 in Rome, Italy, 1961*

*Cared for lepers, seriously ill and children at Mosango Hospital, 1966*

*Returned to Italy and then Antwerp, Belgium for Tropical Medicine Course*

*Transferred to Kikwit, cared for lepers, tuberculosis and AIDS victims, 1983*

*4th Sister to die during the 1996 Ebola Outbreak in Belgium Congo*



**Teresa Santa Belleri (Sr. Dinarosa) (1936-1995)** was born on November 11, 1936, in Cailina di Villa Carcina, Brescia, Italy, to Battista Belleri and Maria Riboldi. She was the middle of three children. Her father worked in a workshop, and her mother worked in a cotton mill.

She was taught to sew by her mother's cousin Agnesi. She did not enjoy this work and so changed jobs becoming a worker in an iron bolt factory named Bossini located in Lumezzane. She rode her bike each day to the factory and saved the money she made to help pay for her sister's trousseau. Teresina, as she was called, already knew that she wanted to be a Poverelle Sister.

Teresina entered the Sisters of the Poor of the Palazzolo Institute when she was 21 years old, on March 18, 1957, at the Mother House in Bergamo, Italy. She made her first vows on October 3, 1959. The next day she left for Rome for nursing training. After obtaining her diploma, she was assigned to Marine Hospital in Cagliari, Italy, which specialized in treating all forms of tuberculosis.

In 1966, she was sent to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (previously known as Belgian Congo). She worked for the next seventeen years in the Mosango Hospital Center. She cared for lepers and other seriously ill patients along with children. During this time, she did return to Italy and then was sent for the tropical medicine course in Antwerp, Belgium.

In 1983, at the age of 47, she was transferred to Kikwit and cared for lepers, tuberculosis and AIDS victims. In a rare letter, she described the situation, "450 beds for about 1200 sick people, without pipes, without adequate medicines, with food often consisting of insects." She was known to cheer up the other sisters and defuse tension during stressful times. She sang, wore funny wigs and clothes and even a dental prosthesis to make them laugh.

Sister Dinarosa remained at her post as the Ebola virus epidemic surged. Sister Floralba had died on April 25<sup>th</sup> followed by Sister Clarangela on May 6<sup>th</sup>. The first week in May, Sister Dinarosa began to feel ill and was placed on antimalarials and antibiotics. On the 8<sup>th</sup> word came back from the CDC that the illness was Ebola. Sister Danielangela died on May 11<sup>th</sup>. On May 14, 1995, around 3 a.m. Sister Dinarosa went into a coma. Sister Vitarosa had been watching over her and realized she was no longer responding. Sister Dinarosa died on May 14, 1995, around 9 a.m. in Kikwit, Kwilu, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Servant of God Sister Dinarosa Belleri was declared venerable with the decree of heroic virtue on February 20, 2001, by Pope Francis.

*When I see them nourished like that [eating insects for their food],  
I feel great compassion and confront our so-called economic crises  
with warehouses full of every good thing ...  
What a terrible and incomprehensible social justice!"*

*"But I am here to serve the poor; the Eternal Father will help me."*



**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.<sup>1</sup>



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

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 virtue<sup>3</sup> 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.

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#### Reference:

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- 5) Santi Beati. Venerable Dinarosa (Teresa Santa) Belleri, Sister of the Poverelle. Accessed 4 June 2022. <http://www.santiebeati.net/dettaglio/96028>