

## **Blessed Timothy Giaccardo** **“Another Christ”**

by Fr. George Kaitholil

Timothy Giaccardo was the first to be ordained priest in the Society of St Paul, the first Vicar General of this Congregation and its first Blessed in heaven. He was also the first ever priest of the Catholic Church to be ordained specifically for the ministry of the media. He was born on 13 June 1896, feast of St Anthony of Padua, as the first child of Stephen and Maria, in the little village of Narzole, North Italy. The same day he was baptised and named Joseph. Stephen worked hard in the fields he had taken on lease for sharecropping. The Giaccardo family was materially poor but rich in Christian faith.

At the age of twelve, Joseph met Bl. James Alberione who had gone to help the ailing parish priest of Narzole. Impressed by his piety, he helped the boy to join the seminary of Alba. In October 1908 he entered the seminary where Fr Alberione was the spiritual director. In 1909, at the age of 13, he made a vow of chastity to the Holy Virgin. Later he wrote that he never violated it even during the most difficult periods. On 29 October 1917, with his bishop’s permission, he shifted from the seminary to the Society of St Paul, newly instituted by Fr Alberione at Alba for the “apostolate of the good press”. There Joseph taught the first young boys and was their guide. On 1 November he made a private vow and renewed it on 8 December 1917, together with other four young men. For Fr Alberione he was the “son of promise”, as Isaac was for Abraham; as founder, he saw in Joseph the first among his descendants.

Most of the clergy of Alba thought it impossible for the “Paulines” to be ordained priests. When cleric Giaccardo from the seminary requested permission to join Fr Alberione’s venture, his bishop sternly asked him, “Are you ready to renounce your clerical habit and the priesthood?” With great pain of heart, but without hesitation, Giaccardo accepted these two conditions. He offered the pain as a sacrifice to God, through the hands of Mary, so that he could follow his vocation to the Society of St Paul which he understood clearly and felt intensely. He gave up the comfort and security of the seminary and risked his priesthood to join the newborn and insecure Institute of Fr Alberione. God’s call was powerful. Giaccardo knew that whatever was deposited in the hands of Mary was safe for ever. God accepted his sacrifice as He accepted that of Abraham: the disposition of heart was sufficient; the sacrifice was not to be materialised.

Fr Alberione, strong in faith, silently and prayerfully awaited the canonical approval of his Institute as a Religious Congregation. He was hopeful for the ordination of this young man, called to the ministry of preaching through the Mass Media. To everyone’s surprise, Alberione was able to see cleric Giaccardo ordained priest by the same bishop who had asked him to renounce the priesthood. God favoured his servant. By a special dispensation, Giaccardo was ordained priest on 19 October 1919, before completing the prescribed age, to enable his dying mother to see her son a priest. The two

blessed souls, Fr Alberione and Fr Giaccardo, saw in this event God's great response to their faith in the vocation and mission of the Society of St Paul. They were the founding fathers of the great Pauline Family. As heirs of the apostolate of St Paul, they set out to proclaim the Gospel far and wide through the means of communication.

On 30 June 1920 Fr Giaccardo formally became a member of the Society of St Paul, with religious vows, and Fr Alberione named him Timothy.

Very intelligent and sensible, Fr Giaccardo was the first to guide the men's group and the women's group which in 1926 opened their branches in Rome. Fr Alberione told him, "I am sending you to Rome for your love for St Paul and for your fidelity to the Pope. I am sure, the Divine Master will be pleased to have in Rome, beside his Vicar who represents the spoken Gospel, also a 'Voice' which represents the printed Gospel." *The Voice* was in fact the first leaflet printed by the Paulines in Rome. It was Fr Giaccardo's mission to cultivate the Pauline family in the soil of Rome, made fruitful by the blood of Saints Peter and Paul. There he made his Perpetual Profession on 16 March 1927 and stayed there till April 1946 when he was sent to Alba as superior of the Mother House.

Fr Giaccardo, as the first spiritual son of Fr Alberione, transmitted and deepened his heritage. Without ever calculating the fatigue, and without ever taking a single holiday, he carried on his shoulders the burden of the Pauline Family, sharing with the Founder the solicitude for the individual Congregations in their difficult beginnings and development. Fr Giaccardo recorded in his diary, "I accept this ministry in the spirit of humility, with a docile, affectionate and sincere heart." And Fr Alberione confirmed, "I have no one who, like him, shares so well my sentiments and my spirit, who takes care of you with the most sincere affection."

In the full bloom of his life Fr Giaccardo offered his life to ensure the continuity of his own Congregation in difficult times and the canonical recognition of a new Congregation, the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master. The Lord accepted his offering. On 4 October 1946, Fr Alberione called him to Rome and made him the first Vicar General of the Society of St Paul. On 12 January 1948, Pope Pius XII granted pontifical status to the Sister Disciples. That day Fr Giaccardo celebrated his last Mass. He was suffering from acute leukaemia. Lost in prayer, on 24 January, he left for the next world.

The whole life of Bl. Giaccardo was one of humble service, suffering and sacrifice. He was noted for his absolute obedience, spirit of poverty, deep humility and selfless charity. He welcomed all and was ever joyful in service. Speaking about him, Bl. Alberione says, "He represented the Lord well at the altar, in the confessional, in the pulpit, in conversation, in the classroom, in recreation... in all offices he held and in his private life he was another Christ... His life was a continuous, daily exercise of self-discipline... He knew how to speak with God... He was a master of apostolate... was light and salt in the evangelical sense... Certainly I trusted him more than myself."

The life of Bl. Timothy Giaccardo is a story of passionate and constant love. He was bursar, editor, author, teacher, superior, preacher, but above all he was a living example of sanctity and a much appreciated spiritual guide. He had a very deep and filial devotion to Mother Mary. His abundant diary notes, written for his private use, tell us the marvellous story of his interior life. He had frequent, intimate and passionate colloquies with Jesus, and was used to mystical prayer. His life is a veritable

proclamation and a fascinating demonstration of the primacy of God in our lives. He was very busy and active, yet he was ever a man of prayer and contemplation and was deeply devoted to Jesus Master in the Holy Eucharist.

Timothy Giaccardo was solemnly beatified by Pope John Paul II on 22 October 1989. Thus was proved the validity of the media apostolate as a means of sanctification.

Blessed Timothy Giaccardo is a shining example of a man who employed the media for the good of fellow humans, for their spiritual and moral well-being, and for bringing them closer to God. He beautifully blended in himself active apostolic life with deep, affective contemplation. His example inspires all of us to deepen our interior life and at the same time to employ our energies selflessly to fulfil the tasks entrusted to us.

*don George Kaitholil*