



## **Brother Leonardo Grasso (1942-2020)**

Brother Leonardo Grasso was born on July 8, 1942 in Catania, to his parents Giacchino and Santa Caudullo. He entered the Sicilian-Napoletan Province on January 1, 1993, after having spent a year of Volunteering at Tenda San Camillo in Catania. He entered the novitiate on September 8, 1994 at Ovidio Cerruti, Capriate San Gervasio, and made his temporary Profession on September 10, 1995 at St. Camillus parish in Messina. On

March 25, 1999, on the solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, he made his solemn Profession at the John XXIII Institute, Mangano in Catania. After the solemn Profession, he dedicated himself totally to the service of the drug addicts and the people living with HIV/AIDS, at Tenda San Camillo until the day of his death.

In 2004, he was appointed Provincial Bursar of the Sicilian-Napoletan Province and Superior of the Community of Acireale - Mangano. After a few months, he left the post of Provincial Bursar for health reasons, but he continued to be the Superior of the Community for six years with responsibility and great sacrifices.

On July 9, 2013, Brother Leonardo was appointed Superior of the Community of Acireale - Mangano for the period 2013-2016, and on December 12, 2014, he was appointed co-representative of the Interprovincial Economic Commission.

On May 16, 2017, he was appointed Provincial Councilor of the Sicilian-Napoletan Province for the three-year period 2017-2020. On May 31, 2017, the Provincial Council unanimously appointed him as a member of the Economic Commission, and on July 31, 2017, he was appointed the in-charge of the Tenda San Camillo for the period 2017-2020. On October 30, 2017, he was appointed the second Councilor and bursar of the Community of San Camillo in Acireale and the John XXIII Institute in Mangano.

Brother Leonardo has always been a lover of the community in which he lived, a lover of prayer, especially personal prayer, and he tried to grow in it and in the virtue of community living. Though somewhat individualistic in character, he always knew how to extend his helping hands to others and to seek common good.

He was fascinated by the spirituality and life of St. Camillus. In May 2014, on the occasion of the fourth centenary of the death of St. Camillus, in an interview to RAI television programme "La vita in diretta" conducted by Franco Di Mare, he made a testimony of his own conversion and the experiences with the poor and the sick. In the interview, he recalled how his story was "very similar to that of St. Camillus himself, who after a reckless life had dedicated himself to help others."

His life was marked and caressed by the suffering in which he matured, after the death of his parents in 1988 with a distance of six days from each other. He devoted himself to religious life after having had a change of life at the age of forty-six. On July 26, 2004, he underwent a coronary bypass surgery at Monaldi Hospital by Dr. Maurizio Cotrufo.

Amidst the sufferings, Brother Leonardo confirmed that he was happy to work alongside the suffering and the needy, without regrets for the life that he left behind, a life full of fun, but that had left him empty and full of questions that he could not answer. Thus, from being a commercial agent, he had radically changed his life by choosing to become a Camillian religious Brother and to serve the poor and the sick.

Inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit, during 1992-1993, he began voluntary services at the Tenda San Camillo in Riposto, assisting the people living with HIV/AIDS, in a period when the terrible disease was exploding also in Italy. It was not so long ago that Tenda San Camillo had begun to welcome the terminally ill with AIDS who were abandoned by their families. Thanks to this experience of volunteering in the Association of Volunteers (AVULSS) and the example of Brother Carlo Mangione, he decided to enter the Sicilian-Napoletan Province of the Order of Ministers of the Infirm.

During the various interviews, he often repeated his favourite phrase: "True happiness lies in loving, not in being loved in return."

On September 10, 2020, Brother Leonardo Grasso celebrated 25 years of consecration to religious life. During the thanksgiving Holy Mass on July 15, 2020, at Santa Maria delle Grazie church, commonly known as St. Camillus church of Acireale, he emphasized the joy and emotion in embracing Religious Life, leaving the family of origin and friends to find a new family and new friends. He had a great desire to visit Fatima "to understand in silence and prayer what good or bad I have done in these 25 years", and above all, to be happy and proud in being a son of St. Camillus.

He kept in his heart many stories crowned with joys and sorrows, because, for Brother Leonardo, all those people who came to live in that house were like his children. "He has always been the soul of this beautiful house; many people have passed through here, some have remained inside for years, devoting themselves with passion to a mission in which there are many difficult moments, and sometimes they are aggressive," as the Bishop of Acireale Monsignor Antonino Raspanti recalled at the scene of the crime.

A life offered and donated for the least, for those forgotten by society. The "yes" that he had pronounced during his Profession was renewed day after day until it became a "yes" with blood. Thus, the life of Brother Leonardo Grasso was extinguished by the hands of the one who was welcomed by the Community, a fifty-two-year-old previous convict from Genova, whom Brother Leonardo himself had brought there seven years ago. It was he who, after having killed the Brother, to disguise the murder, might have set the fire.

I feel sorry for this man, for all that he will have to endure and overcome. Surely, he did not want to kill Brother Leonardo; he was not fully master of his mind. The grudge must be put aside; life deserves respect from everyone. Let us keep the sentiment of forgiveness in our hearts, to be in every circumstance witnesses of the culture of life and sowers of hope.

The funeral will be held on Saturday, December 12 at 10.00 a.m. at Tenda San Camillo. The ceremony will be officiated by His Excellency Mons. Antonino Raspanti, Bishop of Acireale. Brother's body will rest near his parents at the monumental Cemetery of Catania.

We thank the Lord for having given us a gift of this confrere. From heaven, he will continue to love and pray for his Order, for the Province, and above all, for vocations and for those who are abandoned, as he always did in life.

Fr. Rosario Mauriello MI  
The Provincial Superior