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BARTOLO LONGO INSTITUTE OF POMPEI (1)

The sanctuary

The story of the Madonna of the Holy Rosary of Pompei begins in November of 1875 with the arrival of the "picture" and its exposition for the veneration of the countryfolk in a dilapidated country chapel within the estate of Countess Marianna De Fusco.

The reconstruction of the Sanctuary, which was necessary because of the great number of the faithful coming there, was done in 1891.

The fact that in such a short time such a lively devotion developed, attracting a continual influx of pilgrims, is truly incredible. In 1985 more than 3,000,000 pilgrims had come from all parts of the world, 11,000 Masses had been celebrated during which about 612,000 received Holy Communion, 5,211 people were Confirmed, and 764 pilgrimages were officially registered.

In mentioning then the "Sanctuary", we should also mention its auxiliary institutes, with more than 500 young guests, the shelters, elementary, junior high, and high schools, a community for elderly women, and a center for drug dependents. Caring for all of these are 150 Religious Sisters, 40 priests, 20 confessors, 17 Brothers of the Christian Schools, 70 lay teachers, and some one hundred employees and workers.

Attorney Bartolo Longo

At the beginning of all this was a layman who was a lawyer by profession. His name was Bartolo Longo and he was born in Latiano (Brindisi) in 1841. As a child he had been educated as a Catholic, but at the University of Naples, where he had gone to study Law, he became so anticlerical that he enrolled in a spiritualistic association and participated in some of the most vociferous antiCatholic demonstrations which were quite common in Italy during the second part of the nineteenth century. Then came the change brought about in him because of his frequent contact with Catholic intellectuals who aroused in him an interest in the theological and patristic studies which transformed him into "God's Cyclone" which he thereafter remained.

Atty. Bartolo Longo was named one day as the administrator of the financial estate of a gentlelady, the Countess Marianna De Fusco, in the Pompei countryside, on the outskirts of the ancient city which had been buried in 79 BC by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. It was there that the young professional slowly turned towards the faith, discovering the life of the country people—or rather, their non-life. He saw how they were isolated by the lack of good roads, completely ignored by the authorities, exposed to banditry, illiteracy and to all kinds of illnesses.

That all this must change was his Christian reaction to this sum total of injustice. With the support of Countess De Fusco, who would become his wife in 1885, Bartolo Longo began battling for the restoration of the human dignity of those country people: he obtained streets, drainage, two railroad stations, two police stations for the security of the citizens, and he gave them the initiative of meeting together, of learning, and also of celebrating festivals which molded those people into a community. All of this, however, was engrafted upon the spiritual life, upon prayer, and especially upon the rosary. Longo started the Confraternity of the Rosary at the end of 1875 and this ran parallel with his realization of a multi-graded school, geodynamic and meteorological observatory, a Vesuvian museum and scientific stations. This battle for the emancipation of this people was linked with the national and international struggle concerning the problems of people. Longo wrote, polemicized, participated in congresses in Italy and abroad, and took up anthropological and juridical campaigns which ran absolutely counter to the existing situation.

The liberation of man from the network of crime was one of his greatest battles. At that time, the scientific theories and studies linked with atheistic positivism were riding high. These claimed that criminality was a species of irreparable damnation in which the structure of the brain determined physical and moral behaviour. Not only that, it even claimed further that the children of criminals were also hopelessly beyond reclamation.

Bartolo Longo was indignant at this. God is the Father of all, God redeemed all, and the Blessed Virgin protects all. And so he unleashed not only a spoken and written counteroffensive but even hurled a loud

challenge to the positivists: give me these men and their sons, let us treat them with justice, as well as with Christian love, let us give them respectable work and we will see that they will become exemplary citizens. He took the sons of those in prison and confided them first to some of his zealous collaborators and then to the Brothers of the Christian Schools. For the girls he himself founded a Congregation of Religious Sisters, the Dominican Sisters of the Holy Rosary. The results: the first "reclaimed" boy became a priest and then later a pastor in Calabria; all the others became craftsmen, employees, managers, religious, and also disciplined and scrupulous keepers of good order. A resounding victory!

Bartolo Longo was the firebrand also of another institution: the reformed children, in their turn, could save their own parents. In fact, at the end of the first years of the functioning of this institution, the sons became ambassadors of good for their parents, because Longo, in addition to the frequent correspondence which he encouraged between the boys and their fathers, each year had them accompany him in visiting their fathers in the jails. He gathered together in a volume entitled "The Work in the Pompei Valley, and the Moral Reform of the Prisoners", numerous letters from the directors and chaplains of the jails attesting to the great amount of positive fruit, which resulted from such methods.

And as a result of all of this, there was such a change of public opinion that Bartolo Longo instituted the so-called "the fathers of children orphaned by the law", persons, that is, from all classes of society who, at Confirmation, took one of these children of prisoners as a "godchild" and followed his progress not only during his stay in the school but possibly for the rest of his life. This tradition continues on even until today.

"The Educational Hostel for the Sons of Prisoners" and the Brothers of the Christian Schools

Among the works which have sprung up under the shadow of the Sanctuary, the one which has aroused the deepest echo within the world and which continues to be the greatest victory of faith operating through charity is, without doubt, "The Educational Hostel for the Sons of Prisoners".

On May 29, 1892 the first stone of this great building which opens onto the Via Sacra was laid and in May of 1893 the first little group of 15 boys entered the new institution.

The continued growth of the pupils imposed upon Bartolo Longo, who in the opening days had confided the few children to the charitable works of his zealous collaborators, the problem of assuring their education with bigger and better means.

At this point we begin the dealings between Bartolo Longo and the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In truth, he had thought about the Brothers even before the beginning of the grand construction, as is evidenced by the answer which the then Visitor, Brother Casimiro sent to the lawyer, dated August 2, 1891. Again, in 1894, the same Brother Visitor answered Atty. Longo, who was insisting that he send at least one Brother to help him with the direction, in this manner: "Our rule forbids a single Brother to live outside of the community. I would ask you, who are so much favoured by the protection of the Virgin, to recommend our Institute so that we may obtain an increase in our personnel...".

Then Bartolo Longo tried again with a letter of recommendation and for this he had recourse to His Eminence Cardinal Monaco La Valletta. But even this was not effective and he had to resign himself to waiting longer.

In 1907 the direction of the Sanctuary and the Works of Pompei were entrusted to the Pontifical Prelate, Monsignor August Silj. He, taking into account the need for stability, in keeping with the wishes of the Founder, and the definite systematization of the Hostel, appealed directly to the Holy Father, Pius X. The Pope immediately arranged for the sons of St. John Baptist De La Salle to report to Pompei. To the Brother Visitor who bewailed the lack of personnel, he answered "Nothing should be impossible when the Pope wills it".

Thus, in August of 1907, the first Brothers arrived in Pompei. Why was there so much insistence on the part of Bartolo Longo in wanting the Brothers that he discarded "a priori" all other collaboration? Because the sense of education which he possessed, found its surest and most reassuring counterpart in the educational norms of the Saint from Rheims and the method adopted by his sons over the past two centuries. In his celebrated discourses which he delivered on May 27, 1894 and May 23, 1894 on the occasion of the "Civil Holiday", initiated by him, can be found the cardinal principles of his educational concepts. In these discourses he affirmed that in the choice of children, he intended to follow only the rule of charity, receiving and loving all without distinction, as was practiced and taught by the Divine Master.

With regard to the educational method, Atty. Longo insisted on three points: Prayer, Study, Work. But above all, Love, that love for children which exacts a total dedication and continual sacrifice; which requires that one live the life as that of the child in order to be always ready to receive him, to correct him, and, if necessary, to punish him with dignity and firmness.

These were the ideals which the Brothers of the Christian Schools represented for Bartolo Longo, "the pious, modest and hard-working Sons of St. John Baptist De La Salle... belonging to a remarkable order because it is made up of all laymen, without any priests, which disposes them for only one mission, humble in appearance but most noble in reality: the moral and intellectual education of children...".

Bro. Rodolfo MEOLI