

## MSGR. VINCENZO M. SARNELLI,

### Servite Tertiary (1835-1898)



Vincenzo M. Sarnelli was born in Naples on April 5, 1835. Both his parents were of noble lineage: his father, Nicola, belonged to the Ciorani baronial family and his mother was related to the Marquis Santangelo. Vincenzo was baptized on the day he was born and his father died when he was only seven years old. He received his First Holy Communion at the age of ten and was confirmed on June 2, 1846.

While studying law at the University of Naples he felt a calling to the priesthood. He entered the seminary on July 22, 1857 and was especially devoted to acts of piety, sacred studies and charity. He spent much time working in the hospital for the incurably sick.

On December 20, 1862 he was ordained to the priesthood. He continued his theological and legal studies with the intention of devoting himself to the religious education of the poor. The Archbishop of Naples, Cardinal Riario Sforza, did not fail to note Don Vincenzo's devotion to study and decided to send him to Rome to study Canon Law. He remained in the Eternal City from November 1868 to September 1869 and then returned to the ancient capital of Campania. The Cardinal appointed him professor of Public Canon Law in the Archiepiscopal Athenaeum and teacher of Civil History at the Troise Lyceum.

In May 1875 Don Vincenzo Sarnelli was appointed the pastor of Santa Maria Avvocata parish in Piazza Dante in Naples. His pastoral sensitivity was especially evident in his performance of parish duties. He was an example of devotion, enthusiasm and the spirit of poverty – a spirit that led him to devote all his energies to relieving the sufferings of poor people in his parish.

Sarnelli's confrères were well aware his holy life and were not surprised when he was appointed Co-adjutor to the Bishop of Castellamare di Stabia, Msgr. Petagna. Sarnelli automatically succeeded Bishop Petagna when he died on December 18, 1878. Msgr. Sarnelli was consecrated a bishop on March 2, 1879 and on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March he made his solemn entry into the diocese. His apostolate as a Bishop was marked by three vows he had made: "never waste time, do one's very best and practice evangelical poverty." His holy zeal was especially evident during the outbreak of cholera in 1884. He was awarded the Gold Medal of Civic Valor (*medaglia d'oro al valore civile*) for his day and night devotion to the victims of this disease.

He took special care of the spiritual direction and progress of Blessed Sister Maria Maddalena Starace. He was named Archbishop of Naples in 1897 and only a few months later he died piously on January 2, 1898.

On May 24, 1898 Sister Maria Maddalena Starace requested that the cause for his canonization be initiated and she was appointed the Postulator of the Cause. A century later Mother Starace has been beatified and her congregation, the Compassionist Sisters of Castellamare di Stabia, has decided to renew efforts for Sarnelli's canonization. The sisters have taken an active part in the process. On November 17, 1999, the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints authorized the Archbishop of Naples to re-initiate the process of beatification.