

SAINT GELTRUDE COMENSOLI'S SPIRITUALITY

St Geltrude Comensoli's spiritual experience matured in the multi-faceted social and religious climate of Lombardy at the end of the 19th century: a lively pastoral animation of the parishes, the anticlerical pressures, the social renewals brought about by the Unification of Italy and the beginning of industrialisation.

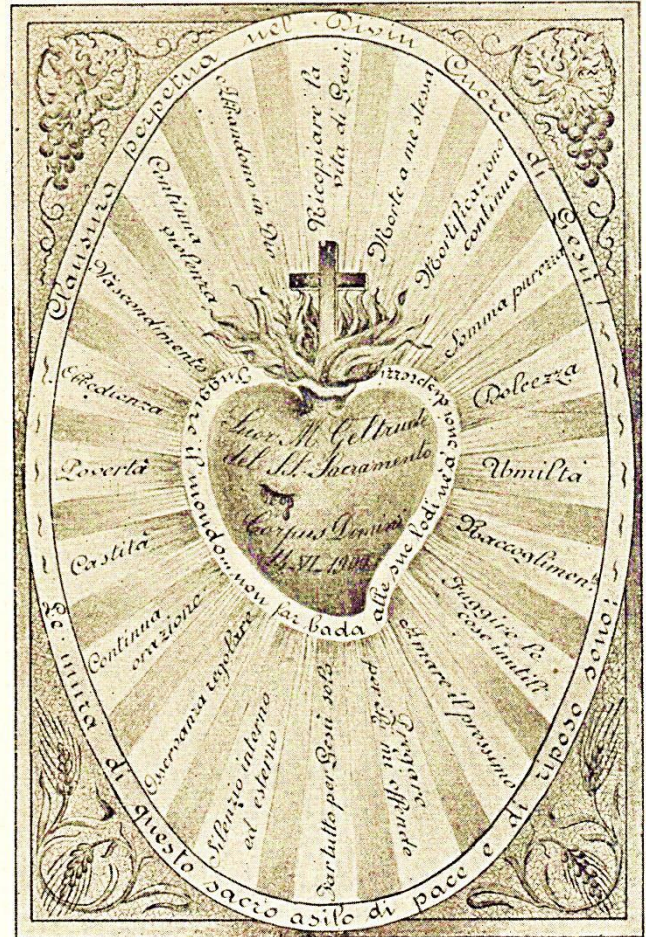
Mother Gertrude was able to give unity and profound meaning to all this: she built her spiritual journey on love, choosing Jesus as the guide and support for all her choices.

TO LOVE BY FOLLOWING JESUS, THE CRUCIFIED "LOVER"

Our Foundress lived with intensity the 19th century devotion to the Sacred Heart as an expression of Jesus' boundless love for humanity. Her willingness to entrust herself to God's merciful love, in order to walk with a quick and light step towards the goal of holiness, was born from this intuition.

His relationship with Christ took on the features of a mystical experience: Jesus is the "Crucified Lover", model of holiness, faithful spouse, and centre of existence, sovereign in every situation of life. Supported by such great Love, she matured an experience of unshakeable faith even in the hardest challenges, because with Him everything becomes possible.

In order to reach this certainty, however, she came to understand the need to be associated with his cross, learning to let her "self-love", her "old self" die in a process of continuous asceticism and renewed abandonment to God's plan for her life.



Drawing by Saint Gertrude

Saint Gertrude truly experienced that discipleship involves sharing the cross in a journey that must be renewed daily with patience and perseverance, until we cross the "night" of the Father's absence, of a God who seems to hide. This path leads to the purification of human sensitivity in order to reach a higher knowledge of God and the union with Him.

TO LOVE BY CONSECRATING ONESELF TO JESUS, THE CRUCIFIED SPOUSE

Another characteristic of Mother Gertrude's spiritual experience is her consecration to Jesus. A choice she made from her youth and which is present in her writings, where we often find expressions of a person in love, a sign of a heart that in giving itself to God has not lost its natural tenderness. The choice of virginity has in fact taken on the traits of sponsality in her: Jesus is the spouse of her life; hers is a relationship that leads her to love in the offering of herself, rather than a renunciation of affectivity.

Prayer constantly nourished her deep relationship with God. A prayer that, for her, meant to stay always in His Presence. This is why for her virginity becomes inseparable from Adoration. It is a way of saying that the Lord is everything and it is well worth spending time with Him.

TO LOVE BY OFFERING ONE'S LIFE IN REPARATION FOR THE OFFENCES AGAINST JESUS

Mother Gertrude's holiness was also an offering of her life "in reparation" for the offences against Jesus. This aspect of his spirituality draws inspiration from the mystical tradition of medieval origin handed down through St Margaret Mary Alacoque.

Having understood the depth of Christ's love, it is a natural consequence for Mother Gertrude to reciprocate it with charity, with the sharing of His sufferings, with weeping for her own and others' sins, with self-offering and with caring for her sinful brothers and sisters.

For her especially, Adoration becomes the best way to show gratitude to the Lord who redeemed humanity with his blood. Prayer thus becomes a true service to the Church.

TO LOVE BY STAYING IN THE PRESENCE OF JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

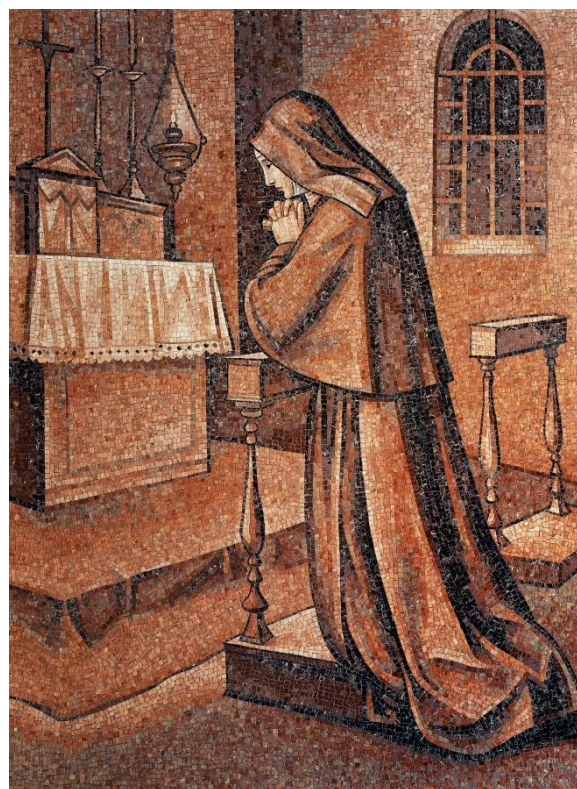
Mother Comensoli is fascinated by the mystery of a God who in the Eucharist annihilates himself to remain present on the path of humanity of all times.

She desires to stay in his presence in order to give him glory; adoration is a way of recognising that Jesus is what count the most in her life.

His Eucharistic spirituality emphasises the close link between the mystery of Jesus' Incarnation and his real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. To worship then means to *"keep him company"*, to look up to him, to invoke him, to recognise him as present and near, to put ourselves in relationship with him who longs to be with us. He is the Friend who waits for us, speaks to us, and helps us in our hardships.

Adoration for her is staying "face to face" with God. In adoration, St Gertrude establishes a relationship of love, trusting surrender and intimate union with Christ; she understands that the Lord is not distant, but incredibly close and willing to listen to those who approach him. All this gives her joy and security, even in the most difficult moments; indeed, when age, commitments and illness keep her away from the tabernacle, she experiences real suffering.

For her, however, it is impossible to approach prayer in an intimistic way; what she experiences in adoration allows her to assimilate the richness received in the celebration of the Eucharistic. His life gradually becomes truly "Eucharistic", rich in the same virtues as of Christ. Adoration is then a true "school of charity", where we can learn to recognise the greatness of God's love, to give thanks with joy for what he gives us, to imitate him and to intercede for our brothers and sisters.



Trento Longaretti: Saint Gertrude in adoration

Mother Gertrude clearly understands the need for silence, for kneeling before the greatness of a God who is so close to us, for recognising our own limitation in order to die to ourselves, and for abandoning our own self-sufficiency in order to allow ourselves to be absorbed by Jesus.

TO LOVE FULFILLING THE WILL OF THE FATHER LIKE JESUS

Our Foundress clearly understands that the love for Jesus does not consist in words or good feelings, but shows itself in deeds: we must do as He did.

Especially during Adoration, St Gertrude renews this intention and uses it as a guide in the most difficult choices. From this choice comes his surrender to God's will, which is not resignation, but a joyful consent granted out of love in complete freedom.

For Mother Gertrude, God's will coincides with Jesus, who fully realised the plan of love of the Father; this is the reason why we must contemplate his life, follow him all the way to the cross, and imitate his love that does not stop in the face of any obstacle. For her, the essential attitude to respond to God's will is total willingness, so much so that she often renews the *"Vow of abandonment to the ever-adorable Holy Will"*.

To understand what God wants for us and from us, we must love him, choose him as the absolute good and decide to live for him. This is the heart of the vow of obedience; it demands the gift of the self. Saint Gertrude, however, is aware that our desires do not always correspond to God's desires for us, so they must be



Trento Longaretti: Caterina Comensoli at the audience with the Pope

increasingly oriented towards his expectations through a demanding conversion made up of a struggle against everything that leads us away from the divine plan.

To live as Children of God, we must also perform the arduous task of recognising the "signs" of God's will in our personal history in order to put ourselves in line with Him. Prayer is the privileged means for this, but we must live in silence and know ourselves. The writings of the Saint Gertrude reveal her great capacity for discernment based on a remarkable subtlety of analysis of her own moods and feelings. With realism, however, Saint Gertrude reminds us that in order to carry out a sound discernment we need to control our instinctive feelings to allow our will to adhere more and more to the model of Christ and to guide our lives.

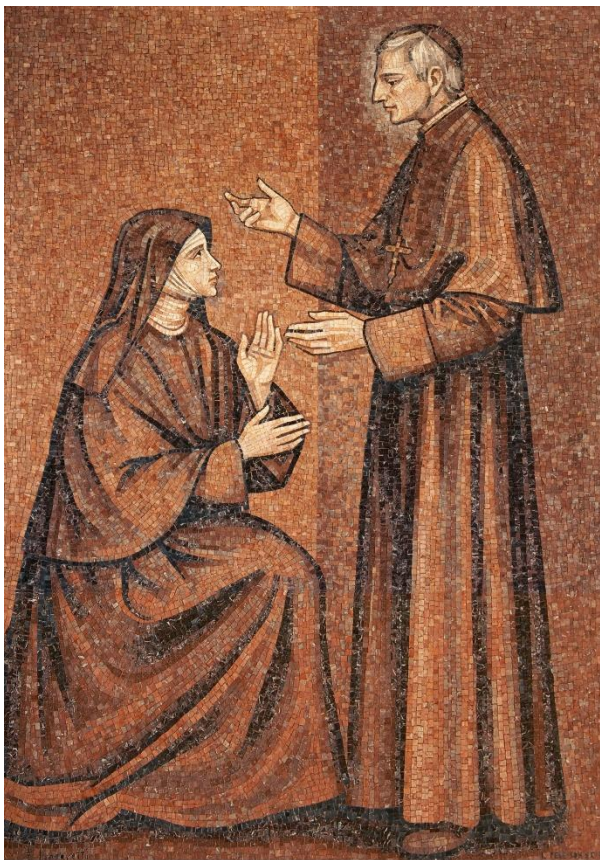
Our Foundress chose to be guided in her discernment by wise priests and by the indications of the Church, because faith is not a private matter, but is made concrete in a specific ecclesial community, where obedience to God is realised.

Observance of the rules of religious life was also a valuable guide for her in interpreting God's plan, especially in everyday life circumstances. Saint Gertrude often associates obedience to the rule, with obedience to her Superiors and sees them as valid means of orientation in the complexity of existence. She frequently reminds her sisters that in God's will there is true freedom, peace and joy.

TO LOVE BY LIVING ONLY FOR JESUS, THE HUMBLE AND GLORIOUS KING

In Saint Gertrude's writings, the desire to live only for the glory of God appears repeatedly, she is in fact aware that this gives fulfilment to human existence. It is necessary to proclaim him Lord of our own lives, accepting and confessing the limits of being a creature and abandoning our own self-sufficiency in order to welcome his saving power. In this lies true humility: feeling oneself to be a "nothing", but also joyfully sharing in God's "everything".

As Jesus did, the Christian is also called to live in hiddenness. For Saint Gertrude, humility is the foundation of Christian life and is always associated with gentleness and meekness. She does not pursue self-glorification, but assumes a humble and ordinary style, which is why she is not concerned with the consent of others: God's approval is enough for her.



Trento Longaretti: Mother Gertrude and Mons. Guindani

For her, cultivating humility means opposing the attitude of continuous self-assertion as the supreme goal of man, so we must also accept with serenity the humiliations that life sometimes holds in store for us. The attitude of humility demands the battle against any form of pride and arrogance: it is a necessary virtue in order to live fraternity without rivalry and competition.

For St. Gertrude, humility is deeply linked to reliance on God and his grace; she finds in it the strength that saves from despair and gives deep joy and peace. To gratefully remember the signs of God's merciful love is a way to grow in this virtue, because it makes us aware of our debt to him and generates in us a great trust in his Providence. For Saint Gertrude, it is the main road to holiness.

Our saint often begins her letters with this motto: "God alone!" It is a summary of his life programme: to seek only the glory of God, without any other interests, without consolations, without seeking other supports, out of pure love. The Lord is the only good for her and she testifies to this with a poor lifestyle, with a confident abandonment to Providence, with a mature detachment

from riches and a generous sharing with the poor. Poverty is the awareness of our own being a creature in constant need of God, following the example of Jesus who preaches this virtue primarily by his own example: he is detached from possessions in order to dedicate himself completely to his mission.

The poverty lived by Mother Gertrude is strict, but also noble and generous with the poor. It is not stinginess because, when necessary, she spends wisely, without taking advantage of the generosity of others.

Finally, we must say that the search for God's glory for St. Gertrude does not coincide with the gratification received through mystical experiences, measured by emotional sensitivity. The emotional dimension plays an important role, but it is necessary to develop a solid faith that is capable of affective but also effective love.

LOVING BY BUILDING FRATERNAL COMMUNION

Mother Comensoli was aware of the importance of mutual love in a religious fraternity, as in any Christian community. In her writings she always recommends fraternal charity, even though she knows that to love is difficult, it is not spontaneous and requires training in acceptance, forgiveness, mercy, communication and patience. Common adherence to Jesus is what promotes charity in a fraternity; it is primarily a way of being and establishing relationships. Fraternal charity requires patience, because it grows and strengthens with time, trust and soul-strength. The evidence of its solidity can be seen in the monotony of everyday life and is not always accompanied by emotional transport, because it requires acceptance of our own and others' frailties. For Mother Gertrude, this ascetic exercise makes us grow in spiritual maturity.

Charity in her manifests itself with gentleness and kindness, even in the face of challenging situations: here she is able to ease tensions with witty jokes and a healthy irony that do not hurt people. She relies on the power of persuasion that moves to the good from within and recommends this attitude in educational activity.

Santa Geltrude vive e propone una carità incarnata: dà indicazioni ricche di buon senso e tiene presenti elementi fondamentali come la salute, l'età, la malattia, la povertà, i limiti fisici e psicologici, il nutrimento e il riposo. He knows how to pay attention to people's concrete needs and often anticipates them with sensitivity and tenderness. But she is also frank: she does not waste her time in mincing words and, when needed, she knows how to make precise and resolute decisions, establishing ties of true, humble and discreet charity. With his way of living, he shows that when we are immersed in God, we are really able to look realistically at situations, people and things.



Trento Longaretti: Caterina Comensoli speaks of Jesus to young people

Even in fraternal correction, she acts with sincerity accompanied by discretion and delicacy, demonstrating that at the root of every reproach there is love, she uses direct, earnest remarks aimed at promoting the good of the person. Mother Gertrude also recommends living forgiveness not only by forgetting offences, but also by rebuilding relationships and responding to evil with good.

She recommends this style also in education and invites not to exaggerate with corrections so as not to generate discouragement; correction should be done with discretion, humility and respect so as not to mortify. With young people in particular, she recommends to discern between errors due to immaturity and faults of a moral nature: for everyone, however, correction should be done by taking the person lovingly aside so as not to humiliate them.

Mother Gertrude's is a motherly charity that keeps ties close; she ensures her physical presence as much as she can and, where she cannot, she makes up for it with a frequent correspondence in which she reveals attention paid to the individual sister as well as the skill to enter into dialogue with gentleness to give admonitions, advice and encouragement.

Her charity is based on the certainty that the Lord is with us and gives us security. To follow Jesus gives a joy that also manifests itself externally, without being loud and superficial, and that does not fail even in suffering. In order to live this way, Saint Gertrude invites us to avoid melancholy and bad moods that spoil fraternity life and hinder apostolic zeal.

In order to remain in the joy, we need a certain discipline of thought that teaches us to see the good, to cultivate trust and gratitude, and to avoid suspicion, self-pity, and brooding over offences and misunderstandings.

TO LOVE JESUS BY SERVING THE POOR

Saint Gertrude's entire life was marked by a strong apostolic impulse in the desire that everyone might come to know God's love; she also lived Adoration with this ecclesial and missionary yearning. For her, the appointment with Jesus is the source and nourishment of apostolic activity and a participation in His mission.

The Sacramentine Sister in her Adoration allows herself to become enkindled by the fire of love with which she in turn enkindles her brothers and sisters. It is an ardour that is evident in external works, but only because it is first experienced in contemplation. That is why his greatest joy is to see faithful and sisters in adoration.

The “Eucharistic works”, all activities aimed at the knowledge and adoration of the Eucharist, originate from this spiritual impulse. In particular, she desires the public adoration of the Blessed Sacrament because it is the heart of the renewal of the Church and of the world. The Eucharist must shape a culture of fraternity, sharing, service, hope and truth. “Eucharistic” logic prevents charity from being reduced to social assistance. Adoration then becomes for Mother Gertrude a service to humanity, because it keeps the gratitude to God awakened in the hearts, the joy that comes from faith and the discovery that life is a great gift.

Adoring Jesus in the signs of Bread and Wine helps to go beyond the superficiality of appearances and to see the whole of creation as a gift from God to be treasured. It also educates to silence and reflection in order to discover the religious dimension of reality.

Adoration nourishes hope, sustains the struggle against suffering and anticipates, in contemplation, the Lord's victory over death and evil. In fact, the mystery of the cross and resurrection is made present in the Eucharist and shows us that God is not distant and silent, but acts by being beside us with his Presence.

In sintesi, Madre Comensoli vede l'Eucaristia come una scuola di carità che insegna ad amare in modo concreto. Hence the focus on the poorest and most disadvantaged young girls, orphans, and workers far from home. Indeed, the Saint understood that the education of youth was an essential element of her apostolate, a true “mission” even if not in distant lands. Her educational passion is directed above all towards 'difficult girls'; for them she proposes a particularly careful formation in the moral and religious fields, to build balanced personalities capable of making mature choices. Mother is convinced that we educate when we are able to communicate a way of thinking and loving, of spending life and giving it meaning.

For Saint Gertrude, apostolic activity requires generous and balanced work, which she considers a source of sustenance, but also a fundamental element of the spiritual life and a concrete way of imitating the example of Jesus in the house of Nazareth.

Work entails dedication and sacrifice, but it is also an opportunity for human growth, because it allows us to get to know our own abilities and limitations. That is why work should be experienced as a participation in the passion of Christ. If we accept to carry the cross of work, we can contribute to the salvation of the world realized by Christ. Saint Gertrude holds work activity in high regard, but recommends combining it wisely with

time for rest so as not to damage one's health. Above all, she cares that her sisters have time for prayer in order to enjoy the presence of the Lord.

Mother Gertrude was able to understand some essential aspects of the Christian faith to make them her own personal path in following Jesus, who had become the centre of her life.

Despite being a woman of the 19th century, she can still say a lot to the Christians of today and of all times with her testimony and sensitivity.

(The text is a summary of the book 'Jesus, loving you and making you loved' by Don Ezio Bolis)

