

## **Fr. GIUSEPPE VILLA CERRI**

Fr. Giuseppe Villa Cerri was born in Trecella di Pozzuolo Martesana (Milan, Italy) on 18 May 1933 – the Holy Year of the Redemption. His parents were Carlo Villa and Regina Cerri. He was baptised in the Parish of St. Mark in Trecella a few days later and received confirmation in the same parish in June 1939. He had two sisters: Anna (August 1934) and Adelaide (December 1935).



After losing his father in October 1936, he moved with his family to Gorgonzola (province of Milan) in November 1940 after his mother had married Giuseppe Corno. A brother and sister were born from this second marriage: Carlo (1940) and Maria (1943).

He received his first communion at the Parish of St. Gervasio and St. Protasio in Gorgonzola in May 1943. He attended primary school in the years 1939-1944.

On 4 November 1944, when going to Milan, he lost his mother and his sister Mary when Piazzale Loreto was bombed from the air. Divine providence saved him and made him meet the Camillian religious of the St. Camillus Clinic. A few weeks later, knowing about his wish to become a priest, they invited him to enter their minor seminary of Villa Visconta (Besana Brianza). Fr. Giuseppe entered that seminary a few days before Christmas, on 21 December 1944.

After studying at secondary schools in Villa Visconta for five years, accompanied by his superiors Fr. Raffaele Gigliano, Fr. Giacomo Bellotto and Fr. Mario Maria Mariani, he went to San Giuliano (Verona) for his novitiate which began on 14 July 1949, where Fr. Raffaele Gigliano was his teacher. He made his temporary vows on 15 July 1950, the feast day of St. Camillus and a Holy Year. On 8 September 1954, a Marian Year, he professed his solemn vows in the Church of S. Giuliano (Verona) after attending the lyceum for four years and being awarded his leaving certificate at the School Institute of the Stigmatine Religious.

He arrived in Mottinello-Rossano Veneto (Vicenza) at the end of September 1954. The next year he was sent with his fellow religious Fr. Domenico Ruatti to Rome and the generalate house to study at the Camillian International College. He then continued with his theological studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University. He obtained his bacalaureat in 1956, his 'studium' diploma from Italian Catholic Action in the same year, and his licence in dogmatic theology in June 1958. On 8 May 1955 he received his lecturate in Rome and on 27 November 1955 his acolytship. After being ordained a sub-deacon in the Church of St. Marcello (Rome) on 27 October 1957, on 1 December of the same year he was made a deacon in the Church of St. Giacomo in Augusta. On 22 March 1958 he was ordained a priest in the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano (Rome), with the laying on of hands by the Vicar General of Rome, Cardinal Traglia.

After three years of service at the city hospital of Verona-Borgo Trento, in the month of October he went to Castellanza (Varese) to teach the young postulants and to continue with his university studies at the Faculty of Humanities and Philosophy at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan, at the same time dedicating himself to pastoral work in the parishes of the district.

In September 1961 he went to the minor seminary of Marchirolo (Varese) to teach Latin to the seminarians of the fourth and fifth years of high school. He was awarded his doctorate in modern humanities on 6 July 1964 with full marks of 110/110.

On 12 July 1964 he moved to Villa Visconta di Besana Brianza and was appointed the superior and director of the minor seminary where he taught humanities in the cycle of lower secondary schools which had recently become a section attached to the state high school of Besana Brianza. These were the intense years of renewal after the Second Vatican Council. In 1967 he was made a member of the *De formatione* sub-committee for the revision of the Constitution.

On 25 June he was appointed superior and director of the seminary of Vigolo Vattaro (Trento) and was responsible for the students of the fourth and fifth years of the high school and the upper high schools, teaching humanities at the diocesan seminary of Trento for two years and at the archbishop's college for one year, meeting our seminarians regularly as well.

After the closure of the house of Vigolo Vattaro, on 27 September he moved to San Giuliano (Verona) with the seminarians who remained and continued with his duties as teacher of the postulants. He continued to teach humanities at the secondary school of the *Alle Stimmate* Institute of Verona for three years, at the secondary school of Lavagno, and then at the secondary school of Borgonovo-Verona for one year. On 3 April 1967 he was awarded the entitlement to teach in secondary schools, being awarded the highest marks. In 1975, on the occasion of the four hundredth anniversary of the conversion of St. Camillus, he published *San Camillo: Un uomo che sapeva amare* ('St. Camillus: a Man who Knew how to Love'), and on 2 February, in San Giuliano, he organised for the first time, together with Fr. Giovanni Maria Rossi and a group of students who were professed, a day of supplementary teaching for all the young Camillians who were receiving formation. Looking forward to the General Chapter of 1977, he was responsible for the revision of the third part of the Constitution which would later be addressed at the General Chapter held in Capiago.

On 22 March 1977 he asked the Provincial Superior for permission to go to Latin America to become a part of the Community of the religious house *della Buenamuerte* of Lima (Peru). Unfortunately, an illness (pleuritis) prevented him from travelling immediately and forced him to remain in Verona until the next year.

On 2 August 1978, with Fr. Giannino Martignoni, he left for Portugal where he visited the Marian sanctuary of Fatima. On 6 August they left for Santa Fe de Bogotà. Finally, on 24 October of the same year he reached Lima and joined the community of the religious house *della Buenamuerte*, beginning his mission as a promoter of vocations. On 25 March the St. Camillus minor seminary of Lima was inaugurated. Fr. Giuseppe was appointed its director and at the same time he continued with his activities as the promoter of vocations.

From that moment onwards he held various positions in Peru: in 1979 he was made the animator of vocations and the teacher of the two novices who lived in the community; on 25 March 1980, in the former catechistic centre, he began the St. Camillus minor seminary, of which he would also be director until 1987, even though he continued his trips in Peru to promote vocations; on 7 May 1980 he was appointed a member of the general council of the Delegation of Colombia and Peru; in March 1983 the minor seminary was moved to its present location, with the first two novices of whom Fr. Giuseppe was appointed teacher until the beginning of 1987; in 1983 he took part in the General Chapter of Bucchianico at which the new Constitution was approved and in the same year he was appointed Superior of the community *della Buenamuerte*, a post he would hold until December 1992; in the month of September he published in Spanish *San Camilo: Un enfermo por los Enfermos* ('St. Camillus: a Sick Man for

the Sick'; and in October he was appointed the first councillor of the Delegation of Colombia and Peru.

In March 1984 the first two novices made their first professions and Fr. Giuseppe was appointed teacher of the temporary professed, a category that gradually increased in number. He took part in the General Chapter of 1989 and on 17 June of the same year he was appointed Provincial Delegate of the Delegation of Colombia and Peru, a post that he would hold until 1998 – the year of the establishment of the Delegation of Peru – when he was appointed Provincial Delegate, a post he held until the year 2004.

In December 1992 he handed over the post of Superior of the religious house *della Buenamuerte* and teacher of the professed to Fr. Camillo Scapin. He was appointed Superior of the *San Martin de Porres* community which had been transformed into a ministerial community after the novices were moved to Chaclacayo with their teacher, Fr. Emilio Stenico.

In April 1994 he became *ad interim* director of the minor seminary, remaining Superior of the *San Martin de Porres* community until September 1995 when he became permanent director of the minor seminary. He took part in the General Chapter of 1995. Both during his stay in Italy and during the period he spent in Peru he took part in various Provincial Chapters.

In June 2001 he was again the Superior of the religious house *della Buenamuerte*. On 12 August 2007 he handed over the direction of the seminary to Fr. Clever Estela Herrera and offered himself as a co-worker. On 21 October 2007 he also stopped being the Superior of the religious house *della Buenamuerte* after the community had been divided into a ministerial community and a community for formation. At the community for formation he continued his service as assistant to the postulants of the second year and to the pre-novices. From the year 2007 onwards he was also the vice-financial administrator. He continued to be the editor of the review *Camilos Perú*.

During the period that he belonged to the Delegation of Colombia and Peru he held various posts: the first councillor in the years 1983-1999; Provincial Delegate from 1989 to 1998. When in June 1998 the Delegation of Peru was erected, he was appointed the Provincial Delegate. During the three year period 2004-2007 he was financial administrator of the Delegation of Peru and then of the Vice-Province of Peru. Confirmed as vice-financial administrator of the Province on 28 September 2007, he was also appointed financial administrator of the new community for formation on 5 November of the same year. In the middle of August 2007 he took the place of Fr. Emilio Stenico as national spiritual assistant to the Lay Camillian Family.

As a Camillian religious he engaged in the service of being a chaplain at the *Beneficenza Publica* of Lima and at the *San Vincenzo de Paoli* geriatric hospital from 1979 to April 2004 when he retired due to his age. In 1995 he also took responsibility for the chaplaincy of the *Albergue Canevaro* for elderly people in *Rimac*.

In the academic field he was the promoter with the Redemptorists in 1980 of the *pre-Iset* winter academy where he taught universal history from April 1980 to December 1983 and then from 1986 to December 1988; in 1988 he taught Latin at the *Iset Giovanni XXIII* and at the Pontifical and Civil Faculty of Theology in Lima in the years 1991-1993. For some years he represented the institute on the Episcopal Commission for Vocations and Seminaries.

In 1975 he published in Italian *Un uomo che sapeva amare* in the format of a short newspaper. In Spanish he published: *Un enfermo por los enfermos: San Camilo* (Bogota, 1983); *Palabras desde el corazón: cartas y escritos de San Camilo* (Lima, 1989 and 2003); *Una vida por los enfermos* (Bogota, 1996); *Acompañar al enfermo: ¿por qué?* (third edition in 2000); *Un enfermo para los enfermos* (Lima, 2008). On 25 May 2011 he completed his masterpiece: *Religiosos Camilos- trescientos años entre luces y sombras en el Perú- un viaje a la luz de la*

*historia y de la crónica*. 610 pages long, published in the form of lecture notes (three copies), this work was given to the Vice-Provincial at the end of the celebrations for the three-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the Camillans in Peru; in March 2012, after the final corrections, it was published for the communities and the general, Provincial and Vice-Provincial archives and for people who were interested in the subject. In November 2011 he produced in the form of lecture notes and for all those who were greatly interested in the subject his *Breve Historia de la Orden de los Ministros de los Enfermos* (120pp).

In 1992 he became editor of the review of the Delegation of Colombia and Peru, *Camilos Hoy*; in 1998 he became editor of the bulletin of the Delegation of Peru, *Camilos Perú*; and in 2006 he was appointed editor of the bulletin of the Vice-Province of Peru, *Camilos Perú*. He worked with various reviews published in Italian and in particular with the review *Vita Nostra* of the Province of Lombardy and Veneto, with *Amare*, and with *Missione Salute*.

On 30 March 2008 he celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of his priesthood at the Church of Santa Maria *della Buenamuerte*, and in October of the same year he celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of his arrival in Peru. In June 2009 he ended his teaching at the *Iset Giovanni XIII* because of his age and became emeritus professor of the same institute.

He continued until June 2016 to be the financial administrator of the Vice-Province of Peru when he handed over the position to Fr. Marco Antonio Toscano Trinidad. As a good father he continued to accompany the young novices, describing to them the life of the Founder to whom, as we know, he was impassionately devoted; stimulating them in their research and their knowledge about the history of the Order and the Vice-Province of Peru; and taking part in celebrations of the Eucharist for seminarians, above all during their monthly retreats.

He was very involved in translating *Lenzo*, his posthumous work. He had originally published it in Latin and with great passion he was translating it into Italian. His dialogues often gravitated to the details of this work of translation.

No longer having commitments and responsibilities at the level of government, his heart and his mind were much more attentive to the people and the good of the institute: he frequently made appeals to thought, to good manners and above all to forgiveness and patience. He often said: '*sono l'emerito!*' ('I am the emeritus!').

In January of this year his health became worse and he was admitted on a number of occasions to the *San Camilo e P. Luis Tezza* Clinic. His combative character which always trusted in providence enabled him to face up to his illness and he experienced it with an approach of deep trust in God. On 20 September he was admitted to the *P. Luis Tezza* Clinic where he died on 4 October 2016 at 6.00.

Today, you are accompanied by all those who for very many reasons in their lives knew you and experienced your love as a father, a friend and a man to confide in. Our hearts, for which you offered up the already remembered commendations, will remember you for the rest of our lives. Furthermore, from on high, where you are now, together with your beautiful little image of Our Lady, we ask you to continue to help us with your love, with your tough character, and with your common sense. Thanks for everything, dear and beloved Fr. Pepino!

The Lord will certainly reward you with an opening of the gates of heaven, to which you possessed the keys: goodness of heart, reflected in so many of your good works!

His mortal remains were placed in the chapel of the historic religious house of the good death; his funeral was celebrated on 5 October; and his body was buried in the cemetery of Huachipa in Lima.

*Goodbye Fr. Pepino!*