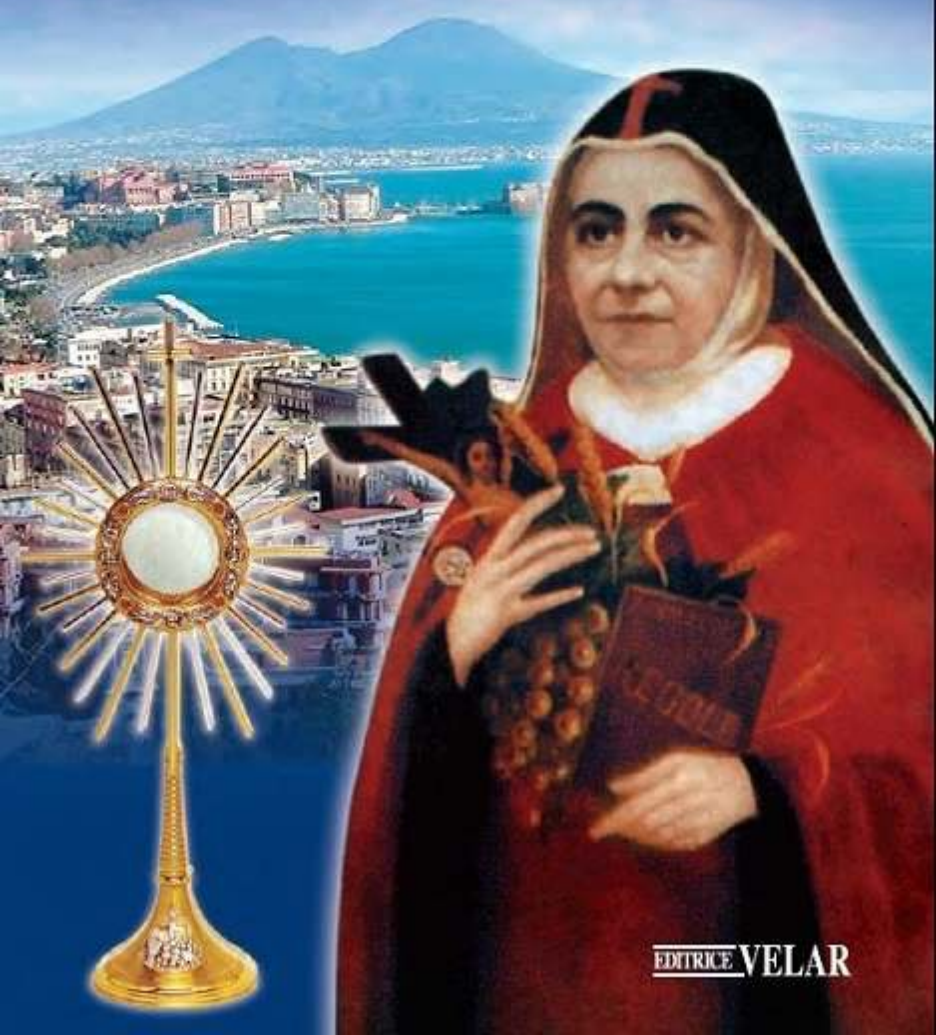


# Mother Maria Pia of the Cross

Foundress of the Crucified  
Sisters Adorers of the Eucharist

MASSIMILIANO  
TARONI



EDITRICE **VELAR**

Massimiliano Taroni

# Mother Maria Pia of the Cross

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Foundress of the Crucified Sisters  
Adorers of the Eucharist



EDITRICE VELAR

*On the cover.*

*On the foreground: Portrait of Mother Maria Pia  
of the Cross.*

*At the background: View of the Gulf of Naples.*

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## *Presentation*

I have heard so much about the Servant of God, who died on July 1, 1919, from her spiritual daughters, the Crucified Sisters Adorers of the Eucharist, whose testimony of religious life I could appreciate in Italy as well as in the Philippines. This book, dedicated to her, is like an even closer meeting that confronts us, page after page, with a figure of great spiritual importance. This story, as exciting as all the biographies of those who dedicate their lives to follow Christ, will accompany us on the road – which has never been explored enough – to that great fervor of faith which characterized Naples between 1800 and 1900. Woman, meek and humble, in love with the Eucharist and conquered by the mystery of the Passion of Christ, she concretely witnessed her adherence to God with tenacity in opposing evil, courage in suffering and apostolic ardor in caring for anyone who entered within her range of action.

A contemplative soul and eager to atone for sins and offenses against the Lord, Mother Notari has been able, however, to live her time to the full, with a character that did not isolate her from the world, concerned as she was, to offer concrete support to the suffering humanity.

During her time in Naples, she lived a life intensely marked by prayer and action.



It was inevitable that the steps of Mother Notari would lead her to a meeting with other saintly souls such as St. Caterina Volpicelli and Blessed Bartolo Longo. There is always some mysterious road that, in the end, brings the saints to look for one another and to share the same roads and projects.

Mother Notari understood that the gift received from God had to be lived together and offered the Church a new religious family. The beatification, in 2006, of one of her first co-sister, Sr. Mary of the Passion, is a mature fruit of this charism.

This contemplative and penitent soul knew how to listen to fallen and suffering humanity, with gentleness, patience, and inventive charity, eager to overcome evil with good, bound to the cross of Christ and the Holy Eucharist.

I hope that these pages will serve to make better known the wonders that God works in His children who welcome with joy and perseverance the vocation to the religious life and to increase our charity towards those most in need of God's mercy, to whom Sister Maria Pia Notari dedicated her life.

✠ **Tommaso Caputo**

*Archbishop,  
Apostolic Nuncio of Malta and Libya*

## *Her inspiration*

The light wind lapped the windows of an austere building in the centre of Castellammare di Stabia. It was early in the morning, the sun began to lay its warm rays on Vesuvius, on the magnificent Gulf of Naples, and in the chapel of Notari's palace, the Holy Mass was being celebrated. It was October 23, 1883. Among those present was Maddalena Notari, a young woman – guest - at that time, of her brother Pasqualino's family.

Her face was composed, a veiled sadness was perceived in her eyes, and her heart was captivated by the great mystery of love that was being celebrated on the altar: the Eucharist. Whenever Maddalena participate in the Mass, it was like she was already in heaven! Something extraordinary happened that morning. A ray of sunlight settled on her face and went to illuminate the Eucharistic table. “*That day*”, she recounted later in her

**Castellammare  
di Stabia  
(Naples).**

*Panorama with  
Vesuvius.*



autobiography, *“when my spirit was in great tribulation, after Holy Communion I was seized by a strong concentration and inspired to open a religious house aimed at repairing the outrages our Lord receives. The Lord enlightened my mind and this inspiration was so strong that I remained for several hours motionless and this was repeated for three consecutive days, always after Communion.”*

At the end of the Mass, Maddalena’s face seemed transfigured. After many years of suffering, uncertainties, steps taken and doors that had closed, finally here is the light! After long and heartfelt thanksgiving in church, Maddalena ran to her room. The view seemed different; on one side of the window she could see a segment of the sea between the houses huddled together. The glance at the sea made her daydream about that inspiration she had in the church: many sisters gathered to offer themselves as “reparation of love” to the spreading evil in the world!

In that moment she remembered how, a few years earlier, she had written in a notebook: *“The Lord made me feel many times that my life had to be spent only for the Eucharist. I spent many hours of the day in prayer and no less than two hours of thanksgiving after Communion.”* The time to offer herself totally for this purpose had arrived.

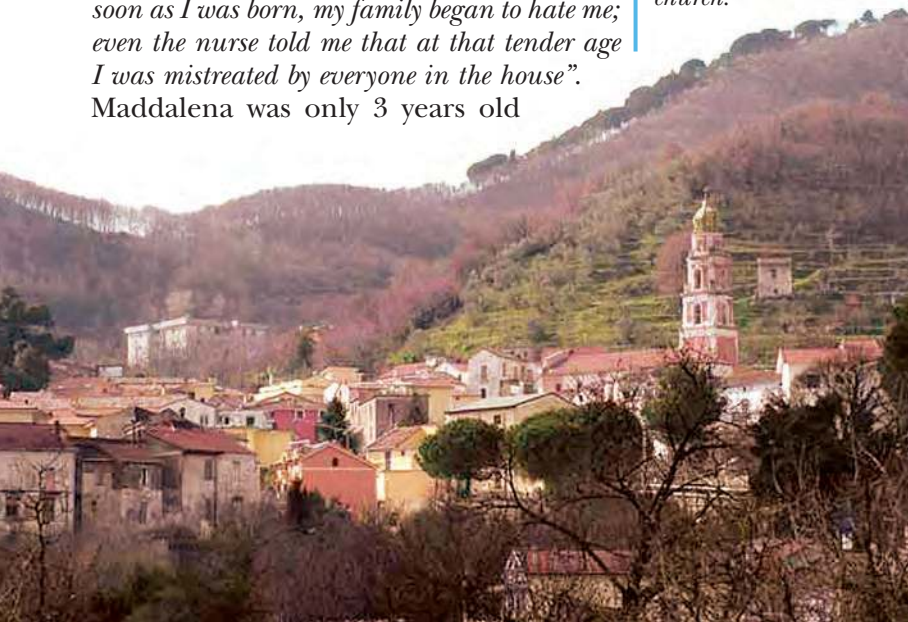
*Portrait of  
Maria Pia  
Notari.*



## *Suffered childhood and uncertain youth*

Capriglia is a charming village in the countryside around Salerno. The hills of Irno valley can be seen behind the mighty bell tower. Here in 1847, precisely on December 2, Maddalena Teresa Rosa Notari was born. It was a cold day, but the cold grew even stronger when her parents and those present at her birth, found that a baby girl was born, not the much-desired baby boy. Thus, began the suffering of this new creature. Her parents, Benedetto Notari and Vincenza Calvanese, never accepted the presence of this unwanted baby girl. In her autobiography, Maddalena wrote about those years: *“As soon as I was born, my family began to hate me; even the nurse told me that at that tender age I was mistreated by everyone in the house”*. Maddalena was only 3 years old

**Capriglia  
(Salerno).**  
*Panorama  
with the parish  
church.*







*Maddalena  
Notari's parents:  
her father Benedetto  
Notari and her  
mother Vincenza  
Calvanese.*

**Naples.**  
*Monastery of  
Donnalbina.  
Mary Most  
Holy, of whom  
Maddalena Notari  
was devoted.*

when she was entrusted to her uncle Nicola who resided in Naples. He too proved to be cruel and terrible with the child, inflicting every kind of mistreatments against her. That experience lasted for a short time and at the age of 6, Maddalena was accompanied to the Third Bourbon boarding school, in the city of Naples. Not even this was a beautiful experience; both rigid rules and severity of the educators had repercussions on those innocent girls as well as on Maddalena. From the royal boarding school, Maddalena passed to the Sisters of the Visitation, in Donnalbina district. Finally, she could enjoy some



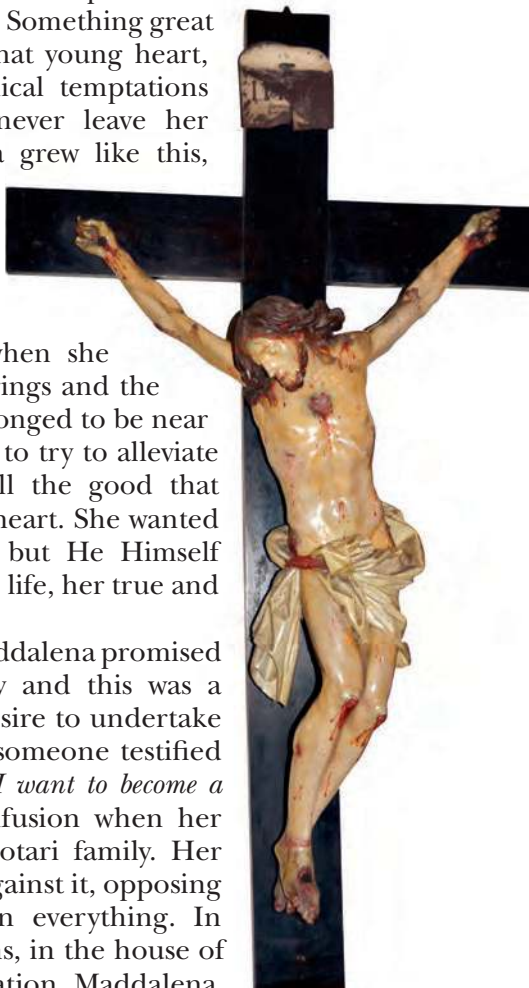
peace: the sisters received the girl with thoughtful care, transmitting to her both affection and human warmth that Maddalena had never received. At the age of nine, she received the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation at the Sisters of Visitation. She was radiant and the attraction for the things of God, prayers and Holy Mass began to grow in her.

She began to do even small penances to offer to her good Jesus. Something great was shaping itself in that young heart, but even small diabolical temptations began which would never leave her whole life. Maddalena grew like this, with a sensitive soul, tried by so many sufferings, but ever closer to her much beloved Jesus. She was deeply stricken when she heard about the sufferings and the Passion of Christ: she longed to be near and console Him, and to try to alleviate that suffering, with all the good that could come from her heart. She wanted to console the Lord, but He Himself would be for her whole life, her true and only consolation!

At the age of 11, Maddalena promised to remain in virginity and this was a prelude to a strong desire to undertake religious life. In fact, someone testified that she often said: *"I want to become a nun!"*. There was confusion when her desire reached the Notari family. Her relatives were always against it, opposing Maddalena's wishes in everything. In the long winter months, in the house of the Sisters of the Visitation, Maddalena,

**San Giorgio  
a Cremano  
(Naples).**

*Mother House.  
In front of this  
wooden crucifix  
the future Servant  
of God stood  
in prayer.*



*Portrait of  
Maria Pia  
Notari.*

at this point grown-up, used to gather in prayer, in front of the tabernacle. One day, while it was raining, she felt the desire to pray with even more fervour. A tear fell from her eyes, thinking of the suffering of her childhood, a sob interrupted her prayer, recalling her parents' reluctance towards her future. Then, her tears disappeared and she found peace in her daily meeting with her Lord.



## *Increasingly intense suffering*

Maddalena had now reached adolescence. Her persevering insistence on becoming a nun finally convinced her family to consent, provided she entered the monastery of the Teresian Sisters in Castel San Giorgio, because two of her aunts, with important positions in the community, lived there. Maddalena accepted, but she was inexplicably rejected at the entrance to the Monastery! It was the first thorn in the heart followed by a long and endless series! She encountered the Alcantarine Sisters at Olivella in Naples. Maddalena was welcomed and felt happy. It was the year 1869: she spent most of the day in prayer, in front of the Eucharist and, as the austere rules of the Alcantarines prescribed, flagellated herself with harsh penances. At that time, this was a very widespread form to express one's desire for conversion and conformation to Christ. If the peace of the cloister made Maddalena's heart happy, the austere and penitent life deteriorated her health to the point that the relatives claimed her to leave the place, and a confessor priest of the monastery proposed her to return to the

### **San Giorgio a Cremano.**

*Mother House.  
Penitential  
instruments  
used by Mother  
Maria Pia  
Notari.*







**Torre  
del Greco  
(Naples).**  
*Teresian  
boarding  
school.*



boarding school of the Visitation. It was May 1869 and Maddalena found herself back where she started! She was happy among the Sisters of the Visitation, but that spirituality did not attract her; she did everything she could to adapt to the rules of the Visitation, but in the end she asked to come back home. She was confronted with an even more painful trial: not only the disappointment of going out but also the humiliation of being accused of extravagance, inconstancy and hypocrisy! Everyone in the house considered her as a dreamer about her vocation. Even a priest suggested her to look for a husband and let go of her dream of becoming a nun. Maddalena suffered in silence. All her life long she asked her spiritual directors and confessors for advice; she never concealed any reflection and decision, as in this case, but faced with the call

of the Lord, it was necessary to oppose even the opinions of priests! In October 1871 her parents finally granted her to enter at the Teresian boarding school, at the Tower of Naples. These periods alternated between light and shadow about her future. Maddalena at that time came to know the spirituality of the Servants of Mary and so she decided to join their Secular Order. In practice, she could lead a normal life at home: in fact the Order was reserved for the laity, but professing a rule of life inspired by the charism of the Servants of Mary. Thus

on February 22, 1872 Maddalena dressed the habit of the *Servite Tertiaries*, changing her name to Maria Pia of the Cross. She immediately wanted to make a gesture of exquisite charity. Having known in those days that her renowned uncle Nicola was ill, she wanted to visit him, above all, to show him her forgiveness and to reconcile the man with the Grace of God. Thus, her dying uncle repented of all the mistreatments inflicted on his niece and fell asleep in the peace of the Lord.



*On the following page::*

*The Pietà,  
a painting  
for which the  
Mother stood in  
meditation.*

*Mother Maria  
Pia of the Cross  
meditating  
before the  
Crucifix.*





## *New paths in the life of Maria Pia of the Cross*

**M**aria Pia of the Cross lived as a nun at the boarding school and as always, criticism and malice on the part of her family members were not lacking. She found comfort and support from a priest, who, for over thirty years would be her confessor and spiritual guide: Fr. Salvatore Barbara. Meanwhile, her spiritual and existential involvement in the passion of Christ grew more and more. She chose the name “*of the Cross*” because the cross was, for her, the meaning and value of her whole life; she deepened the desire to belong to Christ contemplated in the Eucharist, associated with Him as a victim of expiation for the sins of human beings. At that time Maria Pia deepened and assimilated the spirituality of the Order of the Servants of Mary, centred on Marian piety to Our Lady of Sorrows and to the sufferings of Christ on the cross. She always resided in the Teresian boarding school, in the area of Materdei in Naples. There she met Mother Caterina Volpicelli (canonized in 2009) who, in that area, founded the Servants of the Sacred Heart. She was a prominent woman in the Neapolitan Church and presented Maria Pia of the Cross to Cardinal Guglielmo Sanfelice. As he was in an urgent situation, the Cardinal immediately offered Maria Pia an



*Fr Salvatore  
Barbara.*

*St. Caterina  
Volpicelli in a  
painting by  
G. A. Lomuscio.*







*Cardinal  
Guglielmo  
Sanfelice,  
Archbishop of  
Naples.*

**Naples (Barra).**  
*Entrance  
to Verolino  
orphanage.*



educational experience entrusting her the direction of Verolino Orphanage in Barra.

Maria Pia asked for hospitality from her brother Pasqualino, who had an apartment in Via Duomo, 61 in Naples. The Cardinal was satisfied about her service and when it was over she retired to her brother's summer house in *Castellammare di Stabia*. She was 36 years old when God inspired her to found a new religious family. She was still young, but God had led her to a long and troubled journey of inner purification before giving her the light! Maria Pia left a considerable amount of writings and in all of them, emerged the desire of God at the centre of all her thoughts, her actions, her life. A constant love for Christ in the Eucharist and an alive sense of human participation in the passion and cross of Christ are always present. These would be the exact characteristics that would form the basis of the work that God was inspiring her. Conformation to Christ crucified on the cross, out of love, was the immovable idea of Maria Pia. It was as if she was crucified with Christ and this led her to have a deep desire to offer herself in oblation and reparation to the love of Christ, manifested precisely on the cross. The cross led Maria Pia of the Cross to strip herself more and more of herself, to belong to God alone. In this radical and profound spiritual journey, she was often tempted

by the diabolical action that tormented her soul blessed by God.

Many months passed in Castellammare di Stabia and Maria Pia thought and planned how to begin the new religious family. She wanted to name it “*Servite Adorers*” but the Providence led her to change the name from the beginning, so that it could better express her vocation: Crucified Sisters Adorers of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, today “...of the Eucharist”. Two years more had passed, another long break spent in training, before taking the flight!



*Old photograph  
of the  
Monastery in  
San Giorgio a  
Cremano.*



## *The beginning of the Crucified Sisters Adorers of the Eucharist*

**Naples.**  
*Vico  
dei Maiorani.*



November 21, 1885 marked the beginning of the much coveted work. The sun was barely warm; with a little turmoil, Maria Pia greeted her brother, sister-in-law and nephews and retired to live in a small apartment in the heart of Naples, in Vico Maiorani 19. Two young women she had met at the Teresian boarding school went with her: Adelina Bagaglio and Grazia Sarno (who would become Sr. M. Giuliana and Sr. M. Buonfiglio). It all began on the day when the Church was celebrating the Purification of Mary Most Holy. The apartment, although very modest, became a true cenacle of reparation, with the aim of repairing the offenses against God by the sins of human beings through the offering of themselves with Christ on the cross, adored and contemplated in the Eucharistic presence. A noble, extraordinary and highly mystical aim, yet, well rooted in the concrete life of humanity. In fact, such reparation and self-offering could and can be compared to a profound act of love and solidarity with sinful humanity: to overcome the evil of the world with the offering of oneself and with all the goodness that spring from the heart flooded by divine Grace. The purpose of this newfound family was immediately very clear: to repair...

through meditation and conformation to the Passion of Christ, incessantly adored in the Eucharist and to contemplate the sorrows of the Holy Virgin at the foot of the Cross. Repairing the sins of humanity is a great gesture of love and charity, extremely appropriate in our times! Thus, Mother Maria Pia of the Cross began to form her companions who gradually joined the Institute. The Mother taught her spiritual daughters to conform as much as possible to Christ Crucified, so that they could be authentic souls ready to repair and console the suffering heart of Jesus and that of his Mother, our Lady of Sorrows. On this path of ascetic and continuous conversion, the origin of everything clearly appeared: love for God and the desire to be consumed, to offer oneself as an oblation to Christ, to carry one's own cross united to the path of Christ. This reparation was a salient feature of the spirituality at that time and of the cult to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but as already mentioned, it is an aspect that today, more than ever, becomes current in the words: *"overcome evil with good"*! The Mother also wanted an external sign that would demonstrate this and she herself noted in one of her writings: *"The sisters will carry on their chest a sign of red cross with the instruments of the passion, surmounted by the Host and with the pierced heart of Mary at its base"*.

**San Giorgio  
a Cremano.**  
*Mother House.  
The Virgin  
Mary with  
pierced heart.*





*On the following page:*

**San Giorgio a Cremano.**

*Mother House.  
Panel with the  
emblem of the  
Institute.*

The Mother herself wrote a draft of the Regulations of the new Institute in 12 points. Here are some of the salient features that Mother Maria Pia illustrated on her writing: perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; night prayer; recitation of the prayer to the Holy Cross at each canonical hour, and three times a day, the prayer “O Come Creator Spirit” for the needs of the Church. The Mother then described the calendar of forms of penance and fasts and recommended a poor life. All these recommendations served to live for God alone, in mortification, imitating the Crucified Christ, and assiduously meditating the sorrows of Christ and those of Mary. In the Eucharistic adoration, there was the admirable synthesis of this high and noble ideal of life!

**San Giorgio a Cremano.**

*Mother House.  
Symbol that  
appears on the  
habits of the  
Sisters Adorers.*





## *Life of poverty, mortification and constant prayer*

**Naples.**  
*Church of the  
Divine Love.  
Portal.*



From the modest apartment where the new community was borne, characterized by intricate tangles of walls, houses and balconies, the sea could not be seen and it was even difficult to look at the sky. But the sky and the sea were in the heart of Mother Maria Pia and her first companions: in fact, their sky was the tabernacle, their sea the daily Mass!

The sky alluded to God, the sea to the proclamation of the Gospel to the very ends of the earth. Although the soul of the Crucified Sisters Adorers of the Eucharist was eminently contemplative, with the passing of time it increasingly acquired a well-marked matrix of apostolic ardour in participating to the one mission of the Church.

The days of Mother Maria Pia flowed rhythmically with incessant prayer. At first, the Community could not have the Holy Mass at home, so the sisters participated together in the Church of the Divine Love; from August 1886 the small community was finally allowed to keep the Eucharist in their house: thus, Perpetual Adoration began. Many young Neapolitan women got to know this small flock of women in prayer and in a short time the community

reached the number of 12 members. A new house was necessary and, through the good office of Cardinal Sanfelice, a new location was found in Portici, at Villa Lombardi, and the bishop warmly invited the Mother to complete as soon as possible a more detailed Rule of life: it was necessary for the approval of the Institute. In twenty days, the Mother wrote this precious text, but the approval was slow to arrive and it was an ascent to Calvary for Mother Maria Pia! Several times she sought audience in the Archiepiscopal Curia, but the hearing was punctually delayed. There were criticisms and slanders from people who did not like the new Congregation. The Mother, as patient as the “Immolated Lamb”, confidently awaited the evolution of events. In the meantime, it was also necessary to leave the building in Portici. The new house, seat of the Institute, was found in San Giorgio a Cremano. It was a beautiful building but it was necessary to build an adjacent church. The sisters entered in the new house in April 1891 and on July 1<sup>st</sup> of the same year, the Cardinal laid the first stone of the nascent Church which was completed in just eight months and solemnly inaugurated on August 17, 1892. Two months earlier, the long-awaited approval of the Rule had also arrived. The community, lovingly and wisely guided by Mother Notari, grew more and more, as the depth of spirituality linked to the new Institute was

*The Foundress of the Crucified Sisters Adorers of the Eucharist is writing the Rules of the nascent Institute.*





**San Giorgio  
a Cremano.**

*Mother House.  
Facade with the  
church.*

refined. The sisters truly felt themselves to be “*victims of love*” and “*crucified*” souls, partakers of the sufferings of Christ and perpetual adorers in reparation to the sufferings of Christ and to the spreading evil in the world. Both Cross and Eucharist were the profound bond that strengthened the community. However, the problem of supporting the Institute arose and the sisters thought of a kind of work in conformity with their specific charism. Thus the laboratory for packaging both hosts and particles, so necessary for all the parishes of the territory, was borne. The sisters, with amiable care, prepared what was necessary for the Eucharistic celebration. This work still continues in the Mother House in San Giorgio a Cremano and in other houses.



In that house, there was a special, angelic atmosphere! A prolonged common prayer and personal Eucharistic adoration punctuated everything. Mother Notari preferred the night hours to be



in contemplation of Jesus. She used to repeat to her sisters: *“The sisters should be like many flames, so many flames!”*. Flames of love and prayer. All these were also translated into daily work. Every element of decoration for tabernacles, for altars, and for the celebration of the Holy Mass was prepared with amiable care. But even the people who wanted to meet Mother Notari and the sisters for advice, personal vents and requests for prayer, were astonished by the exquisite welcome that was

### **San Giorgio a Cremano.**

*Mother House. Even today the preparation of the particles for the Eucharist is entrusted to the sisters, as in the times of Mother Maria Pia of the Cross.*



### **San Giorgio a Cremano.**

*Box embroidered by Mother Maria Pia conserved in the Institute.*

given to them. However, not all were roses for Mother Notari... As we know, the devil never left her in peace and many painful trials appeared on the Institute. Joys and sorrows accompanied the expansion of the Institute. Mother Pia had the happiness of welcoming an extraordinary saint who lived with her for several years. She was Sr. Mary of the Passion, whose real name is Grazia Tarallo, beatified on May 14, 2006. She was born in Barra (Naples) in 1866 and joined the sisters of Mother Maria Pia in 1891. She lived all her existence in simplicity and in constant union with God, until 1912, the year in which she died.

**San Giorgio  
a Cremano.**

*Mother House.  
Banner of the  
Blessed Maria  
of the Passion.*



## Generous love for the Church

Mother Maria Pia of the Cross left the house of San Giorgio a Cremano a few times: when she went out for some tasks she was much revered by the people who also loved the sisters who prayed in silence. Some anticlericals and masons mocked her and blabbered blasphemous and offensive words against her and the Church. She remained silent and, returning home, offer her prayers of reparation, precisely because of the rampant sore of freemasonry. Her life was forever a life of crucified and adoring love. When Mother Notari was in front of the Eucharist, she was transfigured! One day, the adoration continued longer than usual. She was like captured in ecstasy; she remembered with no little surprise and emotion the itinerary of her life... she was on the threshold of 50 years and could only say ‘thanks’ for that expanse of life. Thanks also for the inner shadows and purifications, for the sufferings of her childhood and the tortuous path in search of her place in the Church. Being Crucified Adorer meant also making her life a long and heartfelt “thank you” to

*Jesus in the olive grove. Small statue bought personally by the Mother, venerated in every community of the Crucified Adorers of the Eucharist on the Thursday of the first week of Lent.*





**San Giorgio  
a Cremano.**

*Mother House.*

*Objects*

*belonging to the*

*Mother brought*

*from her*

*journey to Rome*

*in 1900.*

God, the Giver of all good. In her continued prayer, she forgave all the people who had harmed her and blessed God for the gift of holy sisters, among whom excelled Sister Mary of the Passion. After prayer, she went down to the Eucharistic office where she admired the whiteness of the hosts, prepared from selected flours. The laboratory for producing wine for the Eucharistic celebration had been also recently set up. The sisters were like laborious bees. She was admired for all this but the devil put his tail in it: she learned that some people had made heavy accusations that even reached the Holy See in Rome! The Mother was accused with insulting slanders, of being a perfidious woman who forced young sisters into a

tremendous command of work and prayer. She was accused of badly feeding the sisters and of assigning goods and works of the Congregation to her relatives.

It was a storm. Cardinal Sanfelice, despised himself for he had to do an inspection without warning. Rome proposed an Apostolic Visitor, that is to say, a sort of detective, who would have to drive out the evil and take the reins of the government of the Institute.

But the accusations soon collapsed and Mother Notari was exonerated from everything. In her



usual humble and modest attitude, she did not utter a word. Her heart was freed from a heavy burden. On July 20, 1900, Mother Pia made a long journey to the Pope's city. She was received in Rome by Leo XIII, who blessed and encouraged the work undertaken. To make the joy of that moment more concrete, the Decree of Praise came unexpectedly and subsequently the definitive approval of the Congregation arrived. It was May 6, 1902. The Crucified Adorers began the new century, marked by expansion.



*Pope Leo XIII.*

**San Giorgio a Cremano.**  
*Mother House.  
Choir where  
Mother Maria  
Pia and the  
other sisters  
prayed*

## *The Congregation expanded...*

*House in Castel San Giorgio.*



Almost twenty years had passed since the inspiration was received by Mother Notari. A considerable stretch of road that had made the Foundress more and more “crucified” next to the beloved Lord. A large group of sisters had gradually joined the Mother. The time had come to take flight to open new houses and began new forms of apostolate, even though, already in 1894, the second house had been opened in Castel San Giorgio and the third, in San Clemente in Nocera.

On September 7, 1902 the first General Chapter of the Congregation was held at the Mother House: Mother Notari was elected General Superior and the first house of the Institute was chosen as the General House. After

*House in Nocera.*



the General Chapter, 4 new houses were opened: Gaeta in Lazio, Rutigliano near Bari, Putignano and Conversano.. Obviously, the Mother followed up the opening of these new houses carefully, visiting them frequently. The laboratory for Host-making was also opened in the house of Conversano to the great benefit of the parishes. The latter was opened in 1912, after almost thirty years of foundation, the Institute had already 6 large houses. Mother Maria Pia of the Cross understood that it was also necessary to respond to the pressing ecclesial and social problems of the time. Thus, she decided that boarding schools for girls, nursing homes and embroidery schools should arise next to their houses. In those years, various wounds fell on the population, such as the famous epidemic called “*spagnola*”. It decimated not only the whole Italy but beyond. The sisters committed themselves to fervent prayers



*House  
n Gaeta.*

*Authentic photo  
of the Mother  
Foundress in  
the House in  
Rutigliano in 1912  
while consigning  
the Rules to Mother  
Veronica, second  
Superior General.*







### **San Giorgio a Cremano.**

*Mother House.  
Bed on which  
the Mother  
rested.*

for this terrible disease to diminish. One day, Mother Notari, in her great humility, asked a young sister to pray with her to preserve their house in San Giorgio a Cremano from being affected. Then, she asked the young woman to bless her. The young sister, very confused, replied that she would go to the tabernacle to pray for her, but the Mother insisted that she gave her the longed-for blessing. With a trembling hand, the young sister traced the blessing with a small Sign of the Cross. Mother Notari unite this profound sense of humility and poverty to the spirit of prayer. Poverty to the point of not even having a small room to rest a while! She did what she could, resting in her modest study.

Sometimes the Mother had to travel by train and some episodes have been recounted: they were similar to Franciscan florets. From them all: amiability, humility and patience excelled, especially in the face of the insults that she often had to endure. The Mother became a secured reference point of the poor who knocked on their door. She visited the sick with delicate charity and did her best to help in any needs of the poor people in San Giorgio a Cremano.



## *Charism and Spirituality of Mother Maria Pia of the Cross*

Much has already been said about the spirituality of the Crucified Sisters Adorers of the Eucharist. Now is the time to understand the spiritual depth of the Mother Foundress. We can deduce this from studies done based on two reports written by herself: for the Archbishop, and the Rule of the Institute which she also personally wrote. There is a constant already mentioned: all her life long, Mother Notari tried to conform herself to the crucified Christ, as a profound desire of love for the One who had given His life for humanity. In her writings, the guiding thread of every affirmation is her grateful love to Christ. She noted: “My sweetest

*Jesus, I have chosen You alone as a faithful lover of the soul, and as best companion in my life. To You I offer the love of my heart by choosing You as my guardian and guide...”* (March 13, 1875). In addition, the Mother lived this offering of love every day in the contemplation of Christ, through the mystery of the Cross and of the Eucharist.

In personal suffering, she found the way to conform and imitate Christ more and more in His passion, but she also advanced in the awareness of wanting to offer herself as a *victim for sinners*.

**San Giorgio  
a Cremano.**  
*Mother House.  
Portrait of  
the Mother in  
prayer.*





nacque il 21 Dicembre 1855 colla benedizione dell'Ono Cardinale  
Arcivescovo di Napoli **D. Uguisimo Santefice dei Duchi di Arquavella**  
il quale con compassione e squisita carità sua si benigno incoraggiarla.  
Vita umana devi sottoposta, come per diritto, alla sua  
considerazione e dipendenza, nonchè dei futuri Duchi successori, i qua-  
li daranno un Superiore Ecclesiastico a loro arbitrio.

The passion, death and resurrection of Christ become present in the Eucharist: hence, her deep desire was to live her whole existence in the Eucharistic adoration. Mother Notari spent long hours in prayer in front of the tabernacle. In her daily diary, there was a constant reference to Christ's presence in the Eucharist: in it she saw summarized the whole life of the Christian and of the religious. She got to express her faith in the admirable Sacrament of the altar with these expressions: *"Good Shepherd, Supreme Good, My Treasure, true Bread..."*. In a writing entitled *Reflections on the Eucharist*, she affirmed: *"the Eucharist is the admirable gift of the love of Christ that nourishes the spiritual life, sanctifies the one who receives it, gives strength in the difficulties"*. Mother Maria Pia saw the deep love for the Sacrament of the altar gush forth from the cross. If the Cross and the Eucharist were the synthesis of her charism, she

*On the previous page:*

*The Rule  
consigned to  
her daughters  
represents for  
the Foundress  
the integral  
expression of  
their charism.*

**San Giorgio  
a Cremano.**

*Church of the  
Mother House.*





**San Giorgio  
a Cremano.**

*Cave in the  
basement where  
Mother Maria  
Pia used to  
pray, for the  
celebration of  
Jesus in the  
olive grove.*

also nourished a heartfelt and profound devotion to the One who remained under the cross: Mary, Mother of Sorrows.

The other aspect closely linked to what was said about her spirituality is the theme of *reparation*: God is not loved: this is why the Mother offered herself and “sacrificed” herself by repairing the outrages that God received daily from humanity; loving and offering herself as a victim. During the time of Mother Notari, as already mentioned, the use of harsh and corporal forms of penance and mortification was also widespread. They, too, were legacies of the Christian life at that time, but it appeared very evident in the writings of Mother Notari that they were exclusively aimed at loving God and charity towards the neighbour. She wrote in a letter: “Look, my dear daughter, the work

*I desire from you: I desire your heart to be an altar of holocaust; every moment of your life you must offer the Lord peaceful hosts and incense of worship, which result from your mortified life and the continuous acts of love that must rise with sweetness to the throne of God. The temple and the altar is your heart...”*

She wanted the sisters to be “Crucified” to imitate Christ on the cross Who gives Himself to humanity, “Crucified” in the work for the salvation of sinners, “Crucified” to bear witness to the redemption that is made present in the Eucharist.



## *The time of fruits...*

The years passed for Mother Maria Pia and her vigils, prayers and penances were offered increasingly for the world and its selfishness. A sister testified: “the Mother spent the silent hours of the night, awake, and raised prayers for those who, in that hour, were guilty of iniquity, imploring their conversion”.

Many sisters told that Mother Pia was able to scrutinize the hearts and sometimes read their thoughts, as it happened when she told that the sisters were secretly preparing for her feast day, an embroidered curtain for the tabernacle! Mother Notari was a true contemplative: many sisters saw her almost in ecstasy, before the Eucharist; the years of prayers, immolation and penitence had refined in her an extraordinary soul, constantly turned to God.

She rarely left the house: if she did, it was because of some need of the community or to accomplish a work of pious charity. When in the last years of her life she walked along the alleys of San Giorgio a Cremano, everyone revered her with affection and she, with an ever slower and tired pace, gave a delicate smile to everyone. Those rare walks were for her,

*Portrait of  
Mother Maria  
Pia of the  
Cross.*





*The Gulf  
of Naples.*

occasions to turn from time to time, the eyes and thoughts to that land, to those people, recalling her distant past, first in Capriglia, then in Naples. She looked at the summit of Vesuvius, which looked like a severe guardian watching over those areas so populous at its feet. She looked towards the Gulf of Sorrento, the Fauto Mountain, and remembered her native town; then a look at the sea, thinking of distant lands to be evangelized... When she returned home, she stopped for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, thanking and blessing God for all.

Mother Maria Pia, almost closer to the encounter with God, spent much of her days in adoration. It was 1918: six years earlier, one of her favourite follower, Sr. Mary of the Passion, had flown to heaven. She kept a vivid memory of her and every time, thought about her, she felt amazement and emotion. She was even called to testify to the beatification process of this spiritual daughter of hers. She wrote a spiritual biography of her that



highlighted the extraordinary nature of the soul of Mary of the Passion. Despite the many consolations at that time, with the expansion of her congregation, Mother Maria Pia began to have heavy physical complaints. Arteriosclerosis and other ailments were undermining her already fragile health. She thought of resigning as Superior General and she gathered all the local superiors, but there was a general plea for her to remain in office. Arthritis also later affected her. By now, she lived between the bedroom and the church; it was her only and daily routine.

At the beginning of 1919 her health began to get worse and on March 20, she had a first heart attack. The doctor and her sisters feared the worst.

They accommodated her in a bed that was a little more comfortable than the rough pallet she was using until then. She called Mother Veronica, one of her closest collaborators, saying that she had various things to entrust her, for the good of the Institute.

The sisters were gathered around her bedside, but it was not yet time to leave the earth for heaven; with a whisper she said: “*My dearest daughters, I must repent; Jesus wants me... My mission is fulfilled and I leave you, but listen to my last wish... From today Mother Veronica will be your Mother General; the*

### **San Giorgio a Cremano.**

*Mother House.  
The Foundress  
consigning  
the Rules to  
Sister Veronica  
Peschechera,  
second Superior  
General of the  
Institute.*







*The tomb of Mother Maria Pia Notari in the church of the Mother House in San Giorgio a Cremano.*

*Chapter that you will have to do will decide everything”.*

Mother Maria Pia suffered for more days, with very acute pain that lasted for several months. Her last words, before blessing and leaving her sisters, were: *“I recommend to you the love for the Blessed Sacrament”*. It had been the only reason of life in her whole existence. Then, she blessed her sisters, went into agony and on the evening of July 1, 1919 she flew to heaven.

The wake lasted for seven long days, with a procession of people never seen before. After being buried from the cemetery in San Giorgio a Cremano, on November 16, 1919, her body was transferred to the church of the Mother House next to that of Sister Mary of the Passion. In April 1921, the process for her beatification began.





## *The personality of Mother Maria Pia of the Cross*

*On the previous page:*

**San Giorgio a Cremano.**

*Mother House. Cross on which the Mother lied down as a sign of penitence (the turtledove entered her room on the day of her death).*

**M**other Maria Pia of the Cross was, undoubtedly, a contemplative soul, naturally inclined to prayer and attracted by it, as well as by union with God. She was a true mystic of the Cross and of the Eucharist, but from her numerous writings it clearly appears that she knew how to balance this nature with a great capacity to govern. She was a dynamic, concrete woman, integrated among people of her time. She reached all these through a long journey, dotted with constant suffering, problems and inner torments. For her spirituality, she drew much from the experience with the Alcantarine Sisters and the Servants of Mary. Two very important attitudes then, emerged in her life: First of all the contact and friendship with eminent personalities of the Neapolitan Church, among whom stand out St. Caterina Volpicelli and Blessed Bartolo Longo; then the desire to confront, both in the spiritual direction and in confession,

*On the left:*  
*Father Luigi Fontana.*

*On the right:*  
*Blessed Bartolo Longo.*



wise priestly guides. Fr. Salvatore Barbara was her confessor for 35 years, and also the Barnabite Father Luigi Fontana, the Redemptorist Emanuele Ribera and the Franciscan Fr Michelangelo da Marigliano, shaped and guided the spiritual path of Mother Notari.

In the Eucharistic adoration, in the sign of the cross and, in the passion of Jesus she repaired the evils of her time and we can find her strong desire to be deeply inserted into the vitality of the Church as well as into the problems of the world. This was concretely implemented in her exquisite charity in front of poverty and her tenacious interest in the social problems of her time.

She was a meek and humble woman, desirous of concealment, she gathered around her some followers, to be sort of lungs of prayer in the world. Thus, she wrote this way about the foundation of the Institute: *“With the blessing of the One who guided me, I began to live with seven young women known and tried by me, proposing that we live in the most obscure and forgotten life: in fact, we spent two years in Naples serving and loving the Lord, without anyone knowing our existence. Certainly, I didn’t do anything to increase the number of my companions, however, I received and continuously receiving demands from many places to join my little family. Today we are eighteen.*

*We live with the Rules of St. Augustine and the Constitutions of St. Giuliana Falconieri, who founded the so-called Mantellate Sisters in Florence.*



*Fr Michelangelo da Marigliano of the Friars Minor.*





*Above:  
Saint  
Augustine.  
Below:  
Santa Giuliana  
Falconieri.*

*Mother Maria  
Pia of the  
Cross.*

*All the observances of the Rule and Constitutions, also the others voluntarily accepted, should be offered to the Lord, for the exaltation of the Holy Church, for the eradication of the heresies, for peace of the princes and of Christian people, and in order to have in the Church ministers filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ.*

*The work of this family is to meditate the passion of Jesus Christ, the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and also the compassion to the Blessed Virgin in her very sorrowful sufferings; for this reason the sisters will carry on their chest a sign of red cross with the instruments of the passion, surmounted by the Host and with the pierced heart of Mary at its base”.*

**Mother Maria Pia of the Cross.**



## Prayer

### ***For the glorification of the Servant of God Mother Maria Pia of the Cross***

*O God, our Father, You had given Mother Maria Pia Notari the strength and the joy of opening herself entirely to the Holy Spirit to conform herself to Christ, Host of expiation and of salvation, and of offering a family of consecrated virgins, crucified with Christ, adorers of the mystery of the Altar, apostles of the Eucharist.*

*We humbly pray You: deign to elevate in your Church her figure, so to continue to orient and induce with more efficiency, through the centuries, the faithful towards the Eucharistic Table where the Church, community of salvation, continuously borne and strengthens herself.*

*By her intercession, grant me the particular grace that I trustfully ask You... and the grace I need to live serenely a Christian life and to glorify You, endless love, Who reign forever and ever. Amen.*









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### 1 - Capriglia (Salerno).

Maddalena Teresa Rosa Notari was born on December 2, 1847.

### 2 - Naples.

Maddalena was just 3 years old when she was entrusted to an uncle from Naples. She finally found affection and human warmth in the boarding school of the Sisters of the Visitation

and from that environment emerged her vocation to religious consecration. After various vicissitudes, Maddalena got to know the spirituality of the Servants of Mary and on February 22, 1872 she took the habit of the Servite Tertiaries, taking the name *Maria Pia della Croce* (Maria Pia of the Cross). After an educational experience at Verolino Orphanage in Barra, at the age of 36, God inspired in her heart the foundation of a new religious institute. On November 21, 1885, in a modest flat in the heart of Naples, the community of the Crucified Sisters Adorers of the Eucharist began.

### 3 - San Giorgio a Cremano (Naples).

The community grew larger and, after a brief period in Portici, in 1891 it moved to a new house in San Giorgio a Cremano. In 1892, their Rule was approved. On September 7, 1902 the first General Chapter took place in the Mother House of the Congregation: Mother Notari was elected General Superior. On the evening of July 1, 1919 Mother Maria Pia of the Cross, flew to heaven, to meet the Beloved of her life.

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