



Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey

Letter of June 21, 2015,
Feast of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga

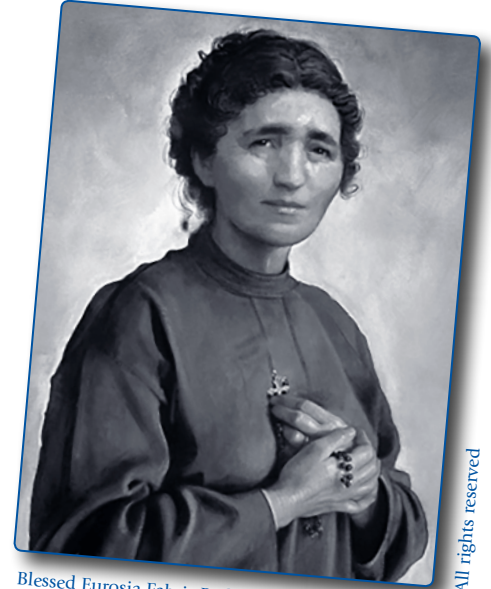
Dear Friends,

ICAN only stress the importance of the witness given by Christian families," said Pope Francis in Korea, on August 16, 2014. "At a time of great crisis for family life ... our Christian communities are called to support married couples and families in fulfilling their proper mission in the life of the Church and society." Eurosia Fabris Barban, the mother of a family, was beatified on November 6, 2005 by Benedict XVI. Venerable Pius XII had previously said of her: "We must make known this beautiful soul, who is an example for the families of our day!"

Eurosia Fabris Barban was born in 1866 into a family of Italian farmers. Luigi and Maria Fabris, her parents, lived in the town of Quinto Vicentino, in Veneto. The little girl was baptized shortly after her birth and received the name of a virgin martyr of the ninth century, Saint Eurosia, a Bohemian princess who had been taken prisoner by the Saracens and died for her faith.

Passionate about the Gospel

In 1870, the family moved to Marola, in the municipality of Torri di Quartesolo. Eurasia would remain there for the rest of her life. Busy with farm and domestic chores, she went to elementary school only from 1872 to 1874; in those two years she learned to read and write. She became acquainted with Holy Scripture, the catechism, and Church history. She read the *Introduction to the Devout Life* by Saint Francis de Sales and the *Eternal Maxims* of Saint Alphonsus Liguori. Her mother taught her her future profession of seamstress. From her first Holy Communion when she was twelve, she received communion on every feast day. A member of the Association of the Daughters of MARY in her parish, she was careful to observe its rules. Her devotion to MARY grew under the influence of the nearby shrine of the Madonna of Monte Berico, where the Virgin had appeared in the fifteenth century, delivering the region from an epidemic of the plague. There Eurosia prayed to MARY that the spiritually fatal disease of indifference and impiety might depart from her country. She also had devotion to the Holy Spirit, the Creche, the Crucifix, and the souls in Purgatory. She had a passion for the Gospel and the catechism, which she taught from the time she was fifteen, to the children in her parish. Later she would do the same to the women in her dressmaking shop. She had a manner all her own of making this teaching exciting for her young listeners, interspersing the exposition



Blessed Eurosia Fabris Barban

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of doctrine with anecdotes and moral and practical instruction. But above all, the children responded to the great charity that motivated her—they felt loved and understood what it means to love God. Eurosia found the source of this great love in prayer. From her earliest childhood, she prayed and meditated regularly.

At eighteen, she was a serious young woman, pious and hard-working. Despite the poverty of her home, she kept it clean and orderly. Her virtues and charm did not go unnoticed—she received several requests for her hand in marriage, which she declined. In 1885, a young neighbor, Mrs. Barban, died, leaving three young daughters, one of whom also died shortly thereafter. The two others were twenty and four months, respectively. An uncle and the grandfather, who suffered from a chronic disease, lived with the two orphans' father. These were men with strong temperaments, who often quarreled. Every morning for six months, Eurosia went to take care of the children and do the household chores. It wasn't long before the widower, Carlo Barban, asked her to marry him. After long prayer to know the Lord's will, and well aware of the difficulties to come, she followed the advice of her parents and her parish priest, and agreed to marry Carlo. The marriage, which she considered to be a mission from God, was celebrated on May 5, 1886. It would be blessed with the birth of nine children, not counting the two little orphans and three adoptions.

United in the sacrament of matrimony, the Barbans walked together toward holiness as they cared for their

many children. Where would they find the means to raise them? Although Carlo owned fertile lands, he had inherited heavy debts. Eurosia encouraged him to be confident: "God sends us children like a treasure. Trust in Him, for He will not let us lack the necessities of life."

Confidence and responsibility

If trust in God is needed in raising a large family, it does not dispense the husband and wife from the duty to practice responsible procreation. In determining how many children they will have, "they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the Church herself. The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God" (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 50). In the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, Blessed Paul VI clarifies, "With regard to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time." (July 25, 1968, no. 10).

In this last case, spouses may use natural methods of birth control which, when correctly done, are today very reliable. But the Church has always taught the intrinsic evil of contraceptive methods which render the conjugal act intentionally infertile. This teaching is definitive and unchangeable. Such contraception is in grave opposition to matrimonial chastity. It is against the good of the transmission of life (the procreative aspect of marriage), and breaks the reciprocal gift of the husband and wife (the unitive aspect of marriage). It is destructive to true love and denies the sovereign role of God in the transmission of human life (cf. *Humanae Vitae*, no. 14). The use of methods with an abortive effect constitutes an even graver evil, because they result in the death of the embryo.

Mamma Rosa, as Eurosia was called from then on, performed her marital obligations with the greatest fidelity and lived in profound harmony with her husband, becoming his advisor and comforter. She taught her children prayer, obedience, the fear of God, sacrifice, and love of work. She wished that each one discover and follow God's plan for him or her. "The children the Lord has given us belong to Him more than they belong to us," she liked to say. "And if He wants them for Himself, we must be thankful and even happy; in so doing, He is doing us a great honor. It means additional work, but God will help us." In fact, the Blessed Virgin revealed to her that her three eldest sons would become priests; for the three others the Lord had other plans. She replied, "Dear Madonna, I am so happy. I thank you with all my heart for these three who have been chosen, because I do not deserve such a grace, such privileges. But from this

moment on, I offer you and consecrate all my children to you." In keeping with the Blessed Virgin's prediction, Giuseppe, the eldest, and Alberto, the second, would be ordained priests in 1918 and 1921. The third, Angelo Matteo, would join the Franciscans with the name Brother Bernardino, and would be his mother's first biographer. Three other sons died prematurely. Two of her adoptive sons and one daughter would marry. One of her adoptive daughters, Chiara, entered religious life under the name of Sister Theophania. The last of her adoptive sons would join the Franciscans as Brother George.

Loved even more

In managing her family's finances, Eurosia took into account the charity to be shown towards the poor, with whom she gladly shared her table. She offered the sick continual and extended assistance, full of love and care. She led her life primarily within the four walls of her home, in poverty: "I wish to be a poor woman and I am happy with it," she declared, "because it seems to me that this way I am loved even more by the Lord. If I were rich, I would almost fear that the Lord did not love me as much and that He was asking less of me... It is better to be poor than to be rich... It is not riches, but doing the will of God, that makes the heart happy." She became a Third Order Franciscan, and drew from a life of intense prayer, particularly daily Mass, the strength to respond to the needs of the poor. She seized every opportunity to do good, and shared produce from her garden and henhouse with the needy, pilgrims, and travelers passing through. "The Lord provides more for our needs when we give to others out of love for Him," she said. "If we give something to the poor, it's as though we offered it to JESUS Himself. I am so moved by this thought that if it were possible, I would give myself!" After the First World War broke out, there were many widows, and they often found themselves in great poverty, with several children to care for. Eurosia helped all those around her as best she could, with smiling kindness, the expression of her interior joy in doing the will of God, in spite of difficulties and trials.

In his Lenten message for 2012, Pope Benedict XVI urged Christians to set their gaze on "others, first of all [on] JESUS, to be concerned for one another, and not to remain isolated and indifferent to the fate of our brothers and sisters. All too often, however, our attitude is just the opposite: an indifference and disinterest born of selfishness and masked as a respect for "privacy" ... Concern for others entails desiring what is good for them from every point of view: physical, moral and spiritual. Contemporary culture seems to have lost the sense of good and evil, yet there is a real need to reaffirm that good does exist and will prevail, because God is *generous and acts generously* (Ps. 118:68). The good is whatever gives, protects and promotes life, brotherhood and communion. Responsibility towards others thus means desiring and working for the good of others, in

the hope that they too will become receptive to goodness and its demands. Concern for others means being aware of their needs. Sacred Scripture warns us of the danger that our hearts can become hardened by a sort of 'spiritual anesthesia' which numbs us to the suffering of others. ... "What hinders this humane and loving gaze towards our brothers and sisters? Often it is the possession of material riches and a sense of sufficiency, but it can also be the tendency to put our own interests and problems above all else. ... Humbleness of heart and the personal experience of suffering can awaken within us a sense of compassion and empathy. *The upright understands the cause of the weak, the wicked has not the wit to understand it* (Prov. 29:7). We can then understand the beatitude of *those who mourn* (Mt. 5:5), those who in effect are capable of looking beyond themselves and feeling compassion for the suffering of others. Reaching out to others and opening our hearts to their needs can become an opportunity for salvation and blessedness" (November 3, 2011).

Tact and diplomacy

Eurosia ran a small dressmaker's shop that employed ten to fifteen apprentices. She gave them free vocational training, and prepared them for their future role as mothers of Christian families. She refused to make immodest clothes. In particular when she was asked to make wedding dresses, she often managed, with tact and diplomacy, to convince her client to choose a style that was both elegant and modest.

In moments of silence, Eurosia devoted herself to prayer, particularly the daily recitation of the Rosary. One evening, she left the house to care for a neighbor woman's newborn. The father of the little one came in, and seeing the rosary in Eurosia's hand, began to shout, "Throw away these beads... what do you think to get from them?" She calmly replied, "This is the most powerful weapon for obtaining graces. If you want someone to do you a favor, you must ask them nicely, pleading if need be, and then you will get them to do it. We must do the same with Our Lord and Our Lady." The man began to reflect, calmed down, and finally replied, "Yes, you're right."

"The Rosary of the Virgin MARY ... is a prayer loved by countless Saints and encouraged by the Magisterium," wrote Pope John Paul II. "Simple yet profound, it still remains, at the dawn of this third millennium, a prayer of great significance, destined to bring forth a harvest of holiness. It blends easily into the spiritual journey of the Christian life, which, after two thousand years, has lost none of the freshness of its beginnings and feels drawn by the Spirit of God to *set out into the deep* (*duc in altum!*) in order once more to proclaim, and even cry out, before the world that JESUS CHRIST is Lord and Savior, *the way, and the truth and the life* (Jn. 14:6), 'the goal of human history and the point on which the desires of history and civilization turn'. The Rosary, though clearly Marian

in character, is at heart a Christocentric prayer. ... With the Rosary, the Christian people sits at the school of MARY and is led to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of His love. ... As a prayer for peace, the Rosary is also, and always has been, a prayer of and for the family. At one time this prayer was particularly dear to Christian families, and it certainly brought them closer together. It is important not to lose this precious inheritance. ... The family that prays together stays together. ... Many of the problems facing contemporary families, especially in economically developed societies, result from their increasing difficulty in communicating. Families seldom manage to come together, and the rare occasions when they do are often taken up with watching television. To return to the recitation of the family Rosary means filling daily life with very different images, images of the mystery of salvation: the image of the Redeemer, the image of His most Blessed Mother. The family that recites the Rosary together reproduces something of the atmosphere of the household of Nazareth: its members place JESUS at the center, they share His joys and sorrows, they place their needs and their plans in His hands, they draw from Him the hope and the strength to go on" (Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, October 16, 2002, nos. 1, 41).

Being concerned

Eurosia's great concern was the conversion of sinners; she prayed for and had others pray for them. "Being concerned for each other," declared Pope Benedict XVI, "also entails being concerned for their spiritual well-being. Here I would like to mention an aspect of the Christian life, which I believe has been quite forgotten: fraternal correction in view of eternal salvation. Today, in general, we are very sensitive to the idea of charity and caring about the physical and material well-being of others, but almost completely silent about our spiritual responsibility towards our brothers and sisters. This was not the case in the early Church or in those communities that are truly mature in faith, those which are concerned not only for the physical health of their brothers and sisters, but also for their spiritual health and ultimate destiny. ... Christ Himself commands us to admonish a brother who is committing a sin (cf. Mt. 18:15). ... We must not remain silent before evil. I am thinking of all those Christians who, out of human regard or purely personal convenience, adapt to the prevailing mentality, rather than warning their brothers and sisters against ways of thinking and acting that are contrary to the truth and that do not follow the path of goodness. Christian admonishment, for its part, is never motivated by a spirit of accusation or recrimination. It is always moved by love and mercy, and springs from genuine concern for the good of the other. ... There will always be a need for a gaze which loves and admonishes, which knows and understands, which discerns and forgives (cf. Lk. 22:61), as God has done and continues to do with each of us. This 'custody' of others is in contrast to a mentality that, by

reducing life exclusively to its earthly dimension, fails to see it in an eschatological perspective and accepts any moral choice in the name of personal freedom. A society like ours can become blind to physical sufferings and to the spiritual and moral demands of life. This must not be the case in the Christian community! "The Lord's disciples, united with Him through the Eucharist, live in a fellowship that binds them one to another as members of a single body. This means that the other is part of me, and that his or her life, his or her salvation, concern my own life and salvation. ... Our existence is related to that of others, for better or for worse. Both our sins and our acts of love have a social dimension. This reciprocity is seen in the Church, the mystical body of Christ: the community constantly does penance and asks for the forgiveness of the sins of its members, but also unfailingly rejoices in the examples of virtue and charity present in her midst" (November 3, 2011).

Our destination

Eurosia behaved courageously during her husband's final illness, in the spring of 1930. Attentive to all his needs, she also knew how to slip in, when the occasion arose, a few words of hope: "We all must die... Heaven is our final destination... Up there we will all meet again never again to be separated." When Carlo died, Eurosia was 64 years old. Their marriage had lasted 45 years.

To persevere in the commitment made when they married, spouses need Christ's grace. "The love of Christ, which has blessed and sanctified the union of husband and wife," said Pope Francis, "is able to sustain their love and to renew it when, humanly speaking, it becomes lost, wounded or worn out. The love of Christ can restore to spouses the joy of journeying together. This is what

marriage is all about: man and woman walking together, wherein the husband helps his wife to become ever more a woman, and wherein the woman has the task of helping her husband to become ever more a man. ... It is a demanding journey, at times difficult, and at times turbulent, but such is life! ... It is normal for husband and wife to argue: it's normal. It always happens. But my advice is this: never let the day end without having first made peace. Never! A small gesture is sufficient. Thus the journey may continue. Marriage is a symbol of life, real life: it is not 'fiction'! It is the Sacrament of the love of Christ and the Church, a love which finds its proof and guarantee in the Cross" (Homily of September 14, 2014).

After her husband's death, Eurosia's prayer life became more intense. One day she confided to one of her priest sons that the Lord had revealed to her the hour of her death, which would come in eighteen months. She prepared for it with ever greater charity: "I desire nothing but to grow continuously in the love of God. The rest has no importance to me." During the fall of 1931, she was seized with rheumatic pain in the joints of her hands and feet. The pain spread to her knees and shoulders, and she became bedridden, but she did not complain. On January 1, 1932, she came down with pneumonia and her breathing, accompanied with coughing fits, became more and more difficult. She remained lucid up until the end, and offered her life to the Lord out of love. She died on January 8, 1932. Her body was laid in a very simple grave in the cemetery in Marola, but soon many people came to decorate it with flowers in thanksgiving for the many graces received through her intercession. Her liturgical memorial is celebrated on January 9th.

May the example of Blessed Eurosia spur us to defend the family, as the Popes of our time have encouraged all Christians.

Dom Antoine Paris O.S.B.

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ABBAYE SAINT-JOSEPH DE CLAIRVAL – 21150 FLAVIGNY-SUR-OZERAIN – FRANCE

Fax : + 33 3 80 96 25 29 – email : abbey@clairval.com – website : <http://www.clairval.com/>