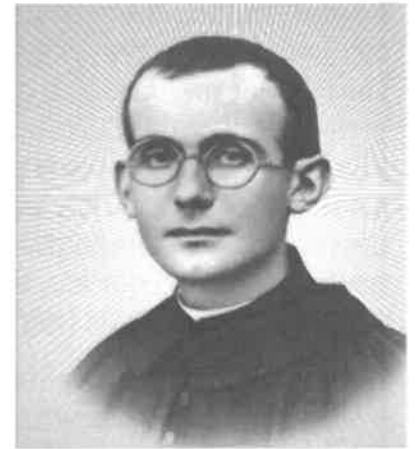


SAINT JUSTIN RUSSOLILLO

Founder of the Vocationist Fathers, Vocationist Sisters, and Apostles of Universal Sanctification



Justin Russolillo was born in Pianura, Italy on January 18, 1891. On the day he was born, an unusual and abundant snowfall fell in Pianura, an area that seldom receives snow. That same day, his parents brought their infant son through the snow for Baptism. Justin was the third of six children born to Luigi and Giuseppina Simpatia, humble people who lived an exceptional Christian life. From this beautiful holy family, the Lord picked three for Himself: Justin became a Priest and founder of the Society of Divine Vocations, Ciro became a priest and entered the Congregation, and Giovanna joined the Sisters of Divine Vocations and eventually became its Superior General.

From an early age, young Justin told everyone that he wanted to become a priest. He strengthened that desire through prayer and reception of the sacraments. In addition to his parents who instilled in him the basic principles of Christian life, Fr. Justin remembered with deep gratitude the part played in his vocation by his three aunts who were all schoolteachers.

A serious problem arose when Justin completed elementary school. In order to satisfy his desire to become a priest, Justin's family needed to find a seminary to accept him and a way to pay for the tuition. Fr. Justin's family was large with limited means. When a wealthy man in Pianura turned down Justin's family's request for help, his mother, in a mixture of frustration and faith promised her son that she would send him to the seminary "even if she had to pawn her eyeballs". Sustained by this great faith and determination, Justin was sent to the Pozzuoli's Diocesan Seminary. During the entrance exam, one of the teachers remarked that he had "never come across a young man as intelligent as this one". Justin was admitted to the seminary for his first year of high school.

Yet Justin's beautiful and promising vocation remained threatened by adverse life events. His father was severely injured while working, and one of his aunts, who was paying for part of his tuition, suddenly died. Before making the painful decision to take Justin out of the seminary, his mother went to Bishop Giuseppe Zezza who, when he heard Justin's story, immediately offered to help.

Justin continued his studies in the seminary: he finished high school and college, a year of philosophy and his first two years of theology before being sent to the Regional Seminary of Posiillipo, staffed by the Jesuit Fathers. One of the priest who lived in the same house, Monsignor Nicola Esposito, said of Father Justin: "That little room where Justin lived remained lit up long into the night. We used to peek through the keyhole and see him on his knees praying before a Crucifix. It was my distinct impression and that of my peers and superiors that we were in the presence of an angel."

After completing his seminary studies, Father Justin was ordained a priest on September 20, 1913 and sent to the seminary to be in charge of the formation of new seminarians. On the day of his ordination, Fr. Justin made a vow of charity and committed himself to the formation of a religious congregation dedicated to vocations.

Father Justin was appointed the parish priest of St. George's Church in Pianura in 1920. In July of that year, he petitioned the Most Reverend Fortunato Farina, Bishop of Troia, for permission to establish a Congregation for Vocations. On October 18, 1920, in the Rectory of St. George Martyr, the Society opened its doors to any young man who wished to dedicate his life to the service of vocations. It was the beginning of the Society of Divine Vocations. On October 2, 1921, Father Justin founded the Vocationist Sisters.

Fr. Justin loved children and they flocked around him. The more children came to him, the happier he was and the more of himself he gave to them. In his church, Fr. Justin spent many hours each day immersed in prayer and meditation. On one particular day when he had been talking with the Lord longer than usual, a group of restless children entered the church and found Fr. Justin suspended in mid-air near the Crucifix. Astonished at the sight, the children began screaming in fear and surprise. When he heard the commotion, Fr. Salvatore Di Fuisco, the parish pastor and Fr. Justin's Godfather, came out of the sacristy and found Fr. Justin with a look of pure ecstasy on his face. When Fr. Justin descended, he calmed the children and told them not to talk about what they had seen. The news, however, spread quickly, and Fr. Justin, growing in age and virtue, hid his talents and special abilities with his characteristic humility and modesty.

In 1950, Father Justin sent three missionary priests to open a community in Brazil. Today, the Vocationist Fathers serve in the countries of Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, England, India, Indonesia, Italy, Madagascar, Nigeria, Philippines, the United Kingdom, South Africa, the United States, Vietnam and Wales.

During Father Justin's lifetime, regular individuals, religious, Bishops, and Cardinals alike were all attracted to his pious manner. Parishioners, priests, politicians, men of culture, professionals, and prodigal sons formed a long line each day to see Father Justin. He welcomed everyone with a smile that opened hearts and minds to faith and hope. In his spiritual life, his goal was always Divine Union with God.

By July 1955, Father Justin's health was quickly deteriorating with leukemia and he became bedridden, never to leave his bed again. On August 2, 1955, surrounded by priests from his religious order, his soul returned to the Lord at the age of 64. At the time of his death, the Congregation of Vocationist Fathers totaled 110 priests and 70 professed members, 20 novices and 500 aspirants. The Vocationist Sisters numbered 340 professed members, 30 novices, 13 postulants and 200 aspirants.

On January 18, 1980, the process of beatification was begun by Cardinal Corrado Ursi in the archdiocese of Naples, Italy. On December 18, 1977, Pope John Paul II officially declared that Fr. Justin had practiced Christian virtues in a bold and courageous manner, and proclaimed him "Venerable", thus beginning the beatification process of this holy priest of God.

In January, 1998, Gaetannina Ida Meloro from Newark, NJ was diagnosed with an inoperable cancerous tumor in her colon. Given the news of her poor prognosis, Mrs. Meloro entrusted herself, with the help of the Vocationist Fathers and Sisters, her mother and friends, to the intercession of Fr. Justin, who had been proclaimed Venerable the previous month. She received many prayer cards with his picture, and promised to make her case public if she was miraculously healed. By June 1998, the tumor had disappeared and there was no sign of cancer in her body. In August, 2000, September 2002, and again in March 2003, Mrs. Maloro's oncologist reported that there was still no sign of cancer in her body. In October, 2003, Mrs. Meloro's healing was determined to "clinically unexplainable" and her healing attributed to the intercession of Father Justin.

On July 1, 2010, the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI gave the long awaited approval of the miracle of healing attributed to Fr. Justin and signed the decree of Fr. Justin's beatification. He was officially declared "Blessed" on May 7, 2011.

On March 5, 2020, a medical council at the Vatican determined that the recovery of Jean Emile Rasolofo, a religious vocationist in Pianura, Italy, was medically and scientifically unexplainable. This was the second miracle attributed to the intercession of Blessed Fr. Justin. Blessed Father Justin was canonized on May 15, 2022 by Pope Francis. His feast day is on August 2nd.

"O my God and my All."