



Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey

Letter of February 22, 2016,
Feast of the Chair of St Peter

Dear Friends,

SAINTE John Paul II dedicated a significant portion of his ministry as the successor of Peter to those who suffer, especially the sick. On numerous occasions, he addressed the medical community: "Medical professionals," he said in 1986, "have not only a technique to use, but a warm devotion that comes from the heart, mindfulness to the dignity of individuals. Remain careful not to reduce the patient to an object of care, but to make him or her the primary partner in a battle that is his battle. And, in the grave ethical problems that arise in your professions, I encourage you to find the necessary responses that are in keeping with the dignity of the patient's life, in his capacity as a person." On October 25, 1987, the same Pope canonized a doctor, Giuseppe (Joseph) Moscati, in whom he saw "the concrete realization of the ideal of the Christian lay person."



Saint Giuseppe Moscati

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Giuseppe Moscati was born in Benevento (southern Italy), on July 25, 1880, and was baptized on the 31st. Francesco Moscati, his father, a brilliant magistrate, would later become an Appeals Court judge, first in Ancona, then in Naples. Like his wife Rosa de Luca, he was of the lineage of the Marquises of Roseto. Giuseppe was the seventh of nine children, but only three of the brothers and sisters who preceded him, Gennaro, Alberto, and Anna, surrounded his cradle. In 1875, the Moscati family had suffered the loss of two twins, Maria and Anna, at an early age, then the death, even more painful, of another little Maria, at the age of four. After Giuseppe, Eugenio and Domenico were born. The latter would one day become mayor of Naples. Every year Francesco Moscati took his family to the region the family came from, for a vacation in the midst of nature. They always attended Mass together in the local Poor Clares' church. Often Francesco would serve at the altar.

A salutary dismay

The family environment nurtured in young Giuseppe the blossoming of a faith that was profound and fully lived. He met Blessed Bartolo Longo, the founder of the Shrine of the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary of Pompeii, and would later become his doctor, being present at his death. The Moscati family had met him at the home of Caterina Volpicelli, the foundress of the Maids of the Sacred Heart of JESUS, later canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on April 29, 2009. Francesco and Rosa were close friends with her. The Moscati family regularly visited the church of the Maids of the Sacred Heart in Naples. It was there that Giuseppe made his

First Communion, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1888. Two years later, he received the sacrament of Confirmation. In 1889, he entered the high school affiliated with the Vittorio Emanuele Institute, where he diligently devoted himself to literary studies. But already an acute sense of the precariousness of human life was beginning to develop in his soul. He would later write, "I looked with interest at the Hospital of the Incurables, which my father had pointed out to me from our house in the distance, inspiring in me feelings of pity for the nameless suffering that was alleviated there. A salutary dismay seized me, and I began to think of the transitory character of all things. My illusions passed away, as the blossoms fell in the orange groves that surrounded me." At that time he was far from imagining that he would later dedicate his life to the sick and to medical research.

In 1892 a tragic event took place that would change the course of his life. After falling from a horse during a military parade in Turin, his brother Alberto became epileptic. Giuseppe began to regularly spend long hours at his bedside to care for him. It was at this time that his determination to become a doctor grew. As the only one in his family to consider a career in medicine, the situation couldn't help but provoke discussions, but he stuck to his resolution. In 1897, his father died at the age of 61 as a result of a cerebral hemorrhage, but not without receiving the last sacraments. Giuseppe, who had just earned his high school diploma, resolutely enrolled in the faculty of medicine. The reasons for his choice would

later be revealed in remarks addressed to his students: "Remember that in choosing medicine, you are committing yourselves to a sublime mission. With God in your heart, persevere in practicing the good teachings of your parents, love and pity towards those who suffer, with faith and enthusiasm, deaf to both praise and criticism, aiming only to do good."

Competence and faith

However, a wind of revolution and atheism was blowing on the student youth, and the faculties of philosophy and medicine in Naples were its primary hotbeds. But while his classmates were demonstrating in the streets, Giuseppe, judging that serious and thorough study required peacefulness and serenity of mind, refused to allow himself to be distracted from his work. He went on to excel in his profession, and would not give in in the least when it came to his religious convictions, in spite of the prevailing atheist positivism. On August 4, 1903, only twenty-three years old, he obtained his doctorate in medicine with the top grade and the jury's commendation. That same year, he won the competitive exam for temporary assistant at the Hospital of the Incurables—at the time, one of the most renowned hospitals in Europe—then, in 1908, the competitive exam for assistant at the Institute of Chemical Physiology. His scientific abilities aroused admiration. He could have striven after a brilliant university career, but he preferred to serve patients. In addition to his commitments in the laboratory, he continued to examine patients and very quickly acquired an extraordinary ability to make quick and accurate diagnoses. His experience did not suffice to explain this particular gift. He had very profound instincts and a compassion that went beyond the physical ailment: "Remember," he would tell his students, "that life is a mission, a duty; it is suffering! Every one of us must have his battle station. Remember that you must be concerned not only about the body, but about the groaning souls that turn to you for help."

In the same sense, Saint John Paul II would say to medical professionals: "Your patients need the most humane care possible. They need spiritual care. You feel yourselves on the threshold of a mystery that is theirs alone" (October 5, 1986).

Giuseppe put into practice JESUS' words on love of one's neighbor made real by serving him, to the point of giving His life. After having washed the feet of His disciples, JESUS told them: *Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Master and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Amen, amen, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them* (Jn. 13:12-17). "Love makes sacrifices for others," said Pope Francis to youth on June 21, 2015. "Look at the love of parents, of so many mothers, of so many

fathers who in the morning arrive at work tired because they haven't slept well in order to look after their sick child—this is love! This is respect. This is not having a good time. This is—let's go to another key word—this is 'service'. Love is service. It is serving others. When after the washing of the feet JESUS explained the gesture to the Apostles, He taught that we are made to serve one another, and if I say that I love but I don't serve the other, don't help the other, don't enable him to go forward, don't sacrifice myself for him, this isn't love. You have carried the Cross [the World Youth Day Cross]: there is the sign of love. That history of God's love involved in works and dialogue, with respect, with forgiveness, with patience during so many centuries of history with His people, ends there—his Son on the Cross, the greatest service, which is giving one's life, sacrificing oneself, helping others."

At the risk of his life

In April 1906, an eruption of Vesuvius terrified the inhabitants of the area. In Torre del Greco, a small town six kilometers from the crater, lived a number of paralytic or elderly patients. Doctor Moscati saved them by having their hospital evacuated at the risk of his own life, shortly before the roof collapsed. Two days later, he sent a letter to the director general of hospitals in Naples, offering to reward the individuals who had helped him, but he insisted that there be no mention of him: "I beg of you, do not cite my name, so as not to stir up... the ashes!" Five years later, in 1911, a cholera epidemic plunged Naples into mourning. The ships that arrived in this port city from all over the world brought with them disease germs, and the poverty that prevailed in the filthy back alleys in some areas of the town promoted contagion. The progress of medicine limited the number of victims to some extent, but the situation remained worrisome. The Minister of Public Health tasked Doctor Moscati with conducting research on ways to overcome the scourge. Many of his suggestions to sanitize the city were adopted.

Nevertheless, Giuseppe did not abandon scientific research. He would be the author of thirty-two papers published in the academic world. At thirty-one, he was accepted into the competition for Temporary Assistant at the Ospedali Riuniti. One of the members of the jury, Professor Cardarelli, dazzled by his performance, avowed that in sixty years of teaching, he had never seen a young practitioner so well prepared and, on his initiative, the Royal Academy of Medicine and Surgery made him an associate member. In 1911, the Minister of Public Education granted him his doctorate in physiological chemistry and the license to teach in this field.

In the exercise of his profession, Doctor Moscati dedicated himself entirely to Christ. So as to be able to be all things to all people, he firmly made the choice to remain celibate. His devotion to the Virgin MARY—he always had his rosary with him and never failed to pray

the Angelus—gave him the strength to offer his chastity to God and to guard it as a treasure. However, he also knew how to advise his students to marry, according to the writings of Saint Paul: *I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another* (1 Cor. 7:7-9). Casting a lucid and compassionate gaze on human fragility, he invited others to purify their hearts: “Oh, if youth with their exuberance knew that the illusions of love are passing and that they are the fruit of a lively exaltation of the senses! If an angel warned them that all that which is impure must die because impurity is evil, while they so easily swear eternal fidelity in the delirium that overcomes them, perhaps they would suffer much less and be better.”

To the question: “How can we experience the love of JESUS?”, Pope Francis responded, on June 21, 2015: “Permit me to speak sincerely. I don’t want to be a moralist but I would like to say a word that isn’t liked, an unpopular word ... Love is in works, in communicating, but love is very respectful of people, it does not use people, that is, love is chaste. And to you young people in this world, in this hedonistic world, in this world where only pleasure, having a good time, and living the good life get publicity, I say to you: be chaste, be chaste. All of us in life have gone through moments in which this virtue has been very difficult, but it is in fact the way of genuine love, of a love that is able to give life, which does not seek to use the other for one’s own pleasure. It is a love that considers the life of the other person sacred: ‘I respect you, I don’t want to use you, I don’t want to use you’. It’s not easy. ... Forgive me if I say something you weren’t expecting, but I ask you: strive to experience love chastely.”

The greatest evil

In November 1914, Mrs. Moscati died of diabetes, incurable at the time. She received the last sacraments with great devotion, and exhorted her family: “My dear children, I die happy. Always flee from sin, which is the greatest evil in life.” Several years later, Professor Moscati would write: “I know that my parents are always at my side. I can feel their sweet company.” Diabetes was to remain one of his preoccupations. He would become the first doctor in Naples to experiment with insulin, and would teach a group of colleagues methods for treating this disease.

Italy entered into war in May 1915. Giuseppe Moscati volunteered to go to the front, but his request was refused. The Hospital of the Incurables was requisitioned by the army, and military authorities charged the Professor with providing care for the wounded. He became for them not only a doctor, but an attentive and loving comforter. He also devoted himself to the training of young doctors, because he considered it his duty to pass on his professional and spiritual experience to them. One of his students would testify: “He revealed

to us his knowledge and, day after day, he shaped our minds and souls. He spoke to us of God, of divine Providence, of the Christian faith. And joy beamed from his face when we followed him into the churches of Naples to attend Mass.” Giuseppe’s faithful witness to his Christian faith commanded respect, in spite of the avowed atheism that prevailed in the scientific world. He even had a crucifix installed in the new autopsy room of the Institute of Anatomical Pathology, which he directed. Next to the crucifix was an inscription from the prophet Hosea (13:14): *Ero mors tua, o mors (O death, I will be thy death)*. At the Institute’s official opening, he invited his colleagues “to pay homage to Christ, who is the Life, returned after too long an absence to this place of death.” He drew from frequent reception of the sacraments, and especially from daily attendance at Mass, the boldness to publicly witness to his faith in JESUS CHRIST.

Victim of success

Professor Moscati was however the victim of his own success among the students, for many of them preferred to follow his lectures rather than to attend the official courses. Jealous colleagues schemed to prevent his professional advancement. He, however, did not allow himself to be intoxicated by his brilliant success; he even experienced frequent interior struggles, especially against the temptation to discouragement. “I read in the autobiography of Blessed Therese of Lisieux a sentence made for me,” he wrote: ‘My God, discouragement itself is a sin.’ Yes, it’s a sin that comes from pride, and that shows that I have believed myself able to do great things by myself! Whereas on the contrary, we are no more than useless servants (cf. Lk. 17:10).” Although unconcerned with career advancement and human glory, but wishing to continue to teach, he attempted in 1922 to obtain a new degree. Thinking at one point that he had failed, and no longer knowing what his obligations were, he felt a profound helplessness that he confided to one of his former teachers: “I am completely exhausted and depressed, because since the war I have worked unceasingly and experienced very strong emotions... I spend sleepless nights and I have lost the ability to teach [the degree that he thought he had failed at].”

“In the face of [failure],” said Pope Francis to youth in Sardinia, “you are right to wonder: what can we do? Of course one thing is to let oneself be overcome by pessimism and distrust. ... Trust in JESUS. The Lord is always with us. He comes to the shores of the sea of our life, He makes Himself close to our failures, our frailty, and our sins in order to transform them. ... Difficulties must not frighten you but on the contrary spur you to go beyond them. Hear JESUS’ words as though they were addressed to you: *put out into the deep and let down your nets!* (Lk. 5:4)” (September 22, 2013).

In fact, Professor Moscati was completely spent, but he did not give in, just like the Apostles, who were *afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not*

driven to despair (2 Cor. 4:8). Against all expectations, in the end he obtained the degree he wanted that allowed him to teach clinical medicine privately in universities and other higher education institutions. Several days later, he revealed the spirit that kept him going: "Love the truth," he wrote in his private notes, "show the person you are, without guile or fear, without subterfuge. And if the truth earns you persecution, accept it; if it brings you torment, endure it. And if you must sacrifice yourself and your own life for the truth, be strong in the sacrifice." His patience in adversity proved to be productive. Having endured difficult periods of dryness and despair, he was able to truly encourage those who were experiencing similar distress: "Come what may, remember that God never abandons anyone. The more you feel alone, neglected, scorned, misunderstood, the closer you are to capitulating under the weight of grave injustices, the more you will feel an infinite and mysterious force, which will sustain you and make you capable of good and vigorous intentions, and you will be astonished by these strengths when serenity returns. This strength is God!" Thanks to this strength that comes from God in weakness and humility (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9), Giuseppe Moscati did not hold back from the poor any of his time or money.

They have lost everything

He had the gift of offering his assistance to the poor without offending their sensibilities. One day, a penniless woman with tuberculosis realized that along with the prescription, Giuseppe had slid a fifty lire bill into the envelope. She wanted to thank him for his kindness, but he protested, "For the love of God, say nothing of this to anyone!" Called to the bedside of a sick railroad worker, he found many people gathered

there. These railroad workers, who were all as poor as the patient, were taking up a collection to pay for the consultation. The priest who accompanied the doctor was getting ready to dissuade them, knowing full well that it was of no use. But the professor intervened: "Since you are in the process of collecting money by taking a portion from your hard work, I will contribute my share so that the patient may have, with the sum collected, the necessary means to be cared for." And he handed over three ten lire bills. Truly he was called "the doctor of the poor" because he himself lived meagerly in order to better care for his neediest patients. He had neither car nor horse, but always traveled on foot. When he was asked about this practice, he vigorously replied, "I am poor. I do not have the means, due to my professional obligations, for such expenses! I beg you to believe me!" Upon his death, this sentence that speaks volumes was written in the register of condolences: "You did not want either flowers or tears, but we weep all the same, because the world has lost a saint, and Naples an example of virtue; but the poor sick, they have lost everything!"

On Holy Tuesday, April 12, 1927, Professor Moscati attended Mass and received Communion in the early morning. Before going to the Hospital of the Incurables, he told his sister: "Professor Verdinois was hospitalized at Professor Stanziale's clinic—please remember about the sacraments..." Late in the morning, he returned to his own clinic, where many patients awaited him. At three o'clock in the afternoon, he felt poorly. He dismissed those who were still waiting, and withdrew to his room. He told the cleaning lady: "I feel ill..." A few moments later, stretched out in his armchair, his arms crossed over his chest, he tilted his head and peacefully breathed his last. He was 47 years old.

Up to the end, he gave his life to his patients, giving without counting the cost for the love of Christ. A light for our time, he remains a witness to the "wisdom of the heart" of which Pope Francis spoke in his message of December 3, 2014: "Wisdom of the heart means being with our brothers and sisters. Time spent with the sick is holy time. It is a way of praising God Who conforms us to the image of His Son, Who *came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many* (Mt. 20:28). Did not JESUS Himself say (Lk. 22:27): *I am among you as one who serves*?"

Dom Antoine Marie
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D.A.B.

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