



Bl. Chiara Badano

Born: October 29, 1971 Sassello, Italy

Died: October 7, 1990 (aged 18) Sassello, Italy

Venerated: in Roman Catholic Church

Beatified: September 25, 2010, Our Lady of Divine Love in Rome by Pope Benedict XVI

Major shrine: Cimitero di Sassello Savona Liguria, Italy Plot: Family chapel

Feast: October 29

Blessed Chiara Badano (October 29, 1971 – October 7, 1990) was a young Italian teenager who is currently in the process of being pronounced a saint by the Roman Catholic Church. At age nine she joined the Focolare Movement and received the nickname “Luce” by the founder Chiara Lubich. When she was 16 she was diagnosed with osteogenic sarcoma, a painful bone cancer. Chiara succumbed to the cancer on October 7, 1990, after a two-year battle with the disease. She was beatified on September 25, 2010 at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Divine Love in Rome. Her feast day is celebrated on October 29.

Early life

Chiara Badano was born on October 29, 1971, to Ruggero and Maria Teresa Badano in the small village of Sassello, Italy. The couple waited and prayed eleven years to have Chiara. They considered her to be their greatest blessing. While Ruggero worked as a truck driver, Maria Theresa stayed at home to raise Chiara. Chiara grew up with a strong and healthy relationship with her parents, but she did not always obey them and would occasionally have fights with them.

One day, Chiara took an apple off a tree in a neighbor’s orchard; her mother later recounted the event:

One afternoon, Chiara came home with a beautiful red apple. I asked her where it came

from. She replied that she had taken it from our neighbor's orchard without asking her permission. I explained to her that she always had to ask before taking anything and that she had to take it back and apologize to our neighbor. She was reluctant to do this because she was too embarrassed. I told her that it was far more important to own up than to eat an apple. So Chiara took the apple back to our neighbor and explained everything to her. That evening, the woman brought her a whole box of apples saying that on that day Chiara had learnt something very important.

Focolare Movement

Chiara attended her first meeting of the Focolare Movement in September 1980; she was only 9 years old. This group, especially its founder's Chiara Lubich, had a profound impact on Chiara's life. The group focused on the image of the forsaken Christ as a way to make it through difficult times. Chiara later wrote that, "I discovered that Jesus forsaken is the key to unity with God, and I want to choose him as my only spouse. I want to be ready to welcome him when he comes. To prefer him above all else."

While Chiara was a conscientious student, she struggled in school and even failed her first year of high school. She was often teased in school for her strong beliefs and was given the nickname "Sister." Chiara made several good friends, often going out late to have coffee with them. She also enjoyed the normal teenage pastimes such as listening to pop music, dancing, and singing. Chiara was also an avid tennis player; she also enjoyed hiking and swimming.

During the summer of 1988, when she was 16 years old, Chiara had a life-changing experience in Rome with the Focolare Movement. She wrote back to her parents, "This is a very important moment for me: it is an encounter with Jesus Forsaken. It hasn't been easy to embrace this suffering, but this morning Chiara Lubich explained to the children that they have to be the spouse of Jesus Forsaken." After this trip she started to correspond regularly with Chiara Lubich. She then asked for her new name as this was going to be the start of a new life for her. Chiara Lubich gave her the name Chiara Luce. This was a kind of play on words since in Italian "Chiara" is a common girl's name, taken for example from the name of St Clare of Assisi, but it is also an everyday word meaning "clear." "Luce" is occasionally found as a girl's name in Italy, though it is mostly secular rather than religious, and it, too, is also an everyday word meaning "light." So "Chiara Luce" means "Clare/Clear Light." Lubich wrote to Chiara that "your luminous face shows your love for Jesus," which is why she gave her the name Luce.

Illness

In the summer of 1988, Chiara felt a sting of pain in her shoulder while playing tennis. At first she thought nothing of it, but when the pain continued to be present, she underwent a series of tests. The doctors then discovered she had a rare and painful form of bone cancer, osteogenic sarcoma. In response Chiara simply declared, "It's for you, Jesus; if you want it, I want it, too."

Throughout the treatment process, Chiara refused to take any morphine so she could stay aware. She felt it was important to know her illness and pain so she could offer up her sufferings. She said, "It reduces my lucidity and there's only one thing I can do now: to offer my suffering to Jesus because I want to share as much as possible in his sufferings on the cross." During her stays in the hospital, she would take the time to go on walks with another patient who was struggling with depression. These walks were beneficial to the other patient but caused Chiara great pain. Her parents often encouraged

her to stay and rest but she would simply reply, "I'll be able to sleep later on."

One of her doctors, Dr. Antonio Delogu, said, "Through her smile, and through her eyes full of light, she showed us that death doesn't exist; only life exists." A friend from the Focolare Movement said, "At first we thought we'd visit her to keep her spirits up, but very soon we understood that, in fact, we were the ones who needed her. Her life was like a magnet drawing us to her."

Chiara kept her spirits up, even when the harsh chemotherapy caused her beloved hair to fall out. When a lock of her hair would fall, Chiara would simply offer it to God saying, "For you, Jesus." She also donated all of her savings to a friend who was doing mission work in Africa. She wrote to him, "I don't need this money anymore. I have everything."

To help prepare her parents for life after she died, Chiara made her parents dinner reservations for Valentine's Day after they refused to leave her bedside. She also ordered them to not return until after midnight. She also wrote, "Holy Christmas 1990. Thank you for everything. Happy New Year", on a Christmas card and hid it among some blank ones for her mother to find later.

While undergoing a painful medical procedure, Chiara was visited by a lady, "When the doctors began to carry out this small, but quite demanding, procedure, a lady with a very beautiful and luminous smile came in. She came up to me and took me by the hand, and her touch filled me with courage. In the same way that she arrived, she disappeared, and I could no longer see her. But my heart was filled with an immense joy and all fear left me. In that moment I understood that if we're always ready for everything, God sends us many signs of his love."

Chiara's faith and spirit never dwindled even after the cancer left her unable to walk and a CAT scan showed that any hope of remission was gone. In response, she simply said, "If I had to choose between walking again and going to heaven, I wouldn't hesitate. I would choose heaven." On July 19, 1989, Chiara almost died of a hemorrhage. Her faith did not falter as she said, "Don't shed any tears for me. I'm going to Jesus. At my funeral, I don't want people crying, but singing with all their hearts."

Cardinal Saldarini heard about Chiara's illness and visited her at the hospital. He asked her, "The light in your eyes is splendid. Where does it come from?" Chiara simply replied, "I try to love Jesus as much as I can."

Before she died, she told her mother, "Oh Mamma, young people...young people...they are the future. You see, I can't run anymore, but how I would like to pass on to them the torch, like in the Olympics! Young people have only one life and it's worthwhile to spend it well."

When Chiara realized that she was not going to get better, she started to plan for her "wedding" (her funeral) with her mother. She chose the music, songs, flowers, and the readings for Mass. She wanted to be buried in her "wedding dress" a white dress with a pink waist, because her death would allow her to become the bride of Christ. She told her mother, "When you're getting me ready, Mum, you have to keep saying to yourself, 'Chiara Luce is now seeing Jesus.'"

Death

During her final hours, Chiara made her final confession and received the Eucharist. She

had her family and friends pray with her, "Come Holy Spirit." Chiara Badano died at 4am on October 7, 1990, with her parents at her bedside. Her final words were, "Bye, Mum, Be happy, because I am." Two thousand people attended her funeral; the mayor of Sassello shut down the town so people would be able to attend.

Beatification

Chiara's cause for sainthood was promoted by the former Bishop of Acqui, Most Rev. Livio Maritano, beginning in 1999. It was through this process that she was declared a "Venerable" on July 3, 2008. In December 2009, Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged the miracle of a young Italian boy whose parents interceded to Chiara to heal him from meningitis that was destroying his organs. His doctors could not medically explain his sudden healing.

Chiara Badano was declared a "Blessed" in the Catholic Church on September 25, 2010 at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Divine Love in Rome. Thousands of people came for the event. Archbishop Angelo Amato, the head of the Vatican Congregation of the Causes of Saints, said that Chiara was a great example of how the short life of the young could be lived out in great holiness and "today there are virtuous people, who in family, at school, in society do not fritter away their lives." Chiara Badano's feast day is celebrated on October 29.