

## SISTER ORSOLA DONATI (1849 – 1935)



Sister Orsola was born on October 22, 1849 in Paltrone, in the commune of Anzola Emilia and the Province of Bologna. Her parents were Vincenzo Donati and Maria Tommesani.

From early childhood she attended services at the Budrie parish where she came to know Clelia Barbieri. She became a close friend of Barbieri – the two young women had the same hopes and aspirations: “to live together a life of recollection and good works.” On May 1, 1868, Orsola, Clelia and two other companions entered the “House of the Master.” Barbieri recognized in Orsola someone who could carry on her work and so focused her attention on the young woman. She confided in her absolutely and even spoke of the sufferings her soul endured. When she was beset with illness Barbieri directly charged Orsola to guide the group and gradually prepare herself for a role of leadership in the future

mission.

Clelia Barbieri suffered from tuberculosis and on July 13, 1870 she died. The responsibility of succeeding her fell to the twenty-one year old Donati. On her deathbed Clelia explicitly said: “You will be their guide.”

From that time for the next sixty-five years Orsola would be responsible for the government of the Institute. In 1905 this state of affairs was explicitly approved when the Archbishop of Bologna, Domenico Cardinal Svampa, appointed Orsola superior general for life.

During her long term she had the joyful experience of establishing thirty-four communities. It was not all smooth sailing, though. For some time around 1913 the Archbishop of Bologna, Cardinal Della Chiesa who later succeeded Pius X as Benedict XV, expressed a negative opinion of Orsola Donati. She suffered a great deal because of this. What was being said about her was not at all true but Orsola never said a word against the Archbishop. One afternoon Cardinal Della Chiesa showed up unannounced at Budrie. He wanted to speak to Donati and specifically ask her pardon for what had taken place: he was, he said, misinformed.

Under Donati’s leadership the “*Ritiro della Provvidenza* [Providence Retreat]” later became a fully developed Institute with missionary ambitions. The crowning event occurred in 1934 when the Holy See approved the Constitutions of the Little Sisters of Our Lady of Sorrows [*Suore Minime dell’Addolorata*]. This approval brought Mother Orsola Donati’s life to a happy conclusion.

She died on April 8, 1935. She was buried in the Budrie (Province of Bologna) cemetery; her body was later moved to the parish church. On February 9, 2000 the Diocesan Inquest began. It concluded on April 6, 2003. The acts of the process were recognized as valid by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints on January 20, 2006. At present we are preparing the *Positio Super Virtutibus*.