

Alongside the poor

The Little Sisters of the Poor, who have been in Padua for almost a hundred years, have done a lot of good work during that time thanks also to the economic help given to them by our Association.

The friendship between our Association and the Little Sisters of the Poor began over a century ago. These nuns, founded in France in 1839 by Saint Jeanne Jugan, are endowed with a special charisma which makes them one of our most modern religious institutions. In fact the Rules of their Order reflect how they act with “the evangelical spirit of the Beatitudes”, which is not only a sweet expression, but also keeps them busy “joyfully offering, with devotion, their life to helping the elderly and the poor with an indestructible belief in the Providence of God”.

Jeanne (*below: in the centre of the painting*), the sixth daughter of a fisherman, in order to help her family chose to work as a house maid. Once she was freed from her duties to her family, she felt a strong calling towards the poor, who also at that time were mainly elderly people abandoned by their families. A model of humility, she was made the patron saint of home helpers in 2009. She lived in relative secrecy but was able to create a whole army of lovers of Christ throughout the world.

The sisters settled in Italy in 1869 and soon opened houses in various cities including Padua, in Via Beato Pellegrino 82; this was closed in 1972 due to lack of vocations.

During the period, almost a century, that they had been in the city of St. Anthony they had done much good work and had taken care of up to 150 elderly people at a time in their homes. When the time came for their centres to be used for other purposes they were glad to give the land and buildings to an organisation on the condition that they promised to continue their Christian and humanitarian work that the sisters had started; which fortunately continues.

Right from the time when they first arrived in Padua the Little Sisters of the Poor have found in St. Anthony's Universal Association a generous helping hand and guaranteed economic funding several times a year to assist them with their activities. The Lord has given us the opportunity to speak with Sister Agnese, 96 years old and originally from Treviso. She has been resident for 40 years in their Home in Bologna, but spent many years in Padua in the role of “questu-

ante”; she is very proud of the position she held as it brought her close to her Founder, helping her fellow sisters via the benefactors that she contacted.

“At the age of sixteen – she tells us – with a suitcase in my hand I left for Turin and found work in a textile factory. When I was twenty four, the Lord called me to the Little Sisters of the Poor and I am happy to have devoted my life to helping those in need. Today I can no longer get about but from my wheelchair and using the Internet, I can still keep in contact with our benefactors. Unfortunately, they are also becoming poor and it is becoming difficult for us to offer a warm and serene welcome to those who turn to us for help. In Bologna we take care of about seventy (70) old people with various problems, with the help of 16 religious workers and approximately 40 professionals who must receive an adequate monthly salary. Our trust in Providence is great and we must thank your Association for your guaranteed annual contribution. The needs are many and we must also take into account the regular maintenance required for the building which was renovated and made in conformity with current regulations during the last century. We have recently managed to renovate the kitchen and the next big task is to renew the sewage system and the building itself. We are counting on the generosity of the many followers of St. Anthony who are members of your Universal Association”.

That brings us to think about the shortage of people who follow a religious vocation today and she ponders on the problem, she who has offered to the Lord and to the poor 72 years of her life. “Once – she says – there were many of us because every family, with a number of children, was proud to have at least one who became a priest or a nun. The young people of today seem to be afraid to take on anything that requires dedication and time. The time will come when Christians will get down on their knees and, with arms open wide, beg the Lord to send us priests and consecrated souls. The old people suffer as they see that our numbers are dwindling. Just as they have become so attached to a young girl here from Bologna who was a nurse but decided to become a nun and now wants to leave as a missionary. They are begging her to stay because they can feel that there is something different in people like us as we have given up everything in order to remain with those in need”.

