

Father Joseph Marrazzo

Simply a Priest

GAETANO
PASSARELLI



Father Joseph Marrazzo

1 - San Vito dei Normanni (BR).

Joseph Marrazzo was born on May 5, 1917 in a family of farmers. "Peppino", as he was commonly called by all, is docile, revealing, as well, a simple and genuine piety.

2 - Oria (BR).

In October 1930, the boy was invited to study in Oria in the Apostolic School of the Rogationists.

3 - Trani.

On September 29, 1934, he entered the novitiate, in the House of Trani; took the habit and became Brother Joseph Marrazzo. On March 29, 1936 he made the first profession of religious vows.

4 - Messina.

Brother Joseph was sent to the Mother House in Messina, in the Shrine of Saint Anthony, where he arrived on August 14, 1938. On September 24, 1940, he definitely consecrated himself to the Lord. Meanwhile, he studied theology to become a priest.

5 - Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto (ME).

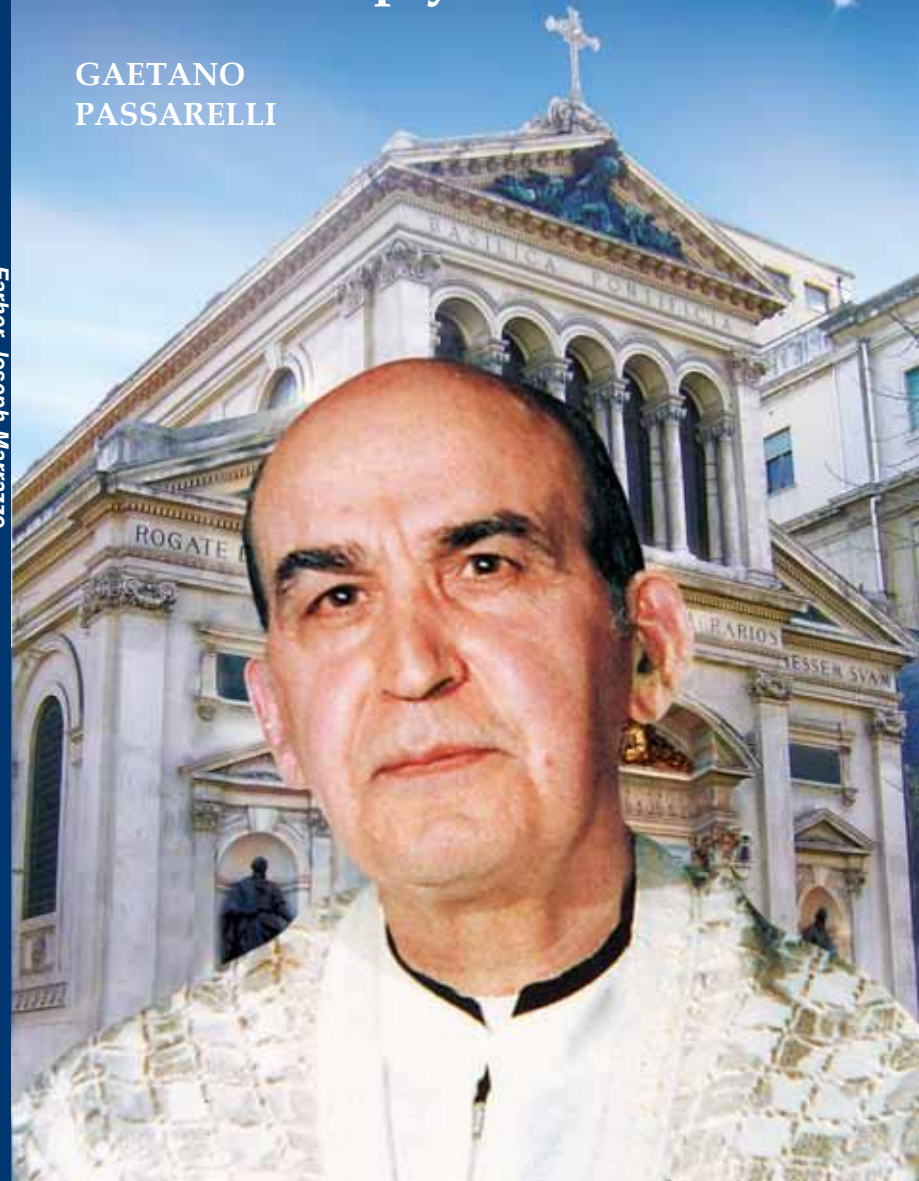
He was ordained priest on May 9, 1943 in the Mother Church of Barcellona. For more than forty years he dedicated himself to the ministry of confession and of spiritual direction in the Basilica Shrine of Saint Anthony in Messina.

6 - Padua.

In 1956 the superiors decided to transfer him to the House of Padua with the task of spiritual father of the seminarians and vocation promoter. The following year he returned to Messina as Rector of the Shrine of Saint Anthony.

7 - Zagarolo (RM).

From 1972 to 1974 he was Vice Superior in the House of Zagarolo. After having lived a most humble and intense life of love and self-giving, Father Joseph Marrazzo, died in Messina on November 30, 1992.



Gaetano Passarelli was born in Castrovillari (Cosenza) and lives in Rome. He was a Professor of Byzantine History at the University of Chieti and Roma³, of Oriental Spirituality at the Institute of Medieval and Franciscan Studies in the Pontifical University Antonianum, and of Byzantine liturgy at the Pontifical Oriental Institute. He is editor-in-chief of the magazine *Oriental Christian Studies* and the historical consultant to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. He has numerous scientific publications on iconography, Byzantine liturgy and history translated into several languages. He is author of biographies of Italian and Brazilian personalities.

On the cover.

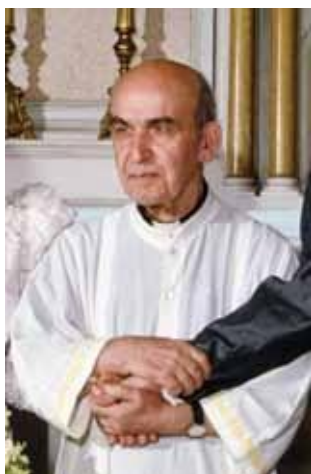
Portrait: Father Joseph Marrazzo.

At the background: Basilica Shrine of Saint Anthony, Messina.

Gaetano Passarelli

Father Joseph Marrazzo

Simply a Priest



TEXTS

Gaetano Passarelli

PHOTOS

Central Historical Archive of the Rogationists
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GRAPHICS

ArancioneArt

TRANSLATION

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From the original:

Padre Giuseppe Marrazzo,

Semplicemente prete

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Presentation

It is my joy to present and recommend to you the reading of this short biography of Father Giuseppe Marrazzo. “Don Peppino” - as he was commonly called - was “simply a priest” according to the Heart of Christ in the footsteps of Saint Hannibal Mary Di Francia, founder of the Rogationists and of the Daughters of Divine Zeal.

This new biography is drawn from the writings of the Servant of God and from the many testimonies of those who knew, loved and revered him as a holy priest who was always “on duty”, day and night. The numerous biographical details and the writings of Father Marrazzo allow us to touch the greatness of his soul as well as his deep spirituality: a simple priest who has transformed his existence into a continual prayer for vocations; a zealous priest animated by pastoral charity towards all, especially the sinners, the sick, the poor, and - in the words of Pope Francis - those who are rejected by the society.

The pleasant and smooth reading is just in the style of the author, Gaetano Passarelli, whom I thank wholeheartedly for this new service to the Church and to the Family of the Rogate. The narrative style immediately creates empathy and feeds the desire of knowing, inspiring in the heart of the reader the will to live and to witness with his own life the merciful humility and simplicity of this holy priest, a reflection of the merciful Father.

The book traces a journey of life from his vocation to religious consecration, to his fruitful and tireless priestly ministry up to his birth to heaven (November 30, 1992), which is truly marked by the heroic and daily fidelity to his priestly commitment. In Father Joseph Marrazzo we find a simple and humble life, totally identified with the Gospel and the Rogate (Mt 9:36-38), in the service to the Church of Messina and to the Con-

gregation of the Rogationists. A service that is expressed in the total gift of himself to the people, who are looking for him and that he himself - as the Good Shepherd – was searching without sparing his time and physical and spiritual energies. Following the example of Saint Hannibal, he favored the poor and the sick in soul and body, contemplating in them the suffering face of Jesus Christ.

The ordinary life of Father Marrazzo manifests the greatness of the shepherd with the merciful heart conformed to the heart of Christ the Good Shepherd. He clearly reveals a passion for Christ and compassion for souls to be saved and led back to the the Father's arms. With his life Don Peppino has shown that the glory of the Lord corresponds with the salvation of souls.

By a happy coincidence this biography is published in the imminence of the centenary of the birth of the Servant of God (May 5, 1917) and during the Jubilee of Mercy, during which the sacrament of reconciliation has a special place. Father Marrazzo was an apostle of God's mercy, and in particular of the sacrament of confession. His action can be identified with the confession, a divine and human mediation of forgiveness. It's not by chance that his frequent contact with the souls who sought God's mercy, and his relations with the people and families, has made Don Peppino a real father, who is able to welcome the suffering, but above all to show them the way that leads to Lord of peace.

I hope that the reading of this biography would lead to a better knowledge of Father Marrazzo's life, his ministry, his holiness, his generous service towards all, especially the least.

*Fr. Angelo Ademir Mezzari, RCJ
Superior General of the Rogationists*

The family

Luigi Marrazzo, a farmer from San Vito dei Normanni, in the province of Brindisi, was married to Maria Concetta Parisi. Their family was blessed with five children – Vito, Bartolomeo, Adolfo, Maria and Filomena –, when on May 5, 1917 – few days before the apparition of the Virgin in Fatima – another child was born and was baptized on the following day in the Parish of St. Dominic by Fr. Giovanni Melacca, with the name Joseph, as willed by his parents.

The family was further blessed with two more girls – Lucia and Palma –, and with the last child, Luigi. For those who had a farm and animals the children were a blessing, because they were considered not only as mouths to be feed but above all as help, needed for the works in the fields and household chores.

During his elementary school Joseph did not show much interest to study, preferring to stay in the farm in the company of his father and older brothers. He himself revealed this, years after, as he wrote in a prayer:

“Thank you, Lord!



Maria Concetta Parisi, his mother.



Baptismal font in the parish of Saint Dominic, where he was baptized.



*House of
Marrazzo
family,
where Peppino
was born.*

You have chosen me in the midst of the fields and from behind the sheep, a poor shepherd, calling me to such a great mission: to be You for the souls". A closer look, in all his apostolic activity, he always kept the "mentality" of the shepherd as he himself confessed in that same prayer: "How many souls you have sent me; I tried to welcome them with your own love".

Like all children of the town, he frequented catechism class, was admitted to the First Communion and on June 3, 1928 received the sacrament of Confirmation through the Archbishop of Brindisi Mons. Tommaso Valeri.



*Maria Concetta
with children.
The child in
her arms
is Peppino
(1918).*

The vocation

Peppino", as he was commonly called by all, was docile, revealing at the same time, a simple and genuine piety, which did not escape from the watchful eye both of his mother and that of Msgr. Francesco Passante. This last, while presenting an unassuming personality, he enjoyed great prestige and respectability for his dedication to apostolic mission and academic affairs, so as to be called the quintessential "Archpriest". There were many boys whom he sent to the priesthood. However, this time, the Lord wanted the mother, Maria Concetta, to be the one to mediate in his choice.

In fact, about the origin of his vocation, Joseph recounted: "Jesus called me, making me hear his voice through my mother: 'Peppino, do you also want to go to become a Priest?'. I replied: 'Yes'. Then everything else followed".

The woman spoke with the Archpriest and he directed him to Oria, to the Apostolic School of the Rogationists, which he knew well and where he had directed other boys. After the terrible earthquake of Messina on December 28, 1908, Canon Hannibal Mary Di Francia, founder of the Rogationists and the Daughters of Divine Zeal, had been welcomed by the Bishop of Oria, Msgr. Antonio Di Tommaso, so that the works of the Anthonian Institutes of Fr. Di Francia could continue their beneficial works: on



*Saint Hannibal
Mary Di Francia,
founder of the
Rogationists and
of the Daughters
of Divine Zeal
(1924).*

February 19, 1909 the Daughters of Divine Zeal together with the orphans, settled in a former Benedictine monastery, which became the Female Anthonian Institute of “San Benedetto”; while the Rogationists, on September 28 of that same year, entered the former convent of “San Pasquale” of the Alcantarini Franciscans, thus starting the Male Anthonian Institute, with the school and workshops of “Arts and Crafts” for orphans, launched by Father Pantaleone Palma, and the Apostolic school for boys who wanted to become Rogationists.

It was exactly here where Maria Concetta, together with her eldest son Vito accompanied Peppino, on a “carriage”, on October 20, 1930. This episode of his entrustment to Brother Carmelo Drago, future Superior General, but at the time was in charge of the seminarians, remained particularly engraved in the memory of the young boy and intertwined with what will be his Marian devotion centered on the Mother of Good Counsel, blossoming into his most cherished idea of the spiritual priestly Motherhood.

Oria (BR).
*Institute of the
Rogationists,
Convent of
San Pasquale
(1940).*



Years later, he noted on his diary: “Accompanied by my mother I left our house around noon. Once in Oria mother entrusted me to Father Carmelo. I could not live away from my mother; I had decided to return home the coming Christmas, when she would come to visit me. My mother came, but I did not have enough courage to talk about it. Then gradually, I continued on my journey. Accompanied by the celestial Mother of Good Counsel, I arrived. The scene of Calvary is repeated, Jesus gave me to his Mother: ‘Woman, behold your son’. ‘Son, behold your Mother’”.

In the Apostolic School, Joseph began to breathe the ambiance of concentration and study, but also of recreation outdoors along with many friends. Certainly life was hard, because it is based on a discipline that is strictly cadenced by schedules, duties and obligations; it would still have been harder if he had remained with his father in the farm or pursued the military career, so he did not worry that much.

Soon the events that help instil emotions and dream goals began to unfold. At the time, in fact, there was a sort of stages of promotion for the seminarians, which usually took place on the feast of St. Joseph: the “simple” seminarian at the start of third year of high school became an “aspirant” seminarian, then in the early months of the fifth year of high school a “postulant” seminarian, and at the end of that school year he enters to the novitiate. These promotions were not automatic, but were decided by the superiors and marked by the giving of a medal to the deserving ones, causing joy and enthusiasm, but also sadness and tears for those excluded.



*Father Carmelo
Drago who
received him
in the Institute
of Oria (BR).*



The image of the Mother of Good Counsel that he had always in his room.

As a “simple” seminarian, Peppino attended the investiture of the religious habit of seven “postulants” seminarians, who became novices on December 8, 1930, feast of the Immaculate Conception. It was such a great excitement for him because two among them were from his hometown: Giovanni Carbotti and Vincenzo Citiolo.

Marrazzo was promoted to be an “aspirant” during the school year 1932-33, receiving a religious medal pinned to his chest, then he completed the lower secondary school, and was transferred along with other seminarians to Trani, to begin the fourth year Junior High School in September.

In 1934, after the Mass of the Solemnity of St. Joseph, the Director Fr. Domenico Santoro admitted to the Postulancy twelve seminarians, including Joseph Marrazzo.

Like his other companions who received the badge of the *Rogate*, he felt encouraged to a greater commitment to the Rogationist formation so as to understand better the vocational charism transmitted by the Founder. Saint Hannibal Mary Di Francia, while still young, before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, understood the value of the command of Jesus: *Pray (Rogate) the Lord of the harvest to send good laborers into his harvest* (Mt 9:35ff. and Lk 10:2ff.). He had wanted to elevate it into an Institution by founding the Rogationists of the Heart of Jesus and the Daughters of Divine Zeal of the Heart of Jesus, to spread it and to dedicate themselves to the care of orphans and the poor.

The chronicle of the Male House of Trani in 1934 has recorded the “Closing of the Month of May” with these words: “Undoubtedly, one of the most beautiful and special characteristics of our Congregation is

House of Trani, where he had the Novitiate (1935).



a tender devotion to the great Mother of God, a devotion that our Father Founder wanted to be kept always alive in the community, with its totally brilliant industries. During this holy month, we all gathered together in the study hall, to pay our filial homage to the Divine Mother, who, surrounded by lights and flowers, appeared lovely to our eyes.

All, postulants and seminarians, with fervent speeches, we tried to do our best to honor the Blessed Virgin”.

The “postulants” to whom we refer are those twelve who had been promoted in the previous feast of St. Joseph, including Peppino, who delivered his speech to Mary on the day of his turn. Thus, consolidating all the more in him that profound Marian devotion which will characterize all his life.

Trani (BA).
*Marian mini-
congress (1935).*



Rogationist

On September 29, 1934, feast of St. Michael the Archangel, he entered the novitiate, still in the House of Trani, donning his cassock and became Brother Joseph Marrazzo. Then a journey in search of perfection began. Years later he will say: “So far, the Mother of Good Counsel advised me through her beloved priests whom she placed along the path of my life.” The first among them was the Novice Master, Father Domenico Santoro. With his help he was able to identify the defect that was the root of all his other defects. “The predominant passion – as he wrote - is that of selfishness, for which I have difficulty to sympathize with others, I judge wrongly, I’m envious.” So his resolution was: “I have to be affable with everyone, to ask for a tender heart to Jesus and Mary, to abound in acts of charity, to be familiar with all. I will think that the souls of the confreres are souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus. They are souls consecrated to God. I must pray for their sanctification and so, by the grace of the Lord, I will overcome the predominant passion”.

It was, indeed, a resolution that will characterize his future priestly ministry. Hence, as if he engraved in his heart the exhortation of the Holy Founder: “Fall in love with Jesus Christ!” And when he became a priest, someone will ask him: “Father, what can I do for you?”, he will always reply: “If you want to help me, love Jesus!”.



*Father
Domenico
Santoro,
Master of
Novices.*

The one and a half year of novitiate was, therefore, not only challenging but fruitful as well, and in the morning of March 29, 1936 he made his first profession in the hands of the Superior General, Father Francis Vitale. A consecration to the Lord that he renewed annually until 1939.

The formative curriculum of the Rogationists prescribed that before starting theological studies, religious students spend a year of practical training among the boys of the Anthonian Institutes. Brother Marrazzo was assigned to the Mother House of Messina, at the Shrine of St. Anthony, where he arrived on August 14, 1938. He dedicated himself fully to the orphans, yet without ever neglecting “to spend some time in the chapel after the last evening prayers, having requested and obtained the permission of the superior”.

His prayer is characterized by a particular anxiety; it is noted in his diary: “Sometimes I do not obtain order and silence from the boys, despite showing firmness and raising my voice. With regard to the treatment of children, I see that by punishing them I could never get them to love and obey me out of love and not of fear.” For this, he prays: “O Mary, let me find the means and enlightenment to gain the love of the orphans and bring them all to Jesus.” He discovered and put into practice how in educating it is more important to love than to impose oneself shouting.

On 24 September 1940, at the age of 23, he consecrated himself definitively to the Lord with these words: “I profess the perpetual vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and zealous fulfillment of the com-

mand of the Heart of Jesus: *Rogate ergo Dominum ut Messis mittat Operarios in Messem suam*, according to our Constitutions. May the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculate, our patron Saints, help and sustain me. Amen”.

Brother Joseph Marrazzo thus became a Rogationist forever.



Father Marrazzo as a young Professed Rogationist.

Priest



Father
Francesco
Vitale, former
Superior
general of the
Rogationists.

The Rogationists did not have their own school of theology in Messina, so their students frequented the archdiocesan seminary, located in the bishop's residence at the center of the city. At the end of the year of practical training, Brother Marrazzo writes on his diary: "Lord, I want to study because this is your will. Oh Jesus, teach me to pray while studying, let me progress in study; I will do everything in your glory and the salvation my soul and of all the souls".

In that year there were about 19 Rogationists students of theology. Unfortunately, the difficulty in study was aggravated due to the war. In fact, for prudence, the major seminary of theologians was moved from the bishop's residence to the minor seminary of the Giostra village, and here the academic year 1939-1940 began on October 9, 1939. On this regard, the chronicler of the Mother House noted: "In the impossibility to have an available vehicle, given the restrictive laws in the use of transportation due to the shortage of gasoline (in view of the war), the students were forced to take the public buses. May the Lord protect them and hopefully give us the grace to find a suitable solution." With Italy's declaration of war against France and England, protective measures were taken against possible air strikes by setting blackout schedules and establishing refuges in case of alarm.

In the diary of House it is noted: "Due to serious difficulties for lack of means of transport, the idea came immediately to try establishing the internal school of theology" and finally the decision came on October 31: "It was announced in the evening in the refectory, amidst the lively joy and surprise of the community, who did not have any hint of having an internal theological school. *Deo Gratias*". In fact, the internal theological school began on November 4, 1941. So Brother Marrazzo and the other brothers of the same year attended the last two years of theology in the internal school of the Mother House with fewer dangers and inconveniences.

And here came also the bombings and nocturnal alarms which was initially sporadic and later became more and more frequent: British warplanes flew over the city, on their way to Naples and when returning to their bases in Malta.

After days of relative calm, on the night of June 27, 1942, there were two alarms fol-

Messina.
*Shrine of
Saint Anthony
and Mother House
of the Rogationists
(1940).*





Barcellona (ME).
*Priestly
ordination,
May 9, 1943.*

lowed by heavy bombardments. The Cathedral was hit with major damages and some bombs also exploded a few meters from the Mother House of the Rogationists and the church of St. Anthony, shattering the windows of the Institute and the beautiful stained glasses; some splinters, went right through the front door, to end against the marble altar. Fortunately, no personal injury was recorded.

In the course of four years of theological studies, the ordinations succeed progressively, with which one ascends the ladder of Holy Orders until reaching the summit of the Priesthood.

On May 2, 1943, first Sunday after Easter, in the Mother Church of Barcelona, where the major seminary of Messina was moved because of the war, Brother Marrazzo received from Msgr. Angelo Paino, Archbishop of Messina, the Order of the Diaconate, together with six other brothers: Luigi Alessandra, Filippo Donvito, Carmelo Ippolito, Joseph Lagati, Liborio Prudentino, Antonio Sgaramella. That evening the new

deacons spent the night in a hospital room of Pozzo di Gotto through the solicitude of Don Carmelo Salomone.

The ongoing war for about three years also obliged them to shorten the time for the reception of Holy Orders, so barely seven days after ordination to the diaconate, on May 9, 1943, the second Sunday after Easter, in the same Mother church of Barcelona, the deacon Marrazzo with the other six received the Order of Priesthood through the hands of the same Mons. Paino. Father Joseph, as he will be called from then on, was 26 years old.

The next day he and Father Alessandra went to celebrate the first Mass to the Rogationist community, which was displaced from Messina, in Seminary of Santa Lucia del Mela.



*Father Marrazzo
together
with his parents
on the occasion
of his 25th year
of priesthood
(1968).*

The defining of his ministry

Each year, the internal *Bulletin* of the Rogationists reports the status of personnel and works of the Congregation. Each house is presented with the picture of the community members, the assets and works within the year preceding the year of publication. Father Francesco Campanale, author of the first biography of Fr. Marrazzo, noted that, except for a brief interval, he stayed in the Motherhouse of Messina, assigned to the Shrine Basilica of St. Anthony, where he practiced for over forty years the ministry of confession and spiritual direction. In fact, in 1949 the Superiors entrusted to him the post of Rector of the Shrine, to which after four years were added also the tasks as spiritual Father of seminarians, Ecclesiastical Assistant of Paggetti Antoniani, of the Pious Union of the Evangelical Rogation and of the Anthonian Youth.

It seemed that Father Joseph had embarked on the right path of his vocation, and went on defining more and more the “specialization” of his priestly ministry. He devoted himself with so much zeal to confession and spiritual direction, not only of the seminarians but, most especially of the growing number of faithful who have recourse to him. Seeing this, the apostolic visitor, the Capuchin Father Angelico d'Alessandria, said: “You will be an apostle of the confessional.” He was a prophet!

Confessor and spiritual father

Father Marrazzo has only one model: the merciful Jesus, sent by the Father, not to condemn, but to save the world. He is aware, as a priest, “to be Jesus” who welcomes the adulteress and Zaccheus, heals the lepers, sits in the company of publicans and sinners. He puts himself in the shoes of the merciful Father who waits patiently for the prodigal son; he knows that he is the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep; he is aware of being a sacrament of Jesus the Healer, who came not for the healthy but for the sick.



Messina.
From Left:
Fathers
Joseph
Marrazzo,
Luigi
Alessandrà,
Antonio
Barbangelo
with the Paggetti
antoniani
of the Shrine
of Saint Anthony
in Messina,
10/29/1946.



Community
of the Mother
House of Messina
with Father
Francesco Vitale,
Superior
general, and
Father Teodoro
Tusino, Superior
of the House.
Encircled above
is Father
Marrazzo
(1947).



Padua.
*Group of new
Postulants
(1957).*

*House of
Padua at the
time when
Father
Marrazzo was
transferred.*



This progression, however, underwent a sudden change in 1956: the Superiors decided to transfer him to the House of Padua still with the task of spiritual Father of seminarists and vocation promoter.

Don Peppino felt like a fish, which had started swimming in the vastness of the sea, caught and thrown inside a small aquarium. So before departing he went to pray in front of the tomb of the founder, Father Hannibal, and even put on his tomb a card with these words which has certainly fixed on paper his prayer: “Beloved Father, hear the desire of my heart: let me return soon to Messina, here in your church, which is an antechamber of Paradise. I believe that my absence will only be for a few months. Father, make haste to hear me”.

He obeyed, but lived this departure as a kind of a cross, a test to which the Lord was putting him.

Reaching in Padua he fulfilled the task he received but, at the same time, he continued to pray fervently for a return to Messina, turning himself first to the Mother of Good Counsel: “Mother, make me truly be a holy



Messina.
*Group of the
Pious Union
of the Evangelical
Rogation
(1953).*

priest and to save souls. Send me, every day, souls to assist and to save. Mother, if you like, let me go back as soon as possible to Messina to work in the Shrine as before. You know how much I have suffered [for this departure]. Let me be like Father Leopoldo who confessed for about 40 years. Mother, help me to become a saint along with the souls entrusted to me”.

Of course he also asked the intercession of the Saint like whom he wanted to be, the patron of confessors, buried precisely in Padua: “O St. Leopoldo of Castelnuovo, you who confessed for about 40 years in Padua, grant that Messina becomes a second Padua for me. That I may become so holy, die to myself and grant that our Shrine may become a fragrant garden of virtues and of saints. Let me meet a good spiritual Father and that I may become the father of all, that all those who come to me would be taken by the love of Jesus, like iron by the magnet”.

It is right to say that there was a miracle. Unexpectedly the following year the superiors asked him to go back to Messina, appointing him as Rector of the Shrine of St. Anthony.

Father Joseph was happy like a shepherd who returns among his flock, consisting of penitents, poor, sick, elderly, suffering and prisoners.

The continuous reflection on the passion of Christ, on the open wound in his side, the intimate intimate pains of his heart, the visceral mercy of his compassion, gave him the ability to read the depths of people's souls, without yielding to the charm of externalities.

Father Francesco Campanale, his first biographer, entitled his book *The people's priest*, in which, by collecting first of all the elements which characterize the type of priest "that he prevalently and normally embodied and lived", he was able to identify the catego-

Messina.
Feast of Christian Doctrine, a competition among children on the Catechism (1959). Presiding the Commission is Father Marrazzo.



ries of people who frequented the Shrine of St. Anthony in Messina and specified the problems that afflict them, and in this way, he tried to find out the reasons why these faithful sought Father Marrazzo.

People preferred to go to Father Joseph for his ability to be in tune with the penitents, for his insight in understanding their situations, for his wisdom in suggesting effective and appropriate remedies, for the results they obtained and for the encouragement, the motivation and serenity with which they returned to their usual tasks at home or in the workplace.

Many problems, in fact, pertain to the ordinary day-to-day family life and the close interactions with neighbors, with co-workers, and in the most inconceivable places of the society, from the market to the parish associations.

Messina.
Father Marrazzo teaches Catechism in the Basilica (1961).

Father Joseph was a meek and patient person, with a great willingness and ability to listen, understand and discern. He knew, in fact, how to welcome people. He listened and allowed them to talk at length to liberate them, to unload, and thus lessen their tension. He did not only absolve them from sins but give them spiritual direction, distributing them the infinite mercy of God, restoring serenity in their soul.

Those who sought him were not only lay people but also many priests, religious and some bishops.

Above of all, whoever was looking for Father Marrazzo, either the Confreres or the people, they knew that they would find him in the church.

In this regard, on the occasion of the funeral of Don Peppino, the journalist Gino Bartolone wrote on the *Gazzetta del Sud*, on December 1, 1992: "Father Joseph Marrazzo was a Rogationist priest. Nothing more. But here, in his ministry, there is all. A Priest. I have never met until now a priest like him.

*Among his
"little angels".*



And I think my own experience is the same as that of countless others. Because Father Marrazzo was simply a priest. He was not a man of culture, nor brag of theological preparation or who knows what pastoral or catechetical specializations. In order to find him, one had to enter the Shrine of St. Anthony. He was always there, on the left aisle, sitting to confess, or immersed in the Eucharistic celebration. Apparently Father Marrazzo was just this; but the depth of the Trinitarian life in him is only up to God to know and to the Church to interpret. 'Without me you can do nothing', says Jesus in the Gospel of John. This passage was particularly dear to the Father; dear because he intimately and fully lived. His person radiated the humility and simplicity of the saints. Father Marrazzo was a humble of the Lord. He did not attribute anything to himself, everything instead was given to God. [...] Father Marrazzo confessed, said a good word, helped everyone. Those who saw him for the first time remained surprised by a candor, which he loved to give to those who sought him. But how much beauty, how much paternal tenderness in that simple gesture!"

To the Confreres who do not approved his stay at the Shrine at any time, in the confessions without looking at the clock, Father Joseph responded with few words that reveal his pastoral charity and his faith: "I do not want to be responsible if a penitent dies without having confessed for not finding me".

For this he was always on duty even during the night. In the evening, before taking leave of the confreres he informed the sacristan saying: "If someone seeks for me, tell him that the Father is resting. I will not



*After
celebrating a
wedding
Father Joseph
used to join his
hands together
with those of
the spouses.*

be available for anyone, except for the sick and for those who want to confess”.

That sacristan himself testified to have accompanied him more than once, at the middle of the night, to the bedside of a sick person who wanted to confess and receive the anointing of the sick.

The great desire of Father Joseph was to make the Sanctuary become a garden saints. And he has done his part, doing all his best so that the Shrine would be the antechamber of Paradise, as he had asked to his Holy Founder and to Father Leopoldo.

He called himself God’s taxi driver. Always waiting for “passengers” to take them to the only destination: the arms of the Father. This is why he was asking to God insistently: “Send me souls. That those who approach me, may feel more in love with you and see in me the instrument of your goodness”.



The confessional of Father Joseph in the Basilica of Saint Anthony in Messina. For him “the confessional is the tabernacle of forgiveness”.

Father Joseph confessing (1987).

Amidst the poor and the sick

Saint Hannibal makes the Rogationists declare: “I will consider poverty as a precious pearl”. This maxim is recalled in their Rules with these terms: “We esteem poverty as a firm foundation of our vocation and the very existence of the Institute”.

Father Marrazzo, worthy son of his founder, loved the poor and lived as poor: like Him he saw in them the face of Jesus. This concrete attention to the poor and the commitment to live in valuing poverty is recurring in his writings, otherwise we would not have known what he did with utmost discretion.

He assisted many poor who knocked at the door of his good heart, and each had a word, a caress, a help, an envelope to be delivered. Faithful and friends who knew his generosity sent him and entrusted to him special offerings, with particular intentions. Able to grasp the nuances of beauty in small things and in minute gesture, he is fascinated by the interior beauty of the persons who were suffering and in trouble.

The category of poor people who particularly kept alive Father Giuseppe’s sensitivity has been that of the sick: the disabled, elderly and suffering. For them he has reserved the larger portion of his attention, kindness and concern.



Visiting someone who is gravely sick. “When I approach the children, the youth, the elderly and the sick I feel only one desire: to give them the love of Jesus and to exhort them to love Jesus”.

Angelina Crisafulli, was shot by her boyfriend hitting the spinal column, thus leaving her paralyzed and deprived of hearing. In June 1967 she met Father Joseph and enrolled to the Rogationist Pious Union. Under his guidance she offered herself to obtain from the Lord holy priests. She died at the age of 30. Father Joseph considered her a saint..



The Rogationist tension has characterized so much the life of Father Marrazzo so as to make him discover the inseparable combination between prayer, the cross and the poor. With happy intuition he expresses it in his own way, giving meaning to his own suffering and that of others: "You are part of the Rogationist family whose goal is to pray for vocations; you do more than pray: you suffer!".

His recreation was, therefore, to keep company with the sick. He went out to find them everywhere, to bring his words of comfort, for a prayer, for a blessing, for a caress, a handshake, at time just for a silent, caring, discreet presence. A lot of testimonies confirm that when Father Marrazzo came to know of a person who is seriously ill in a house, he went his way to pay a visit every day.

The Archbishop of Messina, the Servant of God Msgr. Francesco Fasola, who knew very well Father Joseph and his fame, had this to say: "The Shrine of St. Anthony is the spiritual clinic in Messina, of which Father Marrazzo is the doctor on duty". And, in turn, people called him and remembers him as the "118 of the sick".

In general, when Father Marrazzo was free from the ministry in the Shrine, he went out to visit the sick whom he knew in the homes and in hospitals. Often he was caught returning late at night in the Institute or going out at night in unusual time: he did it only to see someone who is seriously ill or dying, to ensure the sacramental solace of human piety and of Christian compassion.

The hospice of Collereale is known in Messina, to welcome the elderly, disabled, in need of care and continuous assistance. Father Marrazzo went there all Sundays and holidays, in the afternoons; if he can, even more often, bringing sweets. He conversed with them, prayed for them, played the guitar, sang in the midst of them and exhorted other people whom he knew to go and visit the sick, to stay close to them, to keep them happy and support them in their illness.

This ministry outside the Institute was kept hidden, done silently, almost furtively, with a private style, adapted in each case to the different sensitivity of people he meets.

This love-service overwhelmed him and he doubled his energies when it involved honoring the Mother of God, Mary.

Father Marrazzo went to Lourdes every year with the sick people of Unitalsi. Lourdes was his headquarter; the requests for his competence rose to maximum level and reached the highest degree of his clinical and spiritual service. He was exclusively taken and overwhelmed by the beauty of the wounds of the Passion of our Lord shown in the greatest intensity of love, as the capacity to love, wonder of love. Therefore, every year he went to Lourdes to meet his friends,



Visit to a family of a person to comfort them with his guitar.



Visiting the residents of Collereale.

*Blessing of
the sick
in the Shrine.*



those secret, intimate, inseparable ones. Usually he went to Lourdes with the train of the sick and when they knew that he was on the train it was a big feast. He celebrated Mass during the journey, brought communion to the sick settled in the various compartments and carriages. He heard confessions, diffused prayers throughout the entire train with the specifically installed speakers. Up and down through the corridors, he played with his guitar and sang the praises of Mary, instilling in everyone the festive mood of joy and peace.

He animated especially the community prayer of the rosary to Mary, while waiting to arrive to her famous Shrine. Thus, during the journey, Father Marrazzo continued the ministry that he held every day in Messina in the Shrine of St. Anthony. Then he would continue throughout the days of his stay in Lourdes, with Mass, confession, prayers, participation in processions, always together with the sick pilgrims. No less he animated the return trip.

Once a pilgrim from Messina observed him looking into the Gave River, which

flows near the Grotto of the Apparitions. She asked him: "Father Marrazzo, what are you doing here?". "Nothing," he replied. "And why are so intent on watching the river?". "I watch the small fishes passing by and tell them: Creatures of God, love the Lord." A moment of genuine spirit of Francis of Assisi.

He ministered with the sick in Lourdes for several years, always with great transport and immense joy for him and for them.



**Lourdes
(France)**
*Father Marrazzo
with the Servant
Of God
Msgr. Francesco
Fasola,
Archbishop of
Messina (1966).*

The singer



With his inseparable guitar in all occasions.

Seeing Father Marrazzo with the guitar caused a certain wonder. This instrument made him simple, and portrayed to those around him a glimpse of his inner self. It brings up a world of wonders and treasures that no one would have expected. In his diary there are countless notes concerning the guitar and how it was useful for him: “Almost always I carry with me the guitar, as a means of apostolate, and it really helps me; I can approach people, comfort the elderly, cheer up the sick priests. [...] I have entertained at length with a group of teachers and young students. The guitar is my tool to talk with others, the instrument of love that allows me to dialogue. It is the instrument of fraternal relationships with hearts that the Lord made me encounter each day”.

His daily prayers was combined with such encounters: “I am glad to let them

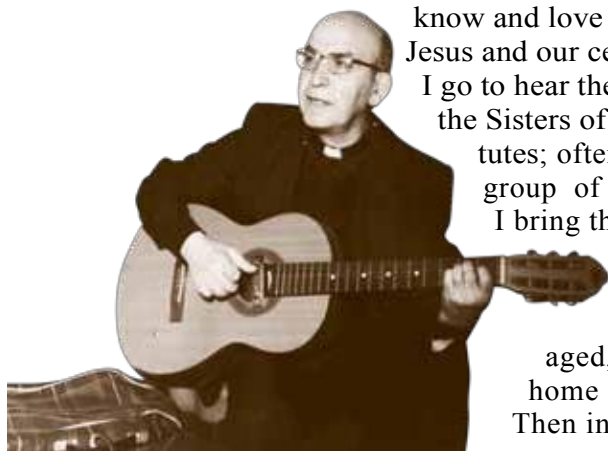
know and love more and more Jesus and our celestial Mother.

I go to hear the confession of the Sisters of different Institutes; oftentimes, with a group of young people,

I bring the guitar and go to play and sing in the homes for the

aged, in the nursing home for sick priests.

Then in the afternoon I



stay for several hours before the Holy Tabernacle to pray for the souls that Jesus sent me to love and to help one another”.

Father Joseph was able to make a simple gesture, meaningful and profound, convincing and kind, welcoming and relaxing, friendly and sympathetic. Even a trip which is apparently and apostolically irrelevant, it became a propitious occasion for him to give some good advice, to listen to the needs and the problems of the young, to put on their lips and in their hearts some beautiful prayer.

“In the train I met many people with whom I have fraternized, as usual with the guitar. Just right now I finished playing the guitar along with two men; soon we became friends, singing: ‘Mother ... etc.’. I gave them a piece of candy, to bring to their mother, and the blessing. [...] Also in the train, on a return trip, the guitar helped me a lot: there were so many young people, we sang together. An English lady offered me a bouquet of roses, which I distributed to all present, one I brought to Our Lady, here in my room.”.

At times some anniversaries of the confreres were forgotten, passed over in silence, and the festivities took on a modest tone. Father Joseph would suddenly vanish and then reappear right away beaming, with the instruments of his craft: guitar, musical arrangements, songs, appropriate to the circumstances to pay tribute to the confreres, to cheer up the audience, to express gratitude to God.



“Almost always I bring with me the guitar as a means of apostolate and indeed, it helps me; I can approach the people, comfort the elderly, cheer up the priests who are confined in the nursing home”.

The priestly Motherhood

Among the confreres in Zagarolo, in 1973.

Father Marrazzo is the second from the left; the first one at the opposite is his future biographer Father Francesco Campanale and the third from right is Father Joseph Aveni, also a great confessor and a spiritual father, whose Cause of Beatification is about to start.

Saint Hannibal Maria Di Francia wished that the devotion to Mary would be the special card of the Congregation of the Rogationists. As we have seen, this has found a fertile ground in the young Peppino and throughout his existence, until the last breath of his earthly life.

Father Joseph was not a theorist, in him all had to have a practical correspondence. We see, therefore, in what consisted his devotion to Mary in its specificity, and how he understood it, by reading directly what he wrote: "I left the house around noon accompanied by my mother. She entrusted me to Father Carmelo. I also remember that, not being resigned to stay away from my mother, I decided to go home the next Christmas day, when my mother would be coming to visit me.



Mother came but I did not have enough courage to talk about it. Then gradually I went on in my journey, a long way, and accompanied by the celestial Mother of Good Counsel, I arrived. The reality of Calvary was repeated: Jesus said: 'Woman, behold your son'. 'Son, behold your Mother'".

Father Joseph explained the reason why Mary is Mother of Good Counsel: "She is Counselor because she repeats the words and commands of Jesus, preserving them in her heart, listening to them, that is putting them into practice and conveying them, without other unnecessary additions".

So here is his invocation: "Mother I will strive to be a priest as You are, because I believe your counsels are all inspired by Jesus".

The necessity of a mother, from the human and psychological needs, has become in time a spiritual aid. In a prayer to Mary he expressed his gratitude by saying: "Mother, I bless Jesus who has chosen You from all eternity, for entrusting my life to you, to be the source of life, my support, counselor, help, otherwise, what would be the mission of the mother if not this?".

Father Joseph was concretely convinced of having with him the Mother, Mary, whom Jesus had entrusted before his death to John at the foot of the cross, whom the disciple took with him in his home and with whom he lived together in Ephesus. Like the beloved disciple of the Lord, when Don Peppino retreated to his room, he returned to Mary who was waiting with her invisible, but real presence, represented by the framed picture of Our Lady of the Good Counsel that was placed on top of his desk.



With some members of the Rogationist Pious Union and priestly mothers.



*With some
priestly
mothers.*

This concrete presence of Mary in his life, Father Marrazzo, as a Rogationist, read it at some point, undoubtedly by divine inspiration, as a support for vocations and for priests, thus initiating the idea of *priestly Motherhood*. He wrote: "The priest must have the sweetness and the motherhood of the woman; in the priesthood, fatherhood is not enough, there should also be motherhood", and more still: "I feel the need that the woman could do more, more, so much more in the Church, while she is allow-

ed so little, but times are changing. O Jesus, send mothers, holy mothers to your priests and to your church." The intuition of the priestly motherhood is providentially interwoven with a meeting with a lady member of the Rogationist Pious Union, for a time had been under the guidance of Msgr. Petralia, Bishop of Agrigento, who was found to possess "a priestly soul".

Father Marrazzo made it clear that to be a *priestly mother* it is not enough to be a mother, or even be the mother of a priest, because not always a mother or a mother of a priest does what Jesus wants or says what Jesus says, but one has to be a priestly mother, that is, to have a particular vocation with a mission.

In a written prayer for a priestly mother he wrote: "O Jesus, take possession more and more of her mind and her heart so that in her every word I may hear the echo of Your voice, of Your message and in her I would drink as from a fresh spiritual source".

To be like Jesus, to continue his mission on earth, is considered to be the heart of the spirituality that characterized the life of Father Joseph Marrazzo; in the face of so many difficulties, fears, uncertainties and doubts, he followed to the letter the indication that Jesus gave to John: "Behold your Mother." Having understood this, everything was easier for him because he allowed himself to be taken by the hand of Mary. Thus, his journey has become at the same time earthly, through the figure of his mother and of the priestly mothers, as well as heavenly, through the figure of Mary who helps her son to devote himself exclusively to the "affairs of the Father".

*In audience
with Paul VI
(1973), Father
Marrazzo speaks
with the Pope,
presenting him
the priestly
Motherhood.
At his left is
Father Joseph
Aveni, the future
Servant of God.*



The return

Father Marrazzo complained of unusual tiredness few days before his death. He had been visited by the doctor and was prescribed with an intensive care, to ease him from asthenia and low pressure. On November 29, 1992, first Sunday of Advent, he had been attending to his usual Sunday ministry at the Shrine, with confessions and animation of the liturgy. In the afternoon he would have gone to the hospice of Collereale, for the usual visit with the guitar to keep company to the elderly, disabled and poor, but due to the weakness he felt, he cancelled that appointment. He started the novena of the Immaculate, leading the prayers and songs of the faithful and then celebrated the evening Mass.

In the Gospel of the day Jesus admonished: "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord will come ... Thus, be vigilant, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of man will come."

In his homily, Father Joseph, commenting on the Gospel passage, at one point said, "I am also afraid of sudden death, but I entrust myself the Lord." The people were impressed with these words. After his death, however, those who knew him well understood the sense in reading this prayer, found among his papers, dating back to 32 years earlier (March 17, 1960): "When I die, I wish my feelings were the same as of now. In a few moments,

Jesus will reveal to me all His maternal goodness. Jesus, You cannot disappoint me, it would be a disaster. Here I am: I have nothing else to show but my faith in your goodness. This is my only strength. If my total trust in your love will vanish, everything would be over, because without You I am nothing. [...] O Mary, Mother of Good Counsel, assist me and present me yourself to the infinite love of Jesus".

In the evening, he took something for dinner and went straight to bed because he felt tired.

In the morning of November 30, Monday, at 6.30 am the sacristan, as usual, came down to open the church for the faithful. Strangely the church was still dark, the early riser Father Marrazzo was not there. He waited a little, but not seeing him coming down, he knocked at his room, but there was no answer.

In front of the coffin of Father Marrazzo many preferred to render praise to God with a "Gloria" rather than reciting a "Requiem".

At the funeral a multitude of people poured in. Such a funeral could not be remembered in Messina since the death of Saint Hannibal.





The faithful touching his coffin as if for a last caress to the beloved Father.

At that time the religious community was in the chapel for prayers and meditation. The Brother went to refer to the director, Father Michele Ferrara, that Father Marrazzo was not yet in the shrine, and that there was no answer when he knocked at the door of his bedroom. They waited a little more, then went back to knock again. When they forced the door they found him lying dead in bed.

They urgently called the community doctor, who had assisted him for many years as a Brother, but he could not do anything else but declare him dead. It occurred shortly after midnight by cardiac arrest. Father Joseph Marrazzo was 75 years old, 56 years of Rogationist religious profession, 49 years of priesthood.

He had gone quietly, without disturbing anyone, because as they say: "Goodness makes no noise."

At the funeral a multitude of people from all walks of life poured in; some attest that they could not remember a funeral of such kind in Messina since the death of the Founder, Saint Hannibal.

The crowd provided the measure of assessment on the extent and the depth with which Father Joseph had entered into the souls of the people from all walks of life.

"A humble life of love". With this title the journalist Gino Bartolone published on the *Gazzetta del Sud* of Messina the above mentioned article and concluded it with these words: "Yesterday morning, at the news of his sudden death, people of all ages and social classes kept coming to pay him their last respects. Well, the manifestation of grief was there, the emotion was most profound but all,

even the pain, testified to an extraordinary relevance of the paschal mystery in the death of that little, poor priest. Because the truth is all there, in the humblest and most intense life of love in which the Father has consumed himself. And when a Christian, a religious, a priest truly loves his brothers, the people know it, feel it in their heart, and respond to it with generosity. And the voice of the people, as we know, sometimes is also 'prophetic': 'A saint has died', used to be heard in the chapel where the body was laid, and not a few were those who preferred to render praise to God with a 'Gloria' rather than recite a 'Requiem'.

Apart from any other consideration, what is certain is that Father Marrazzo will remain in the heart of many: Messina with his death has definitely lost a great priest, but gained, for the people of believers, a new friend near God".

The ecclesiastical tribunal presided by Msgr. Calogero La Piana.





*Saint Leopoldo
Mandić*

*Closing of the
Diocesan
Investigation
presided by
Msgr. Calogero
La Piana,
Archbishop
of Messina.*

Speaking about Father Marrazzo, there have been many comparisons, and much more are being done to better understand his personality and virtues. In the funeral eulogy of the then Archbishop, Mons. Ignazio Canavò, he compared him to Father Leopoldo Mandić, others to Padre Pio, still others to the Holy Curé of Ars. For the people of Messina he remains the full-time priest, the priest of the people, the priest in permanent service, the 118 of the sick.

Father Marrazzo was just Father Marrazzo, a simple priest who showed one of the facets of the mercy of God, Father and Mother. In fact, the Archbishop concluded his eulogy with this prayer: “Lord, we praise You for what you have done through your servant Father Marrazzo. We thank and praise You, because through his priestly ministry we have received your forgiveness. We ask for your mercy on him

who administered your mercy”.

Since May 9, 2014 Father Joseph Marrazzo rests at the Shrine Basilica of St. Anthony in Messina, exactly in the same tomb where the body of St. Hannibal has been laid for over 60 years, and on which he had left the note asking for the grace to return to the Shrine. Truly, for Father Joseph, the Shrine has been and is the antechamber of Paradise.



*Msgr.
La Piana
& concelebrants
before the tomb
of Father
Marrazzo.*



Brief chronology

- **May 5, 1917:** born in San Vito dei Normanni (Brindisi).
- **October 20, 1930:** entered the Rogationist Institute of Oria.
- **September 29, 1934:** began the Novitiate in the House of Trani.
- **September 24, 1940:** made his perpetual profession in the Motherhouse of Messina.
- **May 9, 1943:** ordained priest in Barcellona, Pozzo di Gotto by Msgr. Angelo Paino, Archbishop of Messina.
- **1949-1956:** in-charge of the Shrine of St. Anthony, spiritual Father of the seminarians, Ecclesiastical Assistant of Paggetti Antoniani, of the Pious Union of the Evangelical Rogation and of the Anthonian Youth in Messina.
- **1956-1957:** spiritual father of the seminarians in the House of Padua.
- **1957-1972:** Rector of the Shrine of St. Anthony in Messina.
- **1972-1974:** Vice Superior in the House of Zagarolo (Rome).
- **1974-1992:** Collaborator (Rector 1986-1989) in the Shrine of St. Anthony, Ecclesiastical Assistant of the Paggetti Antoniani and of the Zealatrix of the Rogate in Messina.
- **November 30, 1992:** died in the Motherhouse of Messina.
- **May 5, 2008:** Msgr. Calogero La Piana, Archbishop of Messina, initiated the Diocesan Investigation for the Cause of Canonization.
- **April 7 - May 10, 2014:** translation and burial of the mortal remains in the Basilica of Saint Anthony.
- **May 9, 2015:** Closing of the diocesan Investigation.
- **June 12, 2015:** start of the Roman phase of the canonization process.

Prayer



*Almighty and merciful God,
I turn to you with filial trust:
glorify your servant
Father Joseph Marrazzo
and through his intercession
grant me the grace ...
(mention here)
of which I am in great need
and look with love on those
who turn to you with
sincere faith. Amen.*

Glory to the Father.

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