

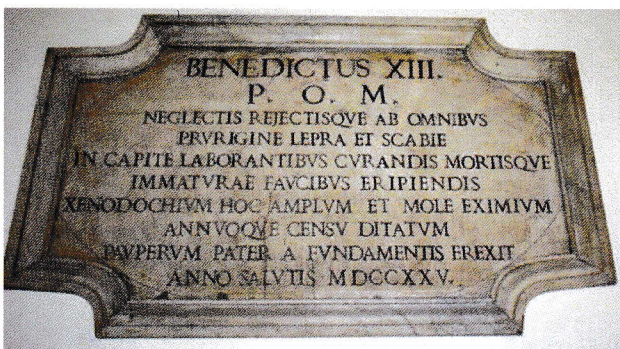


"IN THE FURNACE OF CHARITY"

St. Paul of the Cross and the Venerable John Baptist at the Hospital of San Gallicano, Rome

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Our General Constitutions, at No. 3, state that: "We wish to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected; we seek to offer them comfort and to relieve the burden of their sorrow". Long before this version of the Rule and Constitutions was written, Paul of the Cross and his brother, John Baptist, found themselves in an environment which was to offer them a hands-on opportunity to minister to the poor and abandoned who were physically and spiritually distressed. The year was 1725, the Holy Year, and the opportunity was a new venture of Pope Benedict XIII: a hospital for those afflicted with diseases of the skin – the Institute of San Gallicano in the Trastevere section of Rome. Although there were various hospitals in Rome in the eighteenth century, there were none that cared for these people who were considered to be highly contagious and therefore, a high risk. Often they were abandoned or shunned, left to fend for themselves. As Rome prepared to receive pilgrims for the Holy Year, the Pope sought to provide a sanitary structure where these sick. The dedicatory plaque in the hospital summarizes the sentiments of the Holy Father: "The father of the poor constructed from the foundations this hospice of large and



Dedication Plaque in the Hospital of San Gallicano



The Hospital of San Gallicano, Rome

extraordinary dimensions, enriched by annual contributions, for people abandoned and rejected by all because they suffer from prurigo, leprosy, scabies of the head, for their necessary treatment and in order to save them from the risk of premature death". It was in this setting, which St. Paul of the Cross would later describe as a "furnace of charity", that he and his brother, John Baptist, would begin their first ministerial experience in the city of Rome. It would not only be an opportunity for them to further clarify the charism of this new institute that Paul was inspired to found, but it would be a stepping stone toward their priestly ordination and their introduction into the world of Rome and the Vatican.

However, before arriving at the Hospital of San Gallicano, Paul had several experiences trying to discern this work that he believed God had entrusted to him. Following his retreat at the Church of San Carlo in 1720, during which he wrote the Rule of the Poor of Jesus, Paul visited Rome in the hope of seeking approval from the Holy Father to gather companions for this new venture. In 1721, although he was turned away from the palace of the Pope, he went to the Basilica of St. Mary Major where he professed the vow of the Passion before the icon of Mary, "Salus Populi Romani". In 1722, now accompanied by his brother, John Baptist, he took up residence in the hermitage of the Annunciation on Monte Argentario. Later that year they went to the city of Gaeta where they lived as hermits at the Shrine of the "Madonna della Catena" (Our Lady of the Chain). In August, 1724 they accepted the invitation of the bishop of the city of Troia, Giacomo Cavalieri (1663-1726), to spend a period of time with him during which he would help them to refine the initial draft of the Rule. In 1725 they met with Pope Benedict XIII in Rome at the Church of the Navicella, where he gave them oral



permission for their project. They returned to Gaeta and then, in 1726, they took up residence in Rome at the Hospital of San Gallicano. In a mysterious way, God led them step by step, discerning his will through various people including cardinals, bishops, diocesan priests and laity, and through events such as they were to experience in this hospital. Indeed it would be here that the “silver and gold” of the charism of the Passion that was entrusted to Paul would be purified by fire in ways that were both terrible and awesome.

The first instrument that God used to guide Paul and John Baptist through this next phase of their journey was a young Canon of St. Peter’s, Monsignor Marcello Crescenzi (1694-1768). It was he who would introduce them to Cardinal Pier Marcellino Corradini (1658-1743) and subsequently to the Pope himself, Benedict XIII. Cardinal Corradini was the Prefect of the office that was charged with implementing the decrees of the Council of Trent. One of the matters that concerned Corradini during this Holy Year was the care of the underprivileged, and it was he who began the foundation of the Hospital of San Gallicano.

Another person who would be a key figure in this experience of caring for the sick would be the future prior of the hospital, Don Emilio Lami. He would offer Paul and John Baptist hospitality first at the Roman hospice of Santa Galla, Piazza in Piscinulla, which he had directed since 1708. This hospice, the precursor of the larger San Gallicano complex, offered assistance and medical care to the poor and pilgrims, beggars and especially to those who suffered from various skin diseases. It was here that Paul and John Baptist would reside and would receive an offer from Lami to be part of the staff of the new hospital.

Through a series of letters to Don Erasmo Tuccinardi, a chaplain at the shrine of the Madonna della Catena and later a close and trusted friend of the Danei brothers, we can share first hand in Paul and John Baptist’s sorrows and joys during this period at San Gallicano. On 21 September 1726 Paul wrote to Tuccinardi: *“Here we have safely arrived in Rome, thanks be to God. We shall have no further journey to make for God has arranged otherwise. We are staying at the Hospital which seems to us more suited to our purpose of being totally sacrificed to God’s love. We have not yet had the formal opening. Within eight or ten days the Pope will consecrate the church.”*



Tomb of Cardinal Corradini in the Church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome



Cardinal Marcello Crescenzi (1694-1768)



Then together we shall joyfully go forward to embrace our dear Jesus in the person of his poor". In his testimony for the process of canonization of St. Paul of the Cross, Fr. Giovanni Maria Cioni, future Superior General, would supply the details of the formal opening of the hospital. In a prophetic way, Cioni relates that John Baptist led the entrance procession into the church, bearing the cross.

In eighteenth century Europe, the San Gallicano hospital structure was one of the most functional healthcare institutions of its kind, as well as one of the first centers that specialized in the treatment of skin diseases. Its Rules or guidelines were unique in that era not only because they were motivated by medical concerns, but also by religious principles. Different responsibilities were assigned to lay and religious personnel; but the hierarchical authority was given to the religious. The Rules that governed the institution are directed to the community of ecclesiastics and novices who would dedicate themselves to the health and spiritual care of the sick. A Superior would be chosen from among the elders with the title of "Prior" and the overall administration of the personnel would be entrusted to the Cardinal Protector. Various personnel were employed including nurses, a bursar, a custodian of the Hospital who kept all the keys of the complex, a receiver of alms, two writers to whom was entrusted the task of compiling a list of the sick and that of bundling their clothes, a dispenser of remedies, and a book-keeper for the accounts. In the case of the Danei brothers, Cioni attests to the good order that existed in the hospital and the sacrifices that the personnel had to make: "*Fr. Paul instructed and catechized the poor every day and worked at preparing them for Communion at certain established times of the year. And since they had to see that things moved along in an orderly fashion, they had to suffer a great deal (as Paul himself described to me) including mortifications, etc...*"¹.

The Rules for the personnel of the hospital included prescriptions regarding eating, dressing, recreation, leave from "home", works of Christian charity,

and norms of behavior that were particularly addressed to the "religious community" of the hospital. They described the person of the Superior: "*Considering that a Holy Place in which many people live together is like a ship without a Pilot, this Hospital will have a Superior who governs it directly*". The Rule then proceeded to explain that "*nobody may be assigned to the service of the Hospital who does not lead a life of good reputation, is not scrupulous, a lover of work and capable of succeeding well in the Ministries of the institution. The choosing of subjects possessing such qualities properly pertains only to the Prior...*"². It is not difficult to see how Lami, who was Prior of the hospital, would see Paul and John Baptist as two ideal "novices" – for in one sense, this was an introduction for them into "religious life". Cioni was particularly impressed by John Baptist's recollections of Lami and his treatment of them: "*A certain superior of the place (as Fr. John Baptist told me on numerous occasions), perhaps to test their virtue, made them eat from the napkins that the sick had used, and other such things*"³. There were other similar instances when Lami sought to test their resolve and yet we know that Lami greatly admired the two brothers for their humility and their perseverance and when the time approached for considering them for ordination, he wrote to Bishop Gattinara in Alessandria that the brothers "*practice charity with such fervor and spirit...as to serve as role models and examples of mortification of spirit as well as body*"⁴.

Although the hospital was conducted as a religious community, including the taking of a vow of perseverance, it can be concluded that at no time did Paul consider abandoning his original inspiration. De Sanctis, Zoffoli, Giorgini⁵ and others agree on this point and highlight the fact that Paul and John Baptist were allowed to continue to dress in their penitential garb and, although they had to profess the required vow of perseverance in this work, when they finally decided to leave San Gallicano, Cardinal Corradini willingly released them from this commitment. ➔

¹ Processo ordinario di Vetralla, nella causa di beatif. Di S. Paolo della Croce; ms. in Arch. G.P. p. 55.

² Taverniti, Liana and DiCarolo, Aldo, "The first 'rules' of an ancient dermatologic hospital, the San Gallicano Institute in Rome (1725)" in *The International Journal of Dermatology*, 1988, 37, p. 151-153.

³ Processo ordinario di Vetralla, p. 55.

⁴ DeSanctis, Gioacchino, *Pier Marcellino Corradini, Cardinale Zelante*, Roma, 1971.

⁵ DeSactis, Gioacchino, *Il Santo Fratello di S. Paolo della Croce*; Zoffoli, Enrico, *S. Paolo della Croce, Vol.I*; Giorgini, Fabiano, *Storia dei Passionisti*, Vol. I.



Venerable John Baptist Daneo

After a period of preparation, the Danei brothers were ordained in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican on 7 June 1727 by the same Pope Benedict XIII specifically for their ministry at the hospital. On 27 July their father, Luca Danei, died in Castellazzo. The brothers left to visit with their family and returned to Rome on Sunday, 26 October 1727. During their absence changes took place in the administration of the hospital that would mark a turning point in their ministry. *Constitutions* had been drawn up for the hospital, which included specific treatments for the sick. Until that point in time, Paul and John Baptist were not required to perform any of these medical services; but now, "for the good administration of the place and for a greater sense of community spirit" all of the hospital personnel would have to do these tasks. These included such practices as those used to treat ring worm of the head: *"the scabs, as well as the hair, were softened with a lubricant so that the patient would experience less pain, and then, with utmost charity, the hair was pulled out to the root, a*

few at a time..."⁶. Paul and John Baptist wanted nothing to do with this. Paul humbly confessed to Tuccinardi in a letter dated, 11 March 1728: "we don't have the courage to do this" and he repeated, "according to our temperament, we just can't do this." They protested to Cardinal Corradini and formally petitioned him to be released from their vow and to definitively leave San Gallicano.

Between February and March 1728, the Danei brothers left the hospital — a place where they loved much and where they endured great suffering — suffering that they shared with those to whom they ministered. Curiously, there is no existing record at the hospital that even recalls that they had ever been there.

In discerning God's will, Fr. Gianmaria Cioni recalled that years later Paul would reflect on this experience to a priest saying: *"When the Lord truly wants something for his glory from one of his servants, he always gives him strong signs, so that he follows them. I went to hide myself in the hospital of San Gallicano, and the Lord went there, and with persistent impulses, he pulled me out of there; and I was forced to do that work that he wanted me to do"*⁷. The Lord eventually led them to continue the work of recalling and preaching the Passion and founding an Institute within which others might do the same. At that point their deepest desire was to depart from the hectic activity of caring for the sick in a hospital and in the chaotic environment of 18th century Rome, and withdraw to solitude — Monte Argentario. However, the year and a half that they spent at San Gallicano was not wasted time. Indeed, God was "writing straight with crooked lines". What had God accomplished during this experience?

Although they had not joined a religious order, the hospital was conducted as if it was administered by a religious order. There was a superior, novices who were in training and even a period of testing (novitiate). It clearly was a disciplined lifestyle that included specific rules and regulations. There was a vow to be professed and those who were deemed worthy, were ordained for the service of the institution. The staff lived simply and shared in the plight of those to whom they ministered. One can conclude that this was a first experience of what could be called classical "religious life" and that Paul would

⁶ Cf. Archivio di Stato di Roma, sez. *Ospedali, S. Gallicano, busta, n.7*, cit. Zoffoli, Enrico, *S. Paolo della Croce*, Roma, 1962, Vol.I, p. 363.

⁷ *Processo Ordinario di Vetralla*, p. 157.



draw on this organizational experience as he would continue to revise further drafts of his Rule.

This was also a spiritual experience for the Danei brothers. Paul in particular, embraced this experience of caring for the sick and suffering with all his heart. In a letter dated 4 January 1727 to Tuccinardi, he would refer to the hospital as “a very precious vineyard, or even better, a furnace of charity.” In this “furnace” they would be humbled by their superiors as well as by the poor and sick to whom they ministered. Yet in the end, the poor and the sick would be cared for by Paul and his future sons not primarily with medicine and bandages, but with the healing power of the wounds that Jesus suffered during his Passion. However, neither were the practical lessons in caring for the sick that Paul learned in the hospital wasted.

In one of the early versions of the Rule, that of 1736, Paul offers such specific guidelines for the care of our sick religious that one might be amazed at his knowledge and detail that he stipulates: “Let the rooms be well cleaned, and there can be flowers or other fragrant herbs, as the Superior judges best. The bed for the sick should of straw, and have a woollen mattress, with good pillows covered with simple, but good fabric; sheets are not needed since the sick person will wear his Habit...In cases of serious illness they should never be left alone, but there should always be a Brother present at least a night to assist him and to comfort him in his needs, both physical as well as spiritual” (Rule 1736, Chapt. XXXVII). These would be things that he would have learned at San Gallicano. Although with less detail, our current Constitutions contain specific references to the care of the elderly and sick that echo Paul’s original prescriptions: “All our communities are to show a special concern for the sick brethren, who share in the Passion of Christ at a deeper and more personal level. Our love for them must be shown by our understanding, attentiveness, and providing them with every possible care”. (No.29), and also: “The community must show the same care for the aging, whose religious lives at this time must be made rewarding and fruitful...” (No.30).

Another of the great fruits of the time period at San Gallicano would obviously be their priestly ordination. They were specifically ordained “for the service of the hospital” of San Gallicano and when they

made the decision to leave the hospital, they would have to find a new title under which to exercise their ministry. In a letter to Tuccinardi dated 11 March 1728 Paul states that one of the motivations for their requesting to be dispensed from their vow of perseverance at the hospital was so that they might be able to “withdraw into solitude and persevere in our way of life”. Fabiano Giorgini reflects on the phrase “persevere in our way of life”: “This phrase makes us think Paul had his doubts that hospital service, though an exercise of great charity to the outcasts of society was the way that God had established for him and for the Congregation he was to found. The juridical ordination title still remained that of service to the outcasts of society; but this was to be carried out in administering the Word of God by enabling them to understand how God loves them in Jesus and how he helps them heal the illness of sin”⁸.

Last but not the least of the benefits of the San Gallicano experience was the friendship that Paul cultivated with men of high ecclesiastical rank such as Corradini and Crescenzi. This would serve him well for many years to come and would be of inestimable value in founding the Congregation.

And so the experience at San Gallicano concluded this long period of discernment on the nature of the Congregation and the way in which it would accomplish the will of God. It was a period in which Paul would mature in the way that he dealt with various kinds of people in unique and challenging situations. He learned practical things which he would put to good use his in his future Congregation. He deepened his spiritual and theological knowledge through study. He also spent long hours in prayer, presumably in the chapel of the Hospital where he and John Baptist celebrated their first Mass. It was there before the Blessed Sacrament that he prayed that “the most holy cross of Jesus, our Good, be always planted in the midst of our hearts so that our spirit may be grafted into this Tree of Life and produce fruits worthy of penance through the infinite merits of the death of the true Author of Life” (Tuccinardi, 29 Aug. 1726). Today, the “fruits” of Paul’s efforts are still being harvested from the tree of the Cross that Paul planted in the Congregation by his spiritual sons and daughters. It is a tree which must be carefully tended and pruned so that it will continue to bear the fruit of the Passion. ●

⁸ Giorgini, Fabiano, *Storia dei Passionisti*, Vol. I, p. 113.