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# Placido Is Venerable

*On 30 August, the Holy Father recognized the heroic virtues of Servant of God Placido Cortese, OFM Conv., and titled him Venerable*

*By Neil Xavier O'Donoghue*

**W**HERE at the *Messenger of Saint Anthony* closely follow what Pope Francis says and does. Part of our ministry is to help our readers appreciate the ministry of the Successor of Peter, and so many of our articles are related to the Pope. But on August 30 of this year the Holy Father did something that excited us more than usual – he declared Father Placido Cortese to be “Venerable.”

This is an important stepping-stone on the way to being recognized as a saint in the Catholic Church. The reason we were so excited is that Father Placido was the director of *Il Messaggero di Sant’Antonio*, the Italian edition of this magazine. So, we are well on the

way to having another Saint in our family!

## **Nazi persecution**

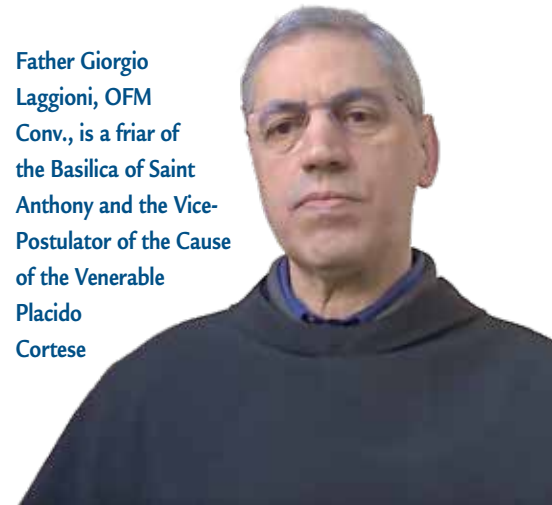
Father Placido was born on the island of Cherso, then part of Italy, but today part of Croatia. As a young man he entered the Conventual Franciscans, and was ordained a priest in 1930. He spent a few years in parish ministry, but in 1937 he was named as the Director of *Il Messaggero di Sant’Antonio*, a post he was to keep until his death. Under his tenure the readership grew to half a million.

During World War II Father Placido took care of the poor and the weak. He is especially remembered for rescuing many Jews from

the Nazi persecution, as well as helping escaped British and Yugoslav prisoners of war to evade capture. He did this particularly at the request of Archbishop Francesco Borgoncini Duca, the Pontifical Delegate to the Basilica of Saint Anthony; Borgoncini Duca was later created a cardinal.

Placido was eventually betrayed to the Nazis, and was arrested on October 13, 1944. He was taken to the Gestapo headquarters in Trieste, where he was tortured, mutilated and eventually buried alive. His remains were dug up and cremated and mixed with the ashes of other

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victims at *La Risiera*, a concentration camp in Trieste.

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### Heroic virtues

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This is not the first article on Father Placido that has appeared in the pages of this English-edition of the *Messenger*. So really the question I feel that I must answer here is what meaning this latest step on the journey towards sainthood has for our readers today, almost 80 years after he gave his life as a martyr for the Faith.

First of all what exactly happened? This is how the Vatican Press Office's daily *Bulletin* reported it: *On 30 August 2021, the Holy Father Francis received in audience His Eminence Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. During the audience, the Supreme Pontiff authorized the same Congregation to promulgate the Decrees regarding... the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Placido Cortese (né Nicolò), professed priest of the Order of Friars Minor Conventual; born on 7 March 1907 in Cherso, now in Croatia, and died in Trieste, Italy in November 1944.*

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### All called to Heaven

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In Rome the Pope has entrusted the process of officially recognizing saints to the *Congregation for the Causes of Saints*. This is not to say that the canonized saints are the only people to make it to heaven. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that all those "who die in God's grace and friendship, and are perfectly purified, live forever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they 'see him as he is,' face to face." We are all called to heaven, and God will provide the grace necessary to live a holy life to whomsoever asks him. No one is beyond his mercy, and his forgiveness is available right until the end of

our life. The Gospel of Luke tells the story of the Good Thief, or St. Dismas as he is often called. This man was not what we would normally refer to as a good person. The Bible does not tell us what he was guilty of, but it does tell us that Dismas thought that he personally deserved the Death Penalty. Yet when he asks Jesus to remember him in his Kingdom, Jesus tells him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

So why does the Church officially declare some people to be Canonized (i.e. officially recognized) saints? The *Catechism* tells us that "by canonizing some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace, the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of holiness within her and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the saints to them as models and intercessors." Additionally, it explains how "the saints have always been the source and origin of renewal in the most difficult moments in the Church's history.' Indeed, 'holiness is the hidden source and infallible measure of her apostolic activity and missionary zeal.'"

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### Three steps

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There are three steps to being recognized as a saint in the Catholic Church. Initially a devotion to that deceased Christian must develop. Once this is recognized the Vatican allows the local Churches, where the person in question lived, to perform a thorough investigation of their life. A report of this is submitted to Rome. If the *Congregation for the Causes of Saints* is satisfied with this investigation and believes that the individual in question could potentially be a saint, they ask the Pope to

## PRAYER TO THE VENERABLE PLACIDO CORTESE

God our Father,  
In the years of war and hatred  
You gave birth to love  
In the heart of your servant  
Father Placido Cortese,  
A humble disciple of St. Francis  
Whom you joined to the Passion  
of your Son.  
Please, graciously grant my  
petition through his intercession.  
May his example as a martyr of  
charity and of silence  
Help me to welcome your Spirit,  
And to entrust myself  
To his intercession with faith.

**Amen.**

(with ecclesiastical approval)



Drawing by Valentina Salmasso - Archivio MSA

formally recognize that the person has lived a heroically virtuous life. This is what has just happened with Father Placido. Pope Francis' recognition means that from now on he can be referred to as the Venerable Placido Cortese.

Now two further steps remain. The process will continue and, hopefully in the near future, the Venerable Placido will be recognized as Blessed, and then as a Saint. But at the moment he is Venerable and the faithful are welcome to imitate his virtues. Also it is customary to address prayers for a miracle to the intercession of someone who is recognized as Venerable, as any miracles that are attributed to the person's intercession before God form part of the process of canonization. So all of us are invited to imitate Father Placido's good works and to pray to God through him.

If you believe you or someone you know may have experienced a miracle through the intercession of the Venerable Placido Cortese please send your report to the Vice-Postulator, Fr. Giorgio Laggioni, through this email: [padreplacidocortese@gmail.com](mailto:padreplacidocortese@gmail.com) ♦