



**Monastery of Sacred Heart - April 19 1998
40th anniversary of the translation
of Servant of God sister Consolata Betrone**

ENTERING-LEAVING GOING-COMING

FROM THE HOMILY OF MGR. GIOVANNI LUCIANO

These verbs, very frequently used in ordinary language, beat time to the petty and monotonous repetitiveness of daily life. The same verbs, used with greater economy in a Convent, assume decisive importance, a more demanding, more binding, at times vital, significance.

Entering, in its simplest meaning, implies the passage from an outside place to another inside one, a movement which one does several times a day, even unconsciously.

Entering, into a Convent, has a very special significance. Yes, it represents a passage from outside to inside, but a meditated passage, at times also suffered, always in full knowledge because it is considered final. Whoever does it must leave the outside world and its attractions, its fleeting loves and its false promises of ephemeral goods without regret, to embrace that type of life which reigns within, namely a poor and austere life. It is spent in the search, for the possession of God, with the promise of finding Him and possessing Him for ever in eternity, and in the constant and arduous sacrifice of self for the salvation of all souls. Who enters is not only passing through there, but enters to remain. It is therefore an entrance which does not provide an exit, except in the very rarest cases of extreme gravity.

Leaving, in common parlance, does not only mean the movement from a place inside to an outside one, but also **freeing oneself from a determined situation - stopping an activity - putting oneself on show - turning to an amusement**, all meanings which imply **a recovered liberty - the exercise of one's own autonomy - the display of one's own personality - the desire to enjoy life.**

Leaving, in a Convent, is not a very frequently conjugated verb, because whosoever enters there renounces her freedom and independence, offering them to God for Himself and for souls and does not consider recovering them. She does not want to change either her situation or her activities. She does not wish to draw attention to herself having chosen concealment; and in her industry finds no place for amusements. Every departure, both final or only temporary, does not occur without sadness equal to its cause.

Going - coming are also verbs of free action, of a vast range of movement, of possession and mastery of time and space, and they often describe the hectic activity of the busy modern man. In a Convent they are used with a certain parsimony because **activity, time and space** applied to nuns are managed by the Holy Rule and are ordered, under the responsibility of the Mother Superior, in a monthly and weekly timetable which establishes the rule of each one, for the better use of earthly things in the search for eternal bounty.

The moderately quick pace of the nuns reveals their level of self control, the intensity of their meditation and the speed of their obedience. No delay, but no excessive haste in the service of the Lord! These verbs, in the life of the Servant of God Sister M. Consolata Betrone, have included happy and sad moments, important and determining moments and "strong" moments which left a deep impression on her soul.

How much did it cost her to obtain the agreement of her family to that **1st entry** in Valdocco, into the Daughters of Our Lady Help of Christians, on Monday January 26 1925? Moreover few realised that her tears, shed on that day due to the separation from her dear ones, were changed into tears of joy for being **finally** "all for Jesus". Finally? - *"Would it always continue like this? - This was the question she asked herself"*. Jesus truly wanted her for Himself, but was waiting for her, wanting to lead her along a rougher road, not the paths of the world but in the solitude of a short but intense Calvary. On April 17 1926, after a painful crisis of spiritual **"growth"**, not due to lack of vocation nor of generosity, but to the search for a greater, more exclusive, more hidden gift, Pierina Betrone **left** the Convent and returned to her family. Her superiors and her companions mourned her.

But Pierina could not be outside for long, the world was not her place. Her **2nd entry**, into the strict Taidines of San Cottolengo, was also the result of an innocent and ingenuous stratagem. Only converted sinners are admitted into the Taidines. *"She presented herself in the convent and was questioned about her vocation. - 'Perhaps you have fallen?' - the Mother Superior asked her. - 'Yes, yes. Several times.' - 'Enough' concluded the Mother Superior and she was immediately accepted. 'In*

that moment - so Sister Consolata laughingly explained many years later - I wanted to say that I had fallen to the ground many times".

Jesus, however, did not want her in a place of her own choice and liking, so he arranged that *"on August 19 1928, for health reasons, (she was first) transferred to the Sisters of Saint Martha"* and with *"the trials of the spirit increasing, on (the following) August 26 she spontaneously left the Institute.* Now it was Jesus Himself who arranged her steps. On April 17 1929, the same day but three years after her first departure from the Institute of the Salesians, she finally came to the Convent of the Poor Clares of Borgo Po - Turin.

The reason for this **3rd entry**, was thus strangely explained by her ***"Nothing about the Capuchins attracts me!"***. Later entering in a mystical communion with her, the voice of Jesus would reveal to her: ***"I wanted you and I have drawn you to the Capuchins!"***.

The subsequent **entering and leaving** of Sister M. Consolata from the Convent hid the random nature of serious necessity or of extreme gravity, contemplated by the Holy Rule.

Her **4th entry**, that of July 2 1939 into the Convent of Moriondo, indicated for her the entry into solitude on the path of Calvary...**Short years** she defined them, with prophetic intuition, those seven which she would still pass climbing the Calvary of the spirit, which strengthens in abandonment, and that of a body slowly tormented and progressively decaying.

Leaving! I do not know exactly how many times, but always to establish the progress of her illness through medical visits and tests, painful for the body and distressing for the spirit...**She left to enter** the Lanzo Torinese Sanatorium on November 4 1945. ***"On that day the Convent went into mourning, they all felt a great void"***.

Sister M. Consolata suffered her greatest pain, both of the spirit and body, outside her Convent, united with Jesus in this separation from affection, in this absolute poverty, even from her real home, from her own place where she could serenely wait for death, stretching out in the spasm towards the future meeting with God-love...

On July 3 1946 she **re-entered** from the sanatorium. Jesus, working through the Mother Abbess, did not leave her to die outside her beloved Convent and far from the care of her sisters. On Thursday July 18, about six in the morning, ***"everything was consumed"***.

"On April 17 1958 the mortal remains of Sister M. Consolata returned to the Convent".

This is the meagre summary, the skeleton of information given by her biographer who does not dare anticipate the Church's judgement of sanctity. But the people of Moriondo and whoever had known the Servant of God joyfully joined her many sisters to welcome the poor and meagre remains of their spiritual benefactress.

Indeed Father Alessandro from Bra, writer at the time in the periodical "Sentiero Franceseano" of June-July 1958, wrote: *"In spite of the fact that invitations were not made in order to maintain the private nature of the ceremony and in spite of the snow, which fell insistently for hours, there were many people, priests, nuns, lay people, family and admirers who wanted to be present at the exhumation of the body"*.

He then tells us that *"on the morning of the 17th even Brother Sun rejoiced for our sister who was returning to her home"*.

And he continues *"the coffin, preceded by the little children from the nursery school, by the school pupils and by many people was carried to the Parish Church and then to the Convent"*.

But - we ask ourselves - why, forty years ago, was a festive welcome given to the few and poor mortal remains of a Poor Clare nun? Why, with an imposing event which involved a great many people, were the humble bones of Sister M. Consolata honoured? Is it not enough to show, on the ten-yearly remembrance of her death, her sublime personality in the devout and touching commemoration? Why do we want to remember the event even today with this solemn Eucharist?

The *"Story of a Soul"* cannot be separated from the *"story of its relative body"*, of that body which God, in partnership with the parents, *"has formed from the womb"* (Is 44, 2.24; q.v. Is 46,3; Ps 22 [21], 10) and intended to accompany and interact with her for all the days of her mortal life. A body, the material tool of human actions, which becomes jointly responsible and, therefore, is called to share joy and pain, rewards and punishments, disgrace and glory...Indeed the Lord does not abandon the just to the oblivion and corruption of the grave, when: *"In him God has been glorified. If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in and will glorify him very soon"* (q.v. Jn 13, 31-32).



These last words, which Jesus about Himself when making His touching farewell to His Apostles, can also be applied to Sister M. Consolata, who He has not "*abandoned in a common grave*", nor left in any way "*to see corruption*".

Instead her glorification has been quickly started. We say this without any intention of anticipating the Church's judgement, without any claim to influence its final decision, but to remember the historic fact of exhumation and translation of the blessed bones of Sister M. Consolata, which happened forty years ago, and in establishing the interest, devotion and love which have made her the object of veneration for many, in their current position...

Today, forty years after the event, we are here again in large numbers to joyfully solemnise her return home, her last entry into the Convent; a very different entry from the other previous ones, with a very different setting in the bosom of the community. No longer to the last place, chosen by her herself, no longer in a narrow and bare cell, but to the place of honour close to Jesus, to a place of elegant sobriety. In a place accessible to everybody, because she can, now without fatigue or pain, continue her constant work:

- ❖ as **Chorister**, to help us make our prayers a true hymn of praise to God, **an act of love to Jesus and Mary, imploring them for the salvation of souls;**
- ❖ as **Secretary**, because she is still and always the depository of our secrets;
- ❖ as **Cobbler**, who we ask for sturdy shoes, which hold and keep our feet safe on the right path, and send us on the path of sanctity;
- ❖ as **Cook**, to prepare, with her ascetic writings and her inspiration, spiritual food for us and thus nourish our souls;
- ❖ as **Nurse**, to cure our moral wounds, our spiritual infirmities, also to look after our bodily needs; and teach us to suffer, as she did, serenely and in a worthy way;
- ❖ as **Doorkeeper**, to show us the "**doorway to heaven**", with the hope of finding her ready to throw it open when we, too, will reach the eternal mansion.

Amen.