

Conforti's Legacy

The Virtues: Why Conforti is a Saint



From the Postulator, Fr. Guglielmo Camera, SX Feb. 21, 2011

Pope Benedict XVI, in a Consistory of Cardinals of Feb. 21st, 2011, recognized the Virtues of Bishop Guido Maria Conforti. What does it mean?

On October 23, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI canonized Guido Maria Conforti, offering him to the universal Church as a gift of the Spirit, as a model to imitate and as a new and living “parable” for our times. Why has the Church decided to propose him as a model to us, to bishops, priests and, indeed, all the faithful?

A Model of Christian life for all the faithful

Bishop Conforti offers us an example of a holiness that does not consist of spectacular works, but in the humble, faithful and constant fulfillment of God’s will at all times. In our own times, when faith is constantly threatened by rationalism, secularism, materialism

and narcissism, bishop Conforti reminds us that faith is our greatest treasure and that it must inspire our thoughts, judgments and action. As a teacher of faith, he proposes a solid path towards holiness to all the faithful, a holiness that he lived and believed possible for all Christians.

In Conforti’s own words: ***“holiness does not consist in extraordinary penances, ecstasy and rapture, in wonderful gifts and great works that attract admiration. It consists in the possession of God’s grace and friendship, in the possession of love, the exercise of virtue, the fulfillment of the duties of one’s own state and in the observance of the divine law. This is the holiness I call ordinary, possible and a duty for all; there is no excuse that can convince us that such a holiness is impossible.”*** (Homily, 1 Nov 1913).

Above all, however, Conforti reminds us of the missionary dimension of the Christian life. All Christians must embrace as their own the plan of Christ to reach the ends of the earth and proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom to all. All Christians, therefore, must be missionaries. By his example, bishop Conforti taught us that it is possible ***“to extend the range of charity to the ends of the earth, and devote***

the same care to those afar off that we do to those who are members of our own community” (Vat. II, Ad Gentes, 37).



A Model for priests

Conforti's life as a priest is well described in the letter he sent to the priests of the Diocese of Parma, on 2 August 1913, to mark the 25th anniversary of his priestly ordination. He encouraged his priests to imitate Jesus the Good Shepherd, the same program he tried to live out each day as a bishop and priest:

“We must love in the same way as Jesus Christ, who gave his entire self for us. Our preference must be for those who are in the greatest need, and who offer us the greatest opportunity to exercise our charity and acquire greater merits in the sight of God. We must prefer the poor, who are the object of Christ's predilection; we must prefer those who are in physical pain, those who bear the burden of sorrow and who need comfort in their state of solitude and abandonment; these people need a friendly word that points them to heaven, which is promised above all to those who weep and bear misfortune with Christian resignation. We must prefer the children; above all, we must show preference to those who have strayed from the Father's house, for those who hate us because they do not know us, those who blaspheme religion because they have never studied it; for these too we must have a profound charity and reach out to them, as far as circumstances allow and, when nothing else if possible, we must at least pray for their conversion.” (Pastoral Letter, 2 August 1913).



A Model for bishops

In addition to his extraordinary zeal for missionary work and his episcopal ministry, Conforti also heroically practiced the Christian, priestly and pastoral virtues, offering a shining example of apostolic, consecrated and contemplative life.

The Second Vatican Council says that the Church is missionary by her very nature (AG 2) and that bishops “are consecrated not just for one diocese, but for the salvation of the entire world” (AG 38). Conforti fully embraced this notion of the Church and the Bishops. He strove to embody this ideal in his life, becoming

a model for his own missionaries, the people of his dioceses and the priests and bishops of the whole Church. While dedicating all his energies to the care of his large and demanding dioceses, he nevertheless keenly felt the *“sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum”* (concern for all the Churches, cfr. 2Cor 11:28). Cardinal Giuseppe Roncalli, the Patriarch of Venice and future Pope John XXIII, aptly described Conforti on the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of his death: *“Bishop of Parma, but Missionary for the whole world.”*



The Virtues

The living faith of the Blessed Conforti shone through his every word and action. His unlimited trust in Divine Providence supported him in all his tribulations, while his inexhaustible love for God and neighbor was visible to all. Faith, hope and love inspired him to found his missionary Institute and sustained him in the countless difficulties that he had to face in the foundation of his Institute and the government of the Diocese.

A central figure in the Italian episcopate in the first thirty years of the 20th century, in the midst of turmoil and important transformations, Conforti always behaved in a virtuous manner, in a continuous crescendo, from his youth

to maturity and until the moment of his death: with the merits he achieved for the Church through his extraordinary zeal for missionary work and his long episcopal government, he offers a shining example of apostolic life combined with the profession of the evangelical counsels and the most intense contemplation.

He also offers an example of a holiness that does not consist of spectacular works, but the humble and constant fulfillment of God’s will in every moment of life. In our own time, in which the faith is constantly threatened by rationalism, secularization, materialism and the pursuit of pleasure in all its forms, Blessed Conforti reminds us that Faith is our greatest treasure and we must allow it to inspire us to think, judge act and behave as Christ, who is the great Model we must imitate and who must be the center of all our thoughts and affection.

Finally, in the missionary re-birth of the Church after the Second Vatican Council, the Blessed Conforti reminds us that every member of the People of God has the fundamental duty to play his/her own part in the missionary effort among the peoples, by collaborating in accordance with their own possibilities, resources, charism and ministry (Cfr. Ad Gentes 35; 28). He taught us through his own life that it is possible ***“to embrace the whole world with love, showing to those who are faraway the same concern we have for the members of our own community.”*** (Ad Gentes, 37)