**Memories around the Sanctuary of Somasca and the grace obtained by the people through the intercession of St. Jerome Emiliani**

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Sanctuary of St. Jerome Emiliani, Memories among the large number of faithful, devotion and graces obtained through the intercession of St. Jerome Emiliani in the year 1861.

Snow had recently melted on the month of January 1861 when the numerous pilgrimages to this Shrine had begun as usual in the other years. During Lent, and especially near Easter, as well as immediately after, they increased more and more. In the month of May, the number of devotees doubled not only on holidays, but also on weekdays, to bless the seeds of silk berries. On Sundays of this month there were several parishes in procession, and on the tenth day, besides a good number of neighboring countries, there was also a parish priest of a village near Como with about sixty parishioners, for whom he celebrated Mass. Even last year he had done so. And in the same month another parish priest from Monza also went here, and he celebrated Mass. He was assisted by the people that he had led here. Even in June, July and August, although the sun was very hot, there were no shortages of pilgrims. Indeed they were much more numerous than the other years. The pilgrims were mostly lodged in Lecco (despite the nearby baths of Barco) and came from the inhabitants of Lecco, very devoted to St. Jerome, they were excited to visit and pray for their needs, assuring them of a certain healing of their ills. The number of pilgrims was truly extraordinary and moving during the day and during the night, on the 18th, 19th and 20th of August for the solemn Triduum made in honor of St. Jerome, to ask for the rain necessary for the arid fields; because of the scorching, many wells and many sources of water had gone dry.

On the 18th, the third Sunday of August, at about eight o'clock the Sacred relic of St. Jerome was transported from his Chapel to the Main Altar with the same solemnity of the 8th of February for the embellishment of the church; with greater decorum and emotion for the sudden arrival of the people and clergy of Vercurago, who came in procession, the celebration had started.

After the celebration, and after having placed the urn of the Saint in the usual place of the main altar in the midst of so many lamps, we heard from the celebrant the instruction and prayer that marked the ninth day of the Novena of our Holy Founder, and ended with the singing of the Hymn (Al buon Mian che Padre) To the good Miani the Father. About half a day some Masses were celebrated according to the convenience of the pilgrims. At four o'clock in the afternoon Vespers was sung with three celebrants, after which the parish priest of Vercurago, Fr. Giovanni Cominelli gave the people a short speech and ended with the singing of the Litany of the Saints and their respective prayers. The Church remained open until very late for the satisfaction of the faithful, whose overwhelming number had made it almost impossible to transport the corpse of Maria Valsecchi (called Lena) who died the day before. At sunset, a Somascan Priest, Custodian of Valletta, descending to Somasca and passing, expressed the desire to have someone for a companion to climb the Holy Stairs, praying according to the tradition. Half an hour later, four heads of family came to the Sagristia to assure the aforesaid Father, who not only some, but the whole population of Somasca was at his command, ready to follow him at any hour he liked; and he settled down at one hour past midnight in the Oratory of Our Lady of Sorrow, where St. Jerome died, because during the day the heat was unbearable on the road that was made out of stones.

At eleven o'clock on the 19th, at the sound of the bell, all went immediately to the place indicated, and there on their knees, the Priest intoned the Miserere psalm and initiated the procession (without cross) towards Valletta. When they arrived at the (Scala Santa) Holy Stair, and again on their knees, the men on the steps before the Priest, the women behind, all loudly recited the act of sorrow and climbed the Stair reciting the our Father, Ave and Gloria, everyone genuflecting to each step up to the Hermitage, from where they left in good order, praying, until Valletta. Here, having entered the Oratory, The Somascan Priest recited the prayers to the five Most Holy Wounds of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to Our Lady of Sorrow, and to St. Jerome, as they were printed on the hanging tablets; and the priest Luigi Valsecchi, who was always close to the Somascan Priests, celebrated Mass, after which, free and happy, they returned to Somasca, where they met with the people of Vercurago, who went up in procession, singing, to visit St. Jerome and sing the solemn votive Mass and find also in the Church the parishioners of Rossino with the preist saying the Mass; it was only three o’ clack in the morning.

A truly extraordinary spectacle was this night, which made even the most different people cry for emotion. Seeing people spontaneously gathered in prayer, in the hour of the deepest silence of the night, advancing slowly, in perfect order, in procession, while praying, under the dim light of a veiled moon, prostrate on the ground repentant, loudly begs from God mercy in the very place where our Saint made harsh penances; hear voices like moans of children united with the prayers of women, and almost suffocated by the strong voices of men, rise in the thick of the forest to ask for mercy. And the echo descended into the valley in the nearby towns of Vercurago, Garlate and Olginate.

Admiring the sight of two groups of pilgrims, in song; that of Vercurago rising, that of Rossino descending. The whitish lights are now noticed, now they hide among the leafy woods; they merged with the rays of a pale and melancholy moon. The whole presented a true image of penitent Nineveh, and almost, I would say, a sort of Universal judgment.

After the solemn Masses of the two Parishes had ended, and returned to their homes, more Masses were celebrated, and at ten o'clock a Somascan Priest sang a Mass. Until half a day, besides the continuous assistance of the Confratelli del Sacramento, there was a fair amount of devotees. After lunch, after the rumor of what had happened in the past night, some silky factories were closed, so that the workers could also satisfy their devotion. This is why the Vespers was solemnly sung and finished with the singing of the Litany of the Saints, like yesterday, there was an extraordinary presence of pilgrims that continued until very late. We saw groups on their knees praying in front of the church, although already closed because it was already late night. Also on that evening the people of Somasca presented themselves, indeed they prayed the Custodian Father of Valletta to guide the people of Somasca in procession, as in the last night, to the Sanctuary, climbing the Holy Staircase and praying confident to obtain the much desired rain.

At one in the morning, therefore on the 20th day, the last day of the Triduum, the people of Somasca were found together with many pilgrims. That night, it was a wonder to see from every alley and from every path men and youngsters coming from Erve, Carenno, Lorentino, Rossino, Monte Marenzo, etc. etc. not that from the territory of Lecco and Olginate, and all join those of Somasca to pray, repent and climb the Holy Staircase, as in the past night. Once in Valletta, the priest Luigi Valsecchi celebrated Mass. Then, sing the Litanies of the Blessed Sacrament and kissed the Relic of the Saint, everyone went wherever they wanted. The sky, meanwhile, was covered with clouds. While descending they spoke of the goodness of the Lord God, and of the powerful intercession of St. Jerome Miani, they hear from far away the sound of people walking and the murmur of many and varied voices. They stop to listen. Here are the people of Vercurago, led by two Coadjutors Priests, who imitating the people of Somasca, they go up on their knees, praying, the Holy Stairs, they celebrate the Holy Mass, they sing the litanies of the Blessed Virgin, they kissed the sacred Relic, then they descend.

Meanwhile, the large population of Calolzio in procession arrived in Somasca, singing, and with many confreres in the Cape, and with the clergy who sang the solemn votive Mass, and then departed. Everyone says, and the fact has shown it several times, that those of Calolzio when they come to Somasca in a procession to beg for water, always come back with their backs ... wet! And in this way, St. Jerome, they say, takes revenge ... from the Saint, making good for evil. Those who read the life of St. Jerome Miani will know that he was mistreated, insulted by the inhabitants of Calolzio and badly driven out of their country. It is known that the Mayor of that country, the bitter enemy of Miani, was severely chastened by God with painful illness in his legs, and who was brought to the body of the saint before he was buried, obtained perfect healing when he prayed; "If you are truly holy, oh Jerome, show it to me, pity me for mercy, heal me, make good for evil". So many times St. Jerome returned the evil with good! This time, the habitants of Calolzio come to Somasca passing under a cloud-covered sky, and come back warmed by the scorching rays of the sun. Poor things! How afflicted they are! They look pale and melancholy in the face and say, sadly: "Ah! Miserable us, even St. Jerome has abandoned us! Ah! The iniquity of our times is too great. They offend the Pope! Persecute the Church! And the Lord makes it pay to everyone; it does not rain anymore!" But on the way others are more reasonable, and animated with greater hope. “The Triduum is not finished yet. There are still many hours before evening. Here, here are so many clouds! Courage! We return to Somasca to see to put the Saint in his Chapel. There will also be the sermon! Who knows? Before evening it could ... rain ".

Meanwhile in Somasca Masses were celebrated and one was solemnly sung by the Somascan Fathers at ten o'clock. And the people prayed, and begged. At twelve o'clock other factories were closed in the neighborhood, and the pilgrims were once again gathering and taking courage to trust in St. Jerome. They climbed, and descended to Somasca, and here they came dripping with sweat. In a short time the Church was full and the places that surround it were full of people. And the sky? The sky is covered with clouds, but the sun with its scorching rays scatters them. And the poor farmer? And needy worker? They put their trust in their protector St. Jerome Emiliani before whom, with sobs and tears, they pray and plead. At five and a half hours the Vespers begin with the greatest solemnity possible in Somasca and many priests are present. And in a short time the church was darkened, and when they arrived at the Orphanis Patrem hymn, flashes flashed from the windows, and a deep thunder was heard roaring in the distance.

The people are shaking, the eyes of all are turned to the windows, and in the face of everyone one reads with renewed amazement the hope and, I would almost say, the certainty of obtaining grace. The Rev. Luigi Pittaluga, then our novice, at the end of the Vespers rose in the pulpit, and also full of confidence in our Holy Founder, frankly said: "Go, devout people, your faith has obtained what you desired. The water is about to fall. Soon the rain will water your countryside, and you will bless the Most High who fulfilled your prayers, so that you may present them to his Divine Majesty from our most powerful intercessor and his servant St. Jerome Miani. This Saint, true prodigy of charity with all, could not but forget you in such a painful circumstance, after your assiduous and fervent prayers, day and night, accompanied by groans and affectionate sighs ".

To these expressions all those present stare at the speaker, waiting impatiently for his prophecy to occur. The speaker continues in the fervor of his speech. Many people are seen entering the church raising their hats. And faithful push each other and gently squeeze, because everyone wants to enter. This movement takes strength, and forces one to place the breast on the shoulders of others, and without any disorder pushes them all towards the altar. And why? Here are new flashes, thunderous thunders, showers of water! "It is raining! It's raining! "Exclaim the poor peasants out in the halls, happy and jubilant," It's raining! " The speaker continues with greater force and more warmly. And the people? The people are ecstatic, dumb and cry. I confess the truth: I was seated in the presbytery and from here I observed carefully how much it had in church. I read on the faces of each one the impressions that such an extraordinary event can make in the hearts of good, faithful and devout Christians. I was so impressed, that I poured out abundant tears that bathed the cope of which I was dressed. I could not even hide the sobs of inexplicable joy from the surrounding neighbors.

After the discourse, the litanies of the Saints and the prayers as in the two previous days were sung, and the prayer to St. Jerome as in the first. Then with the two priests, the urn that had been placed on the altar was set. The hymn Orphanis Patrem was intoned, and the clergy with beautiful orders and torches passed among the many lights of the Confraternity of the Sacrament lined up in a double row, bringing the sacred relics of St. Jerome to the marble and precious altar, in the magnificent and elegant chapel built in his honor. The church remained open even after the function for some time, always packed with people ... because the water continued and continued until ten o'clock in the evening!

This was truly a triumph for our Saint, whose name the people were blessed when they returned to their homes. Here, they changed their wet clothes; they gathered in groups and talked with such joy and they wiped the tears of joy from their eyes. It was thru this miracle that many people were attracted to go and visit the Shrine of St. Jerome in Somasca.

On the day of the feast of St. Jerome, not only the hotels of the neighboring places were all occupied by pilgrims, but the streets of Vercurago were also cluttered with carts and carriages. You could hardly get through it. Many families of Vercurago and also of Somasca barely found time to cook their meal, because the number of the pilgrims gathered around the cooking place was just too great.

The church of Vercurago and that of Somasca were always crowded with people from dawn to midday to participate in Holy Mass. The two Masses that were celebrated, all the feasts, at Valletta, could not suffice for so many multitudes of peasants and workers who flocked to it. On weekdays many citizens of Monza, Milan and Bergamo came to venerate this saint. I said; "... to venerate", because I have seen most of the citizens demonstrate faith, piety and devotion to the Shrine. And I say this with certainty, because with great edification I have seen not a few rich and noble lords ascend the Holy Stairs on their knees, praying, kissing the Relic of the Saint with respect and devotion, and doing, here in Somasca what perhaps out of human respect they would do in the city; that is ... to confess and to communicate sacramentally.

I was never interested to know in particular who the people were coming to Somasca. I remember, however, two Accounts; a Countess and a Milanese nobleman and of three Countesses and a Count, of Bergamo, who spontaneously presented themselves before leaving the Sanctuary. There were also many educational institutions from Lecco, Monza, Milan and Bergamo, male and female religious families who came to Somasca. There were also priests who presented themselves, like in the other years, who came to pay respect to our Saint. Within few days I counted up to twenty-four clergymen among whom the Priest Paolo Bosisio of Monza, who was on his vacation in Olginate. He came almost every day for three continuous months (and he was doing this for many years already) to celebrate Holy Mass.

I was not talking about the second week of November, when the Spiritual Exercises were given to the clergy of the Diocese of Bergamo, since everyone can already imagine that each priest yearned to celebrate at the altar of the Saint, or at Valletta, but because there were already thirty-eight priests, they could not all be accommodated.

I cannot just be quite but to tell the honor given to our Holy Founder by the visit of many ecclesiastical dignitaries, Canons, Monsignors and especially of the Most illustrious and most Reverend Monsignor Pietro Luigi Speranza, true zealous Pastor, true apostle, who every year as soon as he had the opportunity to go to this valley of San Martino, visit Saint Jerome in his chapel and also to Valletta. And in this year he came twice, first in September for the blessing of the bells of Vercurago, and second in November, for the Pastoral visit to our parish church. It was on his visit, of pure devotion to the Shrine, that he showed his desire to me, and even begged me to write, at least in short, the principal events of the year at this Shrine.

The readers might not believe that, with the end of October and the beginning of the winter, the number of pilgrimages never ceases. They always go on, not only on feast days, but also on the ordinary days someone arrives to visit Saint Jerome and ask to bless something for devotion. And it can truly be said that neither heat nor cold nor rain can completely prevent these pilgrims to come. Indeed, not even the snow, because, many times, pilgrims were seen climbing the Holy Stairs, while it was snowing.

And with my own eyes I admired some go up the Holy Stairs praying kneeling on each of the one hundred and twenty-four steps barefoot on a good snowstorm! They hoped to get the healing from their gout. And soldiers? Oh how many of these too! And especially those who fought with Garibaldi; after the battles of wars in southern Italy, they came to thank Saint Jerome for preserving them from death. They said they had promised to visit the place of his penances.

Someone may say, "Who knows how many troubles these many people create!" It is not true! I have carefully observed by means of guarding the doors of the church, I have never been able to detect any disorder, not only inside the church, but also inside the enclosures of the Sanctuary. The devotion of some spurred the devotion of those who came. Even in the days of greater frequency of pilgrims, while the Holy Masses were celebrated, in the church and in the crowded halls of the people such silence was preserved, that from the beginning to the end there was nothing to be heard but the flow of miraculous water.

One Sunday, ten, or twelve lords of Monza, having come only for fun, had not yet heard the Mass. I offered them the great kneel-room of the sacristy so they could participate in mass with less inconvenience. They accepted it willingly, and although they did not show any devotion, in seeing so many people united in prayer with so much recollection and in perfect silence, they marveled, and looking at each other they knelt down. Once the Mass was over, they too, all twelve, with the multitude to kiss the Saint's Relic. Thanking me, in the end. They told me that they would never have imagined seeing such devotion.

Companies of national guards who carried weapons also came ... wine barrels! They came to civilian bands, with their instruments, in uniform, and even these ... with baskets and bottles. They worried me a lot. I introduced myself to their superiors before they entered the Valletta enclosures. I begged them not to allow any disorder that could disturb the many devotees present here. They promised it and kept their word: they visited the church, took the blessing, kissed the relic and then played in honor of St. Jerome and then ... they went up the mountain. After the fun, they went back to Valletta, and they played again ... always in honor of St. Jerome. I made coffee for the band leaders in a while. When they left they wanted to play along the way and had already prepared enough songs all the way from the Sanctuary to the state road. But, I informed the Count Conte Director of the band, that in Somasca there was an ongoing catechism, on the instant he made to suspend the playing of the band. So they crossed the country without any noise.

This last news to some may seem so small, so that you can even leave out. Of course, in other times I would not have written them. But in these years, when piety and devotion is everywhere mocked and insulted, and priests and friars made signs to the most obnoxious insults, it is no small thing to tell the truth: here the devotion triumphs and grows in every class of people, and the priest has not yet had the slightest disappointment, and is even respected and obeyed even by those, who for some of their carelessness are corrected.

Whoever wishes to know the cause of such a great frequency of pilgrims and of such great devotion, I answer that it is faith. The many healings of bodily illnesses obtained are fruits of faith, and they are obtained every day by the devotees who are recommended to St. Jerome, or who make use of the miraculous water, made to spring from the mountain by the saint when he was alive. Not a single record of the healings of the last years was left undocumented, they were already written and some printed with the necessary ecclesiastical licenses. I only refer to those of the years 1860 and 1861. To write them all, as they are believed by the people for ... miracles, it would take too much time, and a nice ... booklet! So even these two years will record only those special cases, in which, according to the judgment of the men of medicine, it was not enough to save the lives of those poor wretches, or to free them from their infirmities.

From 20 to 25 people left here the black dress, as a sign of gratitude for the healing obtained through the intercession of Saint Jerome Emiliani. But since nature and medicine have cooperated in these healings, I have not recorded them in the book of wonders. And I do not even think of real prodigies now, although the relatives of these healed men (mostly children aged two to twelve) claim to be ... miracles. Instead, I will refer to the following healings as prodigious and extraordinary:

1. Giuseppe Barindelli of Perledo, a leg had been crushed against a wall by a large stone fallen from a mountain, and the doctors were already in the act of amputating it. His sons and his wife and Mr. Giuseppe himself did not want to, they said they wanted to first recommend themselves to Saint Jerome. He recovered from that infirmity.

2. Angela Bertosa of the province of Como, recovered the sight completely lost due to a strong inflammation in the eyes, and that the doctors declared irremediable.

3. Luigi Napoleone Cocchi di Merate was perfectly recovered from the sickness suffered (mal caduco) for the period of seven years.

4. Spada Teresa, of Merate, who was only two years old, was perfectly healed from an apoplexy that had made her deformed in the limbs and in the face so that even the doctors could not ... look at the baby for a long time, because she looked like a baby. .. monster. They declared themselves totally ... powerless. After wearing the little blessed black robe and her parents made a vow to visit St. Jerome, she began to heal, and in April of the year 1861, the eighth month after they made their promise, they brought their daughter here in the state of good health and prosperity, so well restored, it was difficult to believe that it was the same little girl who, in September of the past year, was ... disgusting.

5. Angela Barufaldi, from Tesena (Valsassina), almost dying, recommended herself to Saint Jerome Emiliani. She recovered in a few days from a very serious wound of the head, caused by a large iron, fallen from the top of the forge. And without the care of the doctors ... who did not find any cure, she was healed!

6. Annibale Ricordi, from Milan, receiving the Blessed Sacraments, healed from a kind of madness. Then again he was seriously ill of an unknown sickness and he was operated seven times in the veins by the doctors, who then, they realized that he was suffering from an infectious disease. So he went from bad to worse until he fell to the last extremes, and gave no other sign of life than the movement of the eyes and strong phlegm that suffocated him. The doctors could not do anything to save him. But the mother, a devotee of St. Jerome, remembered to have a small bottle of water brought from Valletta, where she had been two years ago. Trusting in the protection of St. Jerome, she gave a teaspoon of water to the dying son, promising with a vow to pay a visit to the Shrine of Somasca if her son will be healed. Annibale Ricordi immediately began to free himself from the phlegm and gave signs of improvement. A few days later he left his bed ... to the amazement of the doctors and relatives! This was the account of his mother regarding his heaing, who went to Somasca on the 12th of December, to thank Saint Jerome.

7. Rachele Casati, from Milan, through the intercession of our Holy Founder she was healed. The doctors had found out that she was suffering from a horrible swelling of the body that suffocated her, caused by vegetables, perhaps poisoned, that she had eaten, a few days after she had given birth.

8. Lastly, I describe the grace obtained by Giulia Pirovani, a lady from Lecco. After four involuntary consecutive abortions, she dressed in blessed black dress for a whole year, in honor of S. Jerome Emiliani. On the 25th day of December, Christmas, she brought a small wooden tablet as a sign of gratitude to St. Jerome, for having received the joy of motherhood. The wooden small tablet was exposed with another eight wooden tablets on the 8th of February, the main feast of our Holy Founder.