



To the Ends of the Earth

by Fr. Joseph Rinaldo, S.C.

The Servants of Charity, the Congregation of Priests and Brothers serving at the Pious Union of St Joseph, are celebrating this year the centennial of Father Guanella's arrival in Rome with the opening of an agricultural program for orphan boys on October 15, 1903. The uncontainable joy of Father Guanella for this event can not be described. He had wanted to plant his tent of charity in Rome for a long time. Once he had reached his goal, he knew that he had accomplished all that the Lord had asked of him.

Why was the establishment of his Congregation in Rome so vital to Guanella? Because, I think, the saints are rooted in the History of Salvation and we can understand their thinking and acting only by meditating the History of Salvation as presented in the Scriptures. The longing for Rome by Father Guanella is similar to that of St. Paul. The comparison comes spontaneously. Right before Jesus "was lifted up, and a cloud took him from his disciples' sight" (Acts 1:9), He had told them, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, *and to the ends of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8). Jerusalem was the place where salvation was accomplished. It is the starting point for the mission of the Christian disciples to "the ends of the earth," the place where the apostles were situated, and the focal point of the faith in the early days of the community. For St. Paul, however, "the ends of the earth" was Rome.

St. Paul and Blessed Guanella were guided by the Holy Spirit as part of God's plan of salvation. Even though God's intervention is crucial to Salvation History, they were not manipulated like puppets. The saints have to figure out the significance of unusual experiences that happen to them during their mission. They ask for further assistance from God in prayer. They also discuss the events which have occurred as they prepare to take new steps to preach the Gospel. Their ability to look back on past examples of God's action helps them to understand what God is doing in the present. At times they might even have taken the wrong step if God had not intervened.

If we take a look at St. Paul's missionary journeys, we will notice that he touches the major cities along the roads and sea routes of his time. He had begun his ministry where Jesus had ended, in Jerusalem. It was time for St. Paul to spread the Word further to the west until he comes to the center of the empire that embraced the whole Mediterranean basin, Rome. But the task is not over. The Church still must venture into other lands and cultures to fulfill the mission which is hers until the end of time: to bear witness to the Gospel everywhere.

As St. Paul received from God the charism and the mission to spread the Gospel among the Gentiles, Father Guanella received from God the charism and the mission to spread the Gospel among the poorest and the least in society. Father Guanella suffered immensely through the hands of the enemies of the Church who targeted him ferociously with an organized persecution. Even his own superiors failed to understand him and had tried everything to stop his ardent desires to follow his vocation. As a pastor he had dedicated his best energies to the poor, the suffering and the handicapped. He had started many programs on their behalf wherever he went. Finally his hour came. The Spirit had called him to the small town of Pianello Lario. Here his journey to "the ends of the earth" had begun.



On an evening of April 1886, in a little boat heavy with a few pieces of furniture, three sisters and four orphans sailed from Pianello and landed the following morning in Como. In Como Father Guanella clearly had established the identity of his work. From Como his journey had taken him east toward Milan and Venice; north to Switzerland; west toward Turin. It was time now for him to move south toward the center and the heart of the Church and Christianity. Rome and the Holy Father had captured his heart and his mind. They had attracted his faith and had given him hope. He had wanted to bring his tent of charity to Rome; have the Holy Father bless and approve his work so he could move with the Church and spread the Gospel of Charity to "the ends of the earth."

Rome was a magnet that had oriented all his thoughts and all his deeds. He had wanted to be all in the Church and for the Church. He was a brother to all, because he understood that spreading the Gospel of Love meant to love others. On January 28, 1904, Father Guanella was received by Pope St. Pius X. The meeting of those two souls was not a coincidence, but an occasion where the holiness of the one added to the holiness of the other and, thus, their generosity had become a richness for all. The Church now, through them, could provide care for the poor and handicapped in a society unable to solve their problems and that had left them alone to be tormented in misery. This meeting was very meaningful for Father Guanella. The Church had now become a springboard to extend his work of charity beyond the borders of Italy. His closeness and friendship with the Pope was the needed seal of approval and encouragement to reach "the ends of the earth."

Today the two spiritual families of Blessed Louis Guanella, the Servants of Charity and the Daughters of St Mary of Providence, reach "the ends of the earth" and are present on all continents with the good news of the work of charity. It all started in Jerusalem with Jesus healing bodies and souls and bringing hope to the lonely. It had moved through roads and the lanes of the sea to reach Rome where the Church, through its apostles, continues to spread the Gospel to "the ends of the earth" and extend the History of Salvation.

(Credit: Rinaldo, Fr. Joseph. "To the Ends of the Earth." *Now and at the Hour* October-November 2003: 21.)