



VENERABLE

Nicola D'Onofrio

by Father Felice Ruffini



INTRODUCTION

36 years after his death, the message of Nicola is still alive, or rather is more alive than ever, and lives in the hearts of so many people who know him from the writings and testimony of the witnesses.

In these few pages, the reader will find a concise account of the human and spiritual vicissitudes of a boy resolved to offer his young life with joy to the Lord, in the religious family of St. Camilles de Lellis, at the service of the sick people. With this biography we intend to reach other people, especially the youth, hoping that this will arouse in them the desire to give to their life that special quality, which comes from surrendering completely to the Highest Love.

Special thanks go to the author, Father Felice Ruffini, not only for this book and others written about Nicola D'Onofrio, but also for the accurate and passionate research he has done in these years, which is the basis of this book that we hope will have a wide circulation.

THE FIRST YEARS

Nicola D'Onofrio was born on March 24, 1943, in Villamagna in the diocese of Chieti - Abruzzo. He was baptized in the parish church of St. Mary Major (Santa Maria Maggiore) on March 27, and was given the name Nicola. His father was called Giovanni, an honest



and religious man, a good farmer endowed with the simple and popular wisdom of the old country families of Abruzzo. His mother, Virginia Ferrara was a strong but considerate woman, known for her piety and Christian spirit. She was able to transmit to her son a genuine religious sense of life, sensitiveness, an outstanding kindness and peace of mind. On the Feast of Corpus Domini, June 8, 1950, he received his first Holy Communion and three years later on October 17, 1953, he was confirmed. He went to the primary school in Villamagna, close to Madonna del Carmine, where according to the teachers and his contemporaries, he distinguished himself for his diligence, kindness and availability for others. He never missed serving Holy Mass at the parish church, where he was constant even in winter, though his home was several kilometers away, at the border with neighboring Bucchianico, the birthplace of St. Camilles de Lellis.

AT THE SEMINARY IN ROME



A priest of the religious order of St. Camilles, a native of his village, invited him to join the Camillian seminary in Rome. Nicola accepted the proposal with joy and he immediately revealed his decision to his parents. But they objected. Because, his mother wanted him to go to the diocesan seminary in the neighboring town of Chieti, and his father did not want to lose the promising strong hands for the fields. Even his two unmarried paternal aunts, who lived with the family, were blandishing him with the promise of making him the sole heir if he could only stay. All the life of little Nicola was simple and genuine.

The opposition from his family lasted for a year. Nicola lived this period in prayer and study, until he finally obtained the permission to join the Seminary of St. Camilles in Rome. It was on October 3, 1955 that he entered, the feast of St. Theresa of Lisieux, of the Child Jesus, who would

later become his spiritual guide. Though the Seminary was brimming with students, just like all other centers for vocation to the priesthood at that time, the young Nicola did not escape the notice of those who were supposed to observe the distinguishing signs of a true vocation. They immediately noticed in him the determination to model his total personality, entrusting himself completely to the superiors to guide him spiritually. Two years later, he came to know that his father wanted to withdraw him and take him back home. He then wrote a strong letter about his resolute decision to continue with the formation to the Priesthood in the Order of St. Camilles, whatever that would cost. He gave many motivations in support of his decision, among which was the saying of St. John Bosco: "The most beautiful blessing for a family is to have a son Priest."



NOVICE

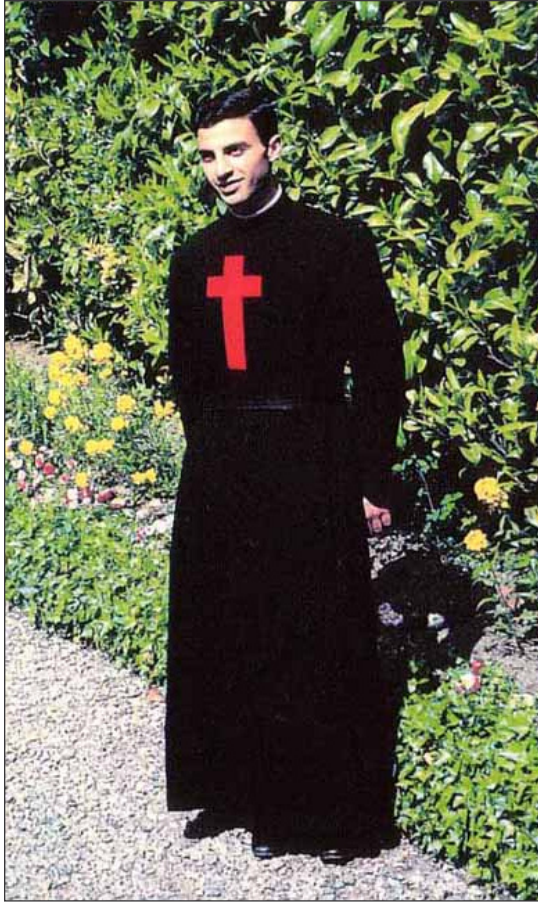
On October 6, 1960, he was dressed for the first time in the Habit of the religious order of St. Camilles, which marked the beginning of the novitiate year. At the end of the spiritual exercises, for this important stage in his life, he wrote: "...Jesus, if one day I have to throw the sacred Habit, like many do, please let me die before I receive it for the first time; I am not afraid of dying at this moment, now that I have your grace. What a gracious thing to be able to come and see You together with Your and my mother: Mary."

Throughout the year of the novitiate he wrote in his "Diary" his objectives and small victories, moments of struggle and spiritual dryness. From his writings, one notices a strong will to continue in pursuit of the divine call, entrusting himself to God's help, which is synthesized in this statement: "We can win the evil only by staying close to Jesus and Mary with the Sacraments and prayer." Already at this moment, he intensively lived the spirituality of the Order of St. Camilles.

This was observed especially when he had to assist an older brother who was seriously ill from cancer in the throat. It is particularly important to remember what he said to this priest on the feast of Good Friday that year: "Father, unite your pains to those of Christ in agony, today is Good Friday, a blessed day for you who suffers together with Jesus."

THE FIRST RELIGIOUS VOWS

On the morning of October 7, 1961, the feast of the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary, after a year of intense training, which his superiors judged excellent, he took the vows of Poverty, Chastity, Obedience and Charity towards the sick even in cases of contagious diseases. These vows were binding for three years. So on that day he started a period of formation



as a professed Camillian religious. He was serene and content, available to everyone, observed well the dispositions of community life with humility and simplicity, was assiduous at prayer and diligent in his studies.

His immediate Superiors, the Provincial and the mentor of the clerics, were his guide and the witnesses to his slow but continuous advancement on the way to the top of the Holy Mountain of God. He had a deep love for the Eucharistic Jesus, whom he received every day and visited often during the day in the church of the Seminary or in the chapel of the Gregorian University. He even enrolled himself to the "Guard of Honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus," choosing the time from 8AM to 9AM as his hour of reparation. He had both a filial and tender devotion to the Virgin Mary and a strong devotion to St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, making his own her spirituality of the little way.

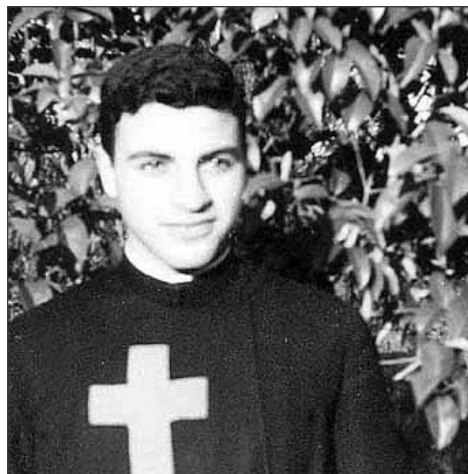
He had a profound love for his Father and Founder, St. Camilles, and deeply studied his spirituality while dreaming about future intense days of work and service to the sick, when he would finally become a priest one day. He was not afraid to show to anybody, his enthusiasm for the vocation in the Order of St. Camilles. Being diligent in his studies, he took his scholastic duties seriously and both loved and respected his teachers. He was docile and careful, anxious to receive the knowledge that was being imparted, because he considered it necessary for the good exercise of his Priesthood at the service of the suffering brothers.

During the short period of life as a student of the religious Order of the Camillians, he showed great love and attachment to his new family. He limited his outings, and preferred to stay in the House to dedicate his heart, mind and time to the several necessities and the most urgent needs of the religious community.

THE TIME OF SUFFERING AND ILLNESS

Towards the end of 1962 he started to feel the first symptoms of the illness that would later lead to his death at the age of 21. He obediently accepted the decisions of his Superiors and doctors from the very beginning. On June 31, 1963, he was operated upon in the Urological Ward of St. Camilles Hospital in Rome. The result of the histological analysis made on the removed part gave the indisputable answer of a certain end: cancer.

During his recovery at the Hospital chaplaincy after the operation, he revealed himself as a person who is always patient and smiling, careful not to disturb his brothers who were



concern for him. Afterwards, on August 19, he was admitted to the Polyclinic Umberto 1st of Rome for the cobalt-therapy, because his doctor had the secret hope of circumscribing the illness. From the 24th of the same month he continued this therapy at the outpatient clinic of the same hospital.

His behavior during this period is a great example to all, both for his patience in tolerating the pain and the willingness to do the will of God. No matter what it was. As to whether he already by this summer knew or at least suspected to be suffering from a serious illness, could be deduced from a note found in his papers, where he wrote: "End of June: in 2-3 days it assumes

enormous proportions. Treatment of Penicillin and Strepto dissolved with vitamins B and C," and ahead – besides the dates of admission at the two hospitals in Rome and of the surgical operations – he wrote: "12/8- Beginning of the treatments with gamma-rays and not gamma (200 in a day)...20/8, 7th application, two X-rays of the lungs, blood tests...23/8, Xth application, 22 X-rays to the digestive apparatus..."

When the Academic Year resumed in autumn, his superiors enrolled him in the first year of philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University, even though he was already seriously



affected by the cancer. Even here, his diligence, serenity and kindness were noted by the teachers and the other students. At the beginning of January 1964 another X-ray was performed on the thorax. The right lung appeared largely infected by the illness. Even though nobody up to now had talked to him about the gravity of his state, and on the contrary all were trying to hide from him the reality of his now hopeless situation, Nicola definitively realized his actual state of health. This can be deduced from a conversation he had with his brother, Tommaso, in which he alluded to the certainty of his approaching death, but that his only worry was the great suffering his death would cause to their mother.

Towards the end of March that year, he asked for a meeting with the provincial superior, in order to know from him the exact truth about his state of health. With his back against the wall, the superior was unable to hide the truth, which he accompanied with words of great hope especially trust in the goodness and power of God, to whom nothing is impossible, even a great miracle like the one Nicola needed. After knowing the truth about his health, he did not react with desperation, on the contrary, after a moment of intense

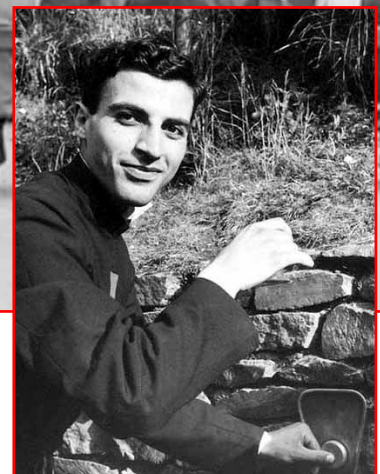
reflection spent before the Eucharistic Jesus in the church of the Seminary, he recovered his usual smile and intensified his prayers, giving more time to meditation. When he had the occasion to talk with some friends about his approaching death, he neither avoided the topic nor dramatized about it, he spoke with serenity and detachment.

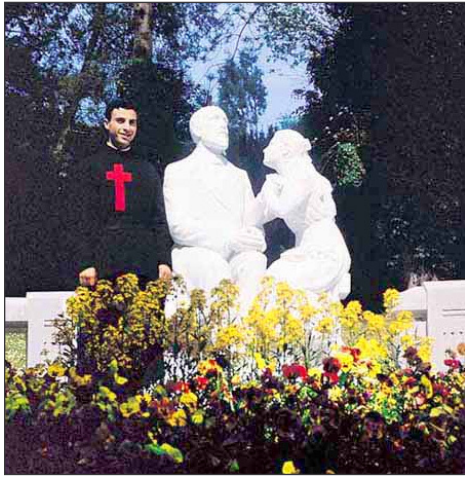
People who lived with him remember that he gave them the impression of a person who was already living the reality of the life to come, as something already present in his existence, which was very prematurely drawing to its end.

They still strongly remember that his conversation about life after death was calm and peaceful, with no strain or fanaticism, and a great spirit of faith enlightened his life, which he continued to conduct normally, sharing in the common life of the Seminary. With a hidden hope of obtaining a great miracle, his Superiors decided to send him on a pilgrimage to Lourdes and Lisieux. Nicola accepted to go, out of obedience, but he went above all with the intention of beseeching the help of the Immaculate Virgin and his little, great Saint Theresa, to do God's will up to the last hour, peacefully united with the Cross of Christ. It was May 10, only 33 days before his meeting with God for the eternity.



Pilgrimage to Lourdes.





Pilgrimage to Lisieux.

TO GOD WITH ALL HIMSELF

With the dispensation "super triennium" Pope Paul VI allowed him to take the Perpetual Vows. On May 28, the feast of Corpus Domini, in the church of the Camillian Seminary, he consecrated himself to God forever; it was the last act of love of a short life, lived fervently through "praying and loving". The morning of June 5, feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in full consciousness, he accepted to receive the Anointing of the Sick as his Provincial Superior had proposed. It was a moment of intense commotion for all his brothers, at the end of the Holy Mass celebrated in the small room on the ground floor where had been placed for some months now, in order to facilitate his movements that were by now only possible in a wheel-chair, and where he received his numerous friends and his mother.



An awful, dramatic and continuous pain marked the last days of his life on earth. The cancer, which advanced and completely invaded his lungs, did not only cause terrific pain, but also moments of suffocation. Nicolino lived this pain heroically, united to the Cross of Christ, invoking help from the Virgin Mary and the Saints Camilles and Theresa of Lisieux, always calm and never abandoning himself to desperation, careful not to inconvenience those assisting him and trying to do his very best to hide the inevitable mask of suffering in order to avoid bringing sorrow to his mother, who stayed close by him. This extraordinary confidence in God's will is a cause for admiration and devotion even for those who knew him from childhood.

A FLOWER IN THE HEART OF GOD

The last day for Nicolino came on June 12, 1964. It was a long agony, which started at 16.00 to close his last evening at 21.15, after a day spent in prayer and manifestation of his deep faith and burning Love for Jesus and Mary, with the help of his two beloved Saints and the comfort of the touching prayers of the brothers and friends. Up till now, his superior

remembers his last moments thus: "I would lead the prayers and all the young brothers reunited around him in his small room would answer with hearts full of faith. Sometimes he would ask us to continue, saying: again, again,stronger, now and then he would add his own personal invocations to ours, which revealed his deep faith in an ultrasensitive reality that he felt really near."

This contact with the ultrasensitive world was also noticed by other people who assisted at his death. Heaven opened its doors to him while he, lucid up to the end, continuously repeated the act of offering his life and all his pains, refusing the analgesics and inviting those present to pray with him and for him. A conclusion, very much coherent with the ideals he had chosen to live up to in his life. The strong impression that with his death a Passion was accomplished, can be noticed in the simple words of a country lady, an old family friend: "Having verified his death, the doctor opened the door and said to his mother: Lady, here is your son! Just as if it were the Virgin Mary receiving her crucified Son."

A confrère who was a great friend of Nicola wrote during the days immediately after his death: "Now down here with us remains only a cut stem, his stem. The flower is up there, engrossed in the Heart of God. For this reason every time that I think or speak of beloved



Nicola I feel I have to look up there as in a dream, bowing. My Hero! I had seen vaguely, I had only dreamed the ideal of holiness, without reaching it, because to touch something you've got to be close to it, and to have an admiration with no obscurity, you've got to be similar to the hero who inspires it. I've touched my hero and then...he seems to vanish. But, like the little Theresa with Celina, I believe that he will always walk at the side of every person who is able to discover him. I loved him, he died in my arms, and he looked at me with his last gaze, waving his hand to me to say "goodbye." I love him, by now he's my great, little Saint together with his, and my little Theresa."

WAITING FOR THE RESURRECTION

At the sacred funeral rites there was a great multitude of confrères, friends and acquaintances. His mother's sad and tormented prayers persuaded the superiors to allow the burial of the remains of Nicola D'Onofrio in Villamagna, his birthplace, in the family grave. His last journey back home was on June 15, accompanied by his confrères and superiors. After a solemn Eucharistic celebration he was buried in the Ferrara Chapel, his mother's family. Since October 8, 1979, Nicola D'Onofrio rests near the Crypt of the Sanctuary of St. Camilles in Bucchianico, reunited to his religious family, waiting for the Resurrection of the last day, when Christ who triumphed over death will come again.

...IT COMES FROM AFAR!

The way he touched people who were close to him or those who managed to know him during the well-known period of his rapid end, which he faced with serenity and with a

smile on his lips, proves his exceptional behavior. But this was not improvised or even superficial. His ascent to the Holy Mountain of God comes from afar. The pages of his original writings reveal to us that this way started from the first days of his life at the Camillian Seminary. The last period of his existence and his death are only the revealing moment of his spiritual dimension.

THE SPIRITUAL INHERITANCE

The extraordinary wave of affective and religious emotions that accompanied his death, which was rendered more tragic by the terrible suffering caused by the sickness, is to be



attributed to the fact that: "In suffering one becomes a completely new person... When this body is seriously sick, completely disabled and the person is almost incapable of living and acting, then one's inner maturity and spiritual greatness become more manifest, thus offering a touching lesson for all the normal and healthy people. Except for arbitrary cases of incomprehension, all people felt that God had stimulated extraordinary answers in his soul, and that his journey to the Holy Mountain was really fast. A religious woman, his contemporary and friend since childhood, wrote that on learning of his death she felt the words of Wisdom ringing in her heart: "Having come to perfection so soon, he has lived long; his soul being pleasing to the

Lord, he has hurried away from the wickedness around him." (Wis. 4:13-14a)

Such a conclusion to life cannot be improvised. It comes from afar and the moment of death is only the occasion that reveals the interior work done. And he founded it essentially upon the Passion and Cross of the Lord Jesus, with his eyes always fixed on the Glory of the Resurrection. This is clear from his "Writings" and from the testimony of the people who knew him.

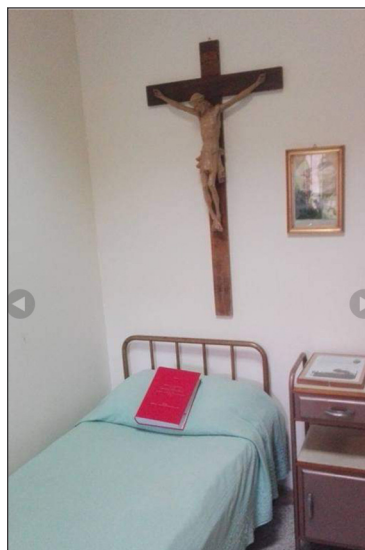
FROM HIS WRITINGS

The key to understanding his spiritual journey appears almost immediately at the beginning of his new life in the minor seminary, when listening to a meditation on the love of God the Father for Man, during the annual Spiritual Retreat, he wrote: "We could say that he was not concerned for his only Son, if only he could save us. Jesus died for us and his blood, up to the last drop, washed our soul. How much Jesus loved us!"

And some few months later, at the end of the monthly retreat, he notes down a dictated meditation in this way: "Jesus has come into the world to glorify the Father who sent him, and to come down here "exinanivit se" he annihilated, humbled himself. The Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Eucharist, are acts of self-destruction for the love he has for us, and for the glory of the Father. Now it is upon us to follow him, in order to give to the Sacred Heart that due glory as a response to his love."

...CRUCIFIED JESUS, HIS MODEL

The crucified Christ entered his life and became his daily reference. The religious life that he started with the Novitiate during the Vespers on October 6, 1960, is a good school for the spirit which convinced him of the necessity to control the human faculty necessary for the practice of mysticism: the will. For a whole year, the messages received from his



spiritual guides found him well disposed at the eve of the first religious vows consecrating him to God. He writes thus at the end of the first day of spiritual exercises: "The will has to be strong, complete, and heroic in the mystical ascent. One that does not change direction according to the winds, but remains faithful to the principles of the Crucified Christ. A will, which is not caught up in the many fatuities of this world, but stays vibrant and strong in sustaining and facilitating the progress of our journey towards God. Moreover, our ascent requires a heroic will because the goal is difficult. We aim at imitating a crucified Christ, who does not present to us anything else but the Cross, to embrace everyday. Heroic too, because our ascent is not in phases, but continuous and demanding, an ascent which ought to consume us completely. But to reach this point Confession and Spiritual Direction are indispensable.

"I am glad to have had the opportunity to assist beloved Father Del Greco, during the night between Wednesday and Holy Thursday. During this night there was the adoration of Jesus from eleven to midnight here in the house. I instead, have done it close to the suffering Jesus in the person of Fr. Del Greco. (I have really done it with this intention). Now he seems to feel better, let's hope for the best!"

The assisted camillian priest, who had been operated for a cancer in his throat, completed later what D'Onofrio did not write in his Spiritual Notes: "I was almost dying, and the cleric D'Onofrio assisted me and comforted me saying: 'Father, unite your pains to the suffering of Jesus in agony. Today is Good Friday, a beautiful day for you, who are suffering together with Jesus!' I have never forgotten those words suggested to me by our cleric, with so much loveliness and faith."

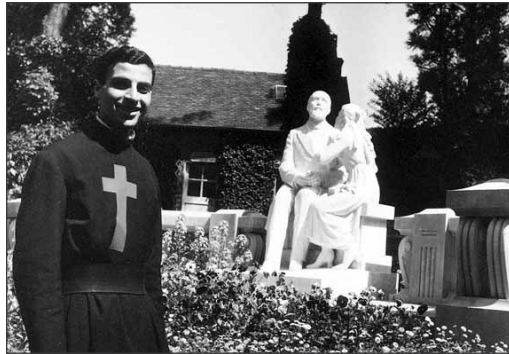
...AND FOR IMMACULATE MOTHER MARY

Along with his devotion to Crucified Jesus, Nicolino had a tender and really filial relationship with his Mother, the Immaculate Virgin Mary. In his Writings, and on the death bed, he had sweet and tender expressions for Her, that we must contemplated within the realm of a inner and secret relationship of the soul, deserving of respect and great consideration. Exactly as we do, when contemplating similar relationships of the Saints proposed by the Church as life models. This is an extract from his writings: "I'm tired, I would say almost discouraged...I find life in the novitiate hard...Why?... It is the deadly enemy of my soul who overworks me, it is the Lord who purifies me...When will this place of exile come to end?... Ah, difficult world!... I would like to die soon, if it is pleasing to God, to fly in my Mothers' arms. I want to go to rest in Heaven...yes...sweet Mum...But here, serenity comes

back slowly into my soul, so I can aim further...This is God's will... "Tota vita Christi crux fuit et martyrium"...and so, what do I pretend?... To live like a lord? No, no, no. But everything for you, Jesus, Mary!"

...ON THE "LITTLE WAY" OF ST. THERESA

One of the intermediate life models that guided his way to the Lord was St. Theresa of the Holy Child and of the Holy Face. Her "little way" became the code of behavior for his life.



In a letter to his mother, who might have been worried about eventual penances imposed by the religious life, Nicolino, wrote reassuring her about the normality and simplicity of the daily acts: "...All is done for the Lord, for his love. There are no extraordinary things to do, like exceptional penances, or sleeping on the ground...Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus, a Carmelite French nun, did nothing special during her life, she did nothing unique, she only did her duty; at the age of 24 she died of tuberculosis and became a saint...."

We have a Prayer written by Nicolino, which comes from a mystic soul. We are not sure whether it belongs to St. Theresa. We present here a little extract which can largely explain our thesis: "Give me the suffering, give me the martyrdom of love, only and always what is more pleasing to you, to possess you forever completely ...I am in love with Christ Crucified. Far from me every other joy, every other liking that is not for my beloved Crucified Bridegroom. I desperately want to own your torn Heart completely, to be inside it, incarnated into one reality: I want to renounce myself completely, to completely be You, my Love. I want to renounce myself always, even in the most hard way, not me anymore, but You, You, Crucified Love."

At the foot of the page Nicolino annotated: "I will recite this prayer at least three times every day: if it is possible, in the morning, at midday and in the evening, before going to bed." He collected every published work of St. Theresa, asking directly from the Convent of Lisieux the last editions. He knew very well the French language and started to translate her poems. To complete these few considerations, we would like to quote stanzas from "To Live for Love," which reveal to us his inner tension to conform himself completely to His beloved Crucified Jesus: "...Living for love on this Earth does not mean/ to pitch a tent on the top of Tabor. / It means climbing Calvary together with Jesus. / It means considering the cross as a treasure! / In Heaven, I will live of joy. / Then, the affliction will have disappeared forever, / but here, in suffering, / I want to live for love!--...To die for love is too sweet a martyrdom, / and that's what I'd like to suffer. / Oh Cherubim! light the lyres, / because I feel it, my exile is close to end.../ Arrow of fire consume me restlessly, / tear my heart in this sad sojourn. / Divine Jesus, please realize my dream: to die for love!"

This is the secret of the great emotion, esteem and enthusiasm caused by his tragic last year of life and by his passage to Heaven. Everyone could basically feel the spiritual dimension in which he was absorbed, and which is faithfully synthesized in the following

passage of the last letter he wrote to his parents: "I'm really glad to have the possibility of suffering a little bit now that I'm young, because these are the most beautiful years to offer (something) to the Lord. St. Theresa of Lisieux is the saint that I like most, because she is very similar to me. She too fell sick when she was only about twenty years old, she suffered a lot and died at the age of 24...Dearest parents, you too pray that the Lord may help me to recover the strength, so that I may become a priest and work a lot more for the souls. But if the good Lord wants something different from you and me, may God be blessed, because He knows what he does and what is really good for us. There is no way, we can't know those things...Only God knows...

SOME TESTIMONIES

Everyone who was able to read the signs of his behavior during the time of the extreme test of his life understood his Message. The demonstrations of esteem expressed at the moment of his death, which as we said were concretized in an extraordinary wave of affective and religious feelings, went beyond the realm of the Camillian Community and time. We are not going to expound the proof of what Nicolino left to us in writing with our own words, rather we shall use a short selection from what the Testimonies have written for the General Postulation of the Order of St. Camilles.

...MILITIA MAN OF THE IMMACULATE

With these words the review of the Militia of the Immaculate presented him to the readers: "He has reached the third grade of the M.I.: the one of the total donation: to give himself completely to Mary, accepting every suffering with spirit of faith and generosity in order to conform himself to the Mystery of the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ, to the point of martyrdom. Nicolino, consumed by pain, offered himself as a victim for so many brothers and sisters in need of hope and spiritual salvation. Even though the circumstances and the mode were different, we can compare his offering to that of Father Kolbe, who found in the Immaculate Mother the strength and love to give himself completely, not only for the father of a family, but for all the human kind. The death of the young camillian and the martyrdom of Father Kolbe find their explanation and message in the eternal Word of the Gospel... Nicolino, so young but yet so wise, understood very well what Father Kolbe says in one of his writing: "There's only one life to live, not two. We have to become saints completely, not half-way, for the greater glory of the Immaculate, and through her, for the greater glory of God."

...REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING

"He saw God's plan in everything, directed to Him all his action and accepted with joy the pains and suffering. He used to say to me: "Suffering is the best currency with which we can buy Heaven." His death was peaceful and I had the grace to be present at this moment.

The following months his illness started to become more and more serious and he was evidently suffering, but with great dignity. He intensively prayed for the sinners and considered the Passion of Jesus and the suffering of St Theresa of Lisieux as models to be imitated, almost literally... During his illness he, like Christ, was able to face the stages of the long Calvary, walking with joy towards the Father, in the Kingdom promised to the good and faithful servants.

"During that night I was assisting Nicola D'Onofrio and I was woken up at dawn by his troubled screams. I run into his small room; leaning on his elbows, as the strength permitted him, he asked God in a loud voice to be healed: "I'll become a priest... I will save many souls...I pray You my Lord, heal me...Mother Mary, please intercede...St.Camilles...! Please father; help me...let us pray together, I have to obtain this miracle... I have to get well...!" I raised him and helped him until, shortly after, he became calm, exhausted. Then, speaking softly and full of submissive abandonment, he said: "Well...but if it's not possible...let it be as you will my God!" This is the gist of his words, even though I may not remember them literally. I was very impressed by that submission to God, that extreme acceptance, so much that it was impossible for me not to compare it with that of Christ on the Cross, who asks imploring and ends with a wonderful submission to His Father's Will. The Doctors in charge almost immediately decided for a surgical operation. Always docile and obedient as usual, he accepted in a spirit of deep union with the Suffering Christ, following the example of St. Theresa of Lisieux in the last period of her illness, and accepted to subject himself to such a delicate operation...But he accepted everything without reacting, and submissively let himself be gradually laid and nailed on his Cross...He spent the Easter period in a special, deep recollection and meditation on the Passion of the Lord, endeavoring to conform himself as much as possible to Him. In fact, he had no doubt anymore about the nature of his illness, he felt it stronger everyday, expanding in his body. Even the easiest things were becoming difficult for him, because he increasingly breathed with difficulty. Though every possible means and cure were attempted in order to sustain him and stimulate his appetite, he kept on losing weight day by day."

"But it was pleasing to Jesus, the Eternal Priest, to shorten his time of waiting, and he took him soon to the top of Calvary, where Nicolino, became an holocaust for everyone, offered himself to God with heroism as a victim of Love, after the example of St. Theresa of Lisieux, who wanted him as her guest in her city, in France, just before his passage from earth to the realm of the blessed, passing through the narrow door indicated by Jesus for the elected few."

"I saw him again on his death-bed. His face impressed me. A gaunt, serious and pallid face. His passage must have been a real martyrdom. His last hour absorbed in darkness. Nicolino had tasted the bitterness of Jesus' Cup. And he still had on his face the sign of disgust for the bitterness. I remember now, the physiognomy of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah: "He has no appearance or beauty / to attract our eyes / no splendor to delight us" (Is. 54, 2). So, like Jesus, Nicolino was "eliminated from the land of the living." (Is. 54,8). We conclude with the expression used by his mother's friend, who lived for many years in Rome and assisted the young camillian student throughout all his suffering. Simple soul, who after so many years remembers those moments in this way: "He seemed to me like Jesus Christ on the Cross, so calm and confident, with prayers on his lips, calling Our Lady 'Mum'. Then, he reclined the head on the left, his tongue moved a little, and he died so peacefully. The Doctor verified the fact, then opened the door and called the mother: "Lady, here is your son!" As if she was Our Lady receiving Her Crucified Son. The mother fell on her son, then knelt down crying loudly, loudly..."

...HIS MESSAGE

The title of the small and successful biography written some months after his death, "When Love Prays", was the incipit of one of the reflections that Nicola D'Onofrio used to jot down on paper in order to be able to follow them for along time. It was lost. But his teacher in the major Seminary, who had seen it, attests that: "the concept, expressed in four short verses, was connected to the words of St Augustine: "Love and do what you like." Actually it affirmed that, when love resembles the Love of God, trough prayer and service to Him, then it is possible to walk confidently towards the goal."

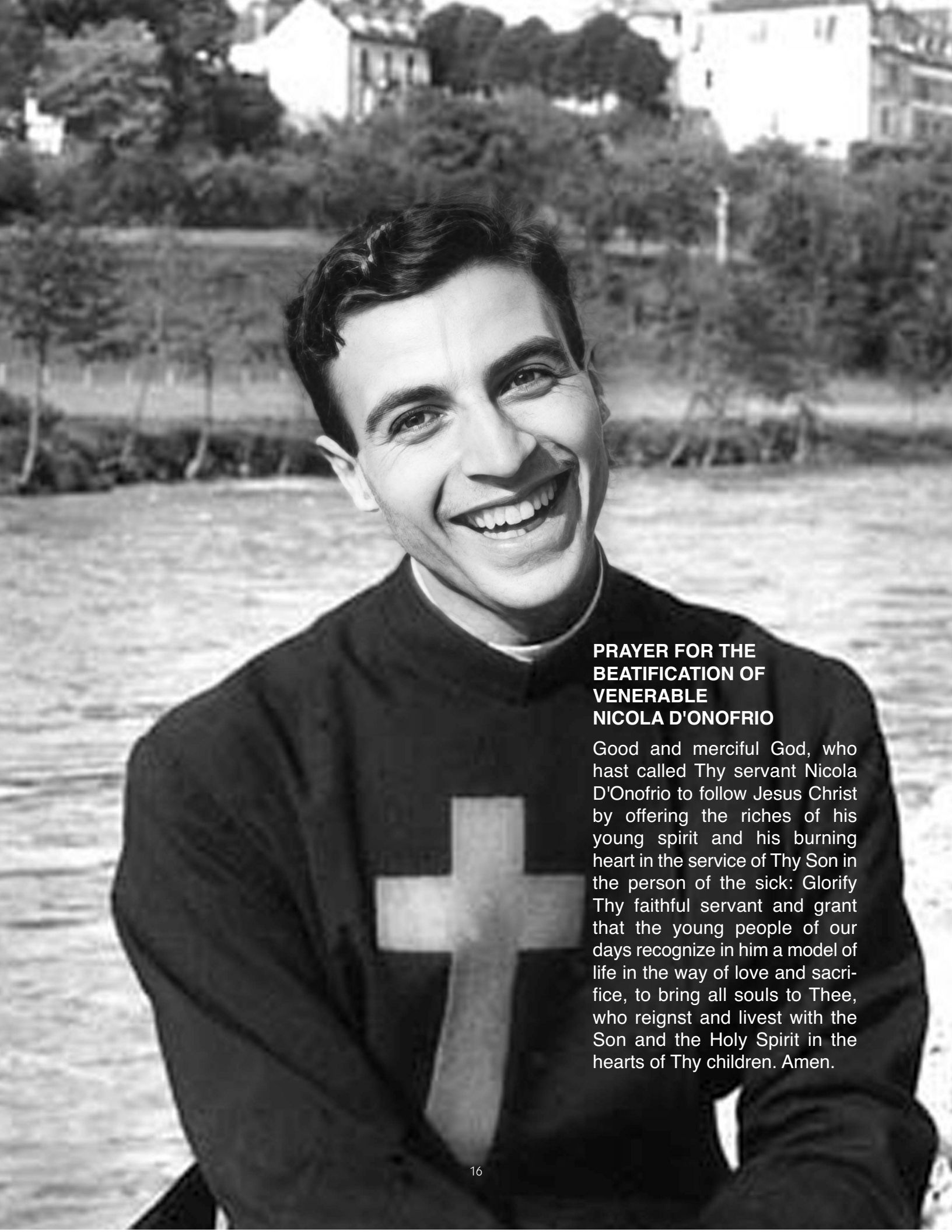
When the Lord called him to live like St. Paul: "I complete in my flesh what is missing in the suffering of Christ, for his body, which is the Church."(Col. 1, 24), Nicola D'Onofrio did not draw back.

Strongly united to the Mother of God, he lived with coherence the phrase he wrote on a quiet evening in the Novitiate, "Tota vita Christi crux fuit et martyrium," adhering to it strongly with "All for you, Jesus, Mary".

The "new maternity" that the Virgin Mary received from Her Son dying on the Cross, "spiritual and universal to all the human kind, so that everyone, in the pilgrimage of faith, could remain strongly united to Her up to the Cross, and, for the strength of this Cross, every suffering, regenerated, could from weakness of man become power of God", found its complete realization in Nicola D'Onofrio, and remains a wonderful example for ages.

The young camillian student, having gone with joy and serenity through the mystery of human suffering, elevated by Christ to the level of redemption, was and remains a credible testimony of the fact that the choice to live the Gospel Values reveals "the heavenly treasures already present in this world, shows better the new and eternal life acquired from the Redemption of Christ, and preannounces as well the future Resurrection and the Glory of the Heavenly Kingdom."

Young people who get to know his short experience on earth are fascinated by it. Of these, we remember Marie-Louise, a girl who, wanting to follow the invitation of John Paul II, at Compostela: "N'ayez pas peur de devenir saints! - Don't be afraid to become saints!" wrote to us saying that she has decided to take " Nicolas D'Onofrio as a life model...I was looking for a contemporary model of life, and I found in the life of this young boy the plans that I've decided to follow, a few moments ago." For years now, Marie-Louise has dedicated her life to one of the new institutes of consecrated life in the world, serving God through the service to the sick and poor brothers and sisters.



**PRAYER FOR THE
BEATIFICATION OF
VENERABLE
NICOLA D'ONOFRIO**

Good and merciful God, who hast called Thy servant Nicola D'Onofrio to follow Jesus Christ by offering the riches of his young spirit and his burning heart in the service of Thy Son in the person of the sick: Glorify Thy faithful servant and grant that the young people of our days recognize in him a model of life in the way of love and sacrifice, to bring all souls to Thee, who reignst and livest with the Son and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of Thy children. Amen.