

# Conforti: Early Years and Priestly Formation

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Guido Conforti was the eighth of ten children of Rinaldo Conforti and Antonia Adorni. He was born on March 30 1865 at Casalora di Ravadese, in the midst of a fertile land of Parma, Italy. All the educational efforts undertaken by his parents geared toward a specific goal, dreamed by his father: to have his son be the future administrator of the farm and its properties.

Guido attended the school of the Christian Brothers in Parma, and he could have very well been a successful manager. On the way to school, Guido developed the habit to stop in prayer in front of a huge Crucifix in the Church of Peace. There was an intense conversation among the two of them: *'I looked at Him, and He looked at me, and it seemed he was telling me many things'* used to retell later Guido Conforti when he became

bishop. In that meeting with the Crucifix, Guido felt called to the priesthood.

We can just imagine the opposition of his father Rinaldo when Guido shared the news of entering the local seminary. But through the support he found in his mother, and the strength he received from his daily dialogues with the Crucifix, Guido seemed very determined.

While in the Seminary, Guido lived an austere life, detached from his natural family, for seldom he received visits from his parents. But he was also experiencing some nervous related illness. He would pass out for a few hours, and he seemed out of breath. This almost precluded his priesthood ordination. His classmates would be ordained, but Guido was asked to wait, and get better.

Guido made trips to the local shrine of Our Lady of Fontanellato, guided by the wisdom he received from Blessed Anna Maria Adorni, a holy religious woman who lived in Parma. Blessed Adorni was considered *"the mother of the marginalized, exploited, of all who are subject to new forms of slavery and, in particular, of the incarcerated and women."*

Our Lady gave Guido Conforti the strength to endure those difficult months, and he finally received the

grace of Ordination to the Priesthood. His first Mass was at the Shrine of Our Lady at Fontanellato, on September 22, 1888. This 23-year-old priest was becoming aware of a new call in life: the founding of a community totally dedicated to the mission of Christ.

## The Crucifix Encounter:

### The Source of My Vocation

*I looked at him, and he looked at me, and it seemed as though he was telling me many things*

God revealed the fullness of his love in his Crucified Son. One day this love touched the heart of young Guido Conforti in an almost natural way. He was but a child. Every morning, he stopped at the "Church of Peace" to gaze at the the large Crucifix there.

This was the beginning of an uninterrupted dialogue with Christ crucified. Later when he was sixty years old and bishop, his sister often found him rapt in ecstasy before that crucifix, which had been brought to his residence, at his request. Was it that dialogue with the Crucified Lord that sparked the idea to found a missionary congregation?



*I looked at him, and he looked at me, and it seemed as though he was telling me many things*

### Brief Life

March 30, 1865 - Guido Maria Conforti is born at Casalora di Ravadese (Parma), Italy.

- 1872-1876 - While attending elementary school in Parma he has his first prayer conversations with Christ crucified. He used to recall: "He gave me my vocation" and "it seemed like he told me many things."
- 1879-1881 - After reading the life of St. Francis Xavier he adopts him as a model.
- September 22, 1888 - He is ordained priest.
- December 3, 1895 - He begins, in Emilia, his "Seminary for the Foreign Missions."
- December 3, 1898 - His seminary, in Emilia, is officially recognized as the "St. Francis Congregation for the Foreign Missions."
- March 3, 1899 - In the Mission Seminary Chapel he bids farewell to the first Xaverians leaving for China, Caio Rastelli and Odoardo Manini.
- June 11, 1902 - In St. Paul's Basilica in Rome, Monsignor Conforti definitively consecrates himself to mission by professing religious vows. He is then consecrated bishop of the Archdiocese of Ravenna.
- December 12, 1907 - He becomes bishop of Parma.
- April 21, 1912 - In the Cathedral of Parma he consecrates Mons. Luigi Calza first Xaverian Bishop and Vicar Apostolic of Cheng-chow (China).
- August 15, 1921 - He finishes writing his "Testament Letter" with which he presents the Xaverian Constitutions to the Xaverian members, approved by Rome.
- September-December 1928 - Notwithstanding his illness and age, he visits his missionaries in China.
- November 5, 1931 - Guido Maria Conforti dies a saintly death in Parma.
- On March 17, 1996 Guido Maria Conforti is declared BLESSED by Pope John Paul II
- October 23, 2011 - Guido Maria Conforti is proclaimed SAINT by Pope Benedict XVI.