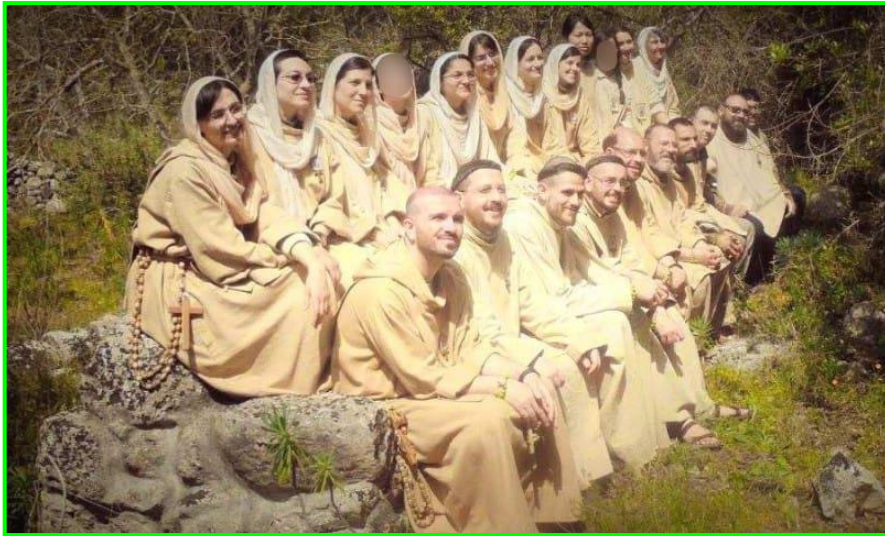


***“GREATER LOVE HAS NO MAN THAN THIS, THAT A MAN LAY
DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS.” (JOHN 15:13)***



In the name of the Lord, Peace and Good to all of you who, a bit like the Magi (cf. Matt 2:1-11), are on the upright way (cf. Ps 84:12) which leads to the *Full Truth* (cf. John 14:6; Eph 1:22-23).¹

I am *Friar Giuseppe Maria Gazzella Jones*: it might sound long, but each part of the name has its meaning! I am 27 years old, and I have been part of the religious family of the Little Friars and Little Nuns of Jesus and Mary for more than 4 years.² At present, after finishing two years of philosophical study, I am studying Theology in order to become a *Priest of the Holy Catholic Apostolic Roman Church*, keeping in mind the exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI: “The priest must be on the watch. He must be on his guard in the face of the imminent powers of evil. He must keep the world awake for God. He must be the one who remains standing: upright before the trends of time. Upright in truth....The priest must be upright, fearless.”³

Having said this, I am going to write a brief witness, a “spark” of what the Lord has been pleased to do in my fleeting life. The serious beginning of my conversion can be dated, clearly and precisely, to October 2, 2003: the day I met Friar Volantino, who is the founder of this sensational religious community of the Little Friars and Nuns of Jesus and Mary!

WHO WAS I AND WHAT DID I DO BEFORE MEETING THE LITTLE FRIARS AND NUNS OF JESUS AND MARY?

My baptismal name is Salvatore Pipitone. From when I was a child, I was very attracted to God and I read Genesis and then Revelation (because I wanted to see immediately what God did at the end!). I remember that once, when I was about nine years old, I asked my earthly parents and a priest this question, more or less: “If Cain and Abel were only two people, why is this written: ‘Cain said to the Lord: “My punishment is too great....I will be a wanderer and a fugitive on the earth, and anyone who encounters me can kill me.” ...The Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who encountered him would kill him.’” (cf. Gen 4:13-16)? Why is this written? Where were the other people? How did they show up on the earth?” After I read the

1 The Magi, led by the mysterious star, found the Meaning of Life, the Fullness of Truth, which is the Divine Child and his Mother inside the house (cf. Matt 2:1-11), which is really the Church (cf. 1Tim 3:15), which, as *Lumen Gentium* says, “subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter” (dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8). And thus says the conciliar Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*: “The...fullness of grace and truth [is] entrusted to the Church...For it is only through Christ's Catholic Church, which is ‘the all-embracing means of salvation,’ that they can benefit fully from the means of salvation” (Decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 3).

2 This testimony was written in 2008; Friar Giuseppe was ordained a priest in April of 2017 (translator's note).

3 Pope Benedict XVI, *homily, Chrism Mass at the Vatican Basilica*, March 20, 2008.

book of Revelation, I would go out and look up at the sky, waiting for Jesus to come down from heaven to free us. But then, when I was about 13, I began to turn away from God and take a downward path. I began to be a bit like Narcissus, the character in Greek mythology who was in love with himself and, on seeing his own reflection in the water, leaned in to kiss it until he fell in and drowned; forgetting about the love of God, who gives himself completely for others, I closed in on myself, wildly trying to indulge my own desires, and this was drowning me. The years passed, and I obtained a degree as an accountant programmer. After that, I studied at the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy in Palermo. I had a promising future, as I had earned multiple scholarships, Erasmus trips, and was preparing to graduate. I also studied at the Brass Group (a school of pop jazz music), as well as studying various types of music (classical, oriental, African, etc.). I had a girlfriend who taught English (who, by the way, is now also a religious!). In the midst of all this, I was very far from the Lord, leading an unbridled, restless life; at night I would play music on the beach, drinking and smoking joints...deep down, I was only searching for happiness, and I was sincere. But it was all for nothing! I couldn't manage to be happy. Instead, I felt my heart ever emptier, and I felt dissatisfied. My sadness could be seen by others – so much so that my cousin once told me, more or less, “*To me, you look like sick old man!*” For me, these harsh but truthful words were like a slap in the face. On top of all this, the very heavy and serious problems of life fell on me like boulders: death, suffering, wars, poverty. In short, I felt lost and crushed, and if there had been no clear-cut and sensible answers, I would have preferred to die at the age of 22! Who could clearly tell me what the meaning of my life was? What was I doing on earth? But above all: Who could give me happiness? Who could give me the blessedness that never ends? On this theme, St. Augustine says, “*We all certainly yearn to live happily, and among men there is no one who denies their assent to this statement.*”⁴ After all, where does all this desire for happiness come from if not from God? The CCC says, “*God has placed [this natural desire for happiness] in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it*” (CCC 1718)! And St. Thomas affirms: “*God alone satisfies.*”⁵ I didn't remotely feel this satisfaction; and so my suffering brought me to the point of making a sincere prayer, and the Lord began to answer me (cf. Ps 107).

THE ENCOUNTER WITH FRIAR VOLANTINO ...

A flame was lit within me: I wanted to consecrate myself completely to the Lord! More precisely, I wanted to live the Gospel – *sine glossa* – as St. Francis of Assisi did! It was clear: I wanted to leave everything – university, girlfriend, family, etc. – to give my life to Jesus. I isolated myself more and more into silent places, and my prayer became ever stronger: “Lord, what do you want from me? Why did you speak so clearly with St. Francis of Assisi, but with me you don't give an answer? What do you want from me?! I beg you to answer me!!” And Adonai (that is, the Lord) listened to my cry and responded, particularly through dreams (cf. Job 33:14-15):

- In the first dream, which I had in the summer of 2003, I saw a great saint, of gigantic proportions, swoop down from heaven with a robe and a white beard. At a certain point he said, “Salvatore! Salvatore! Is it always the same thing with you?” He took my arm like a father, saying, “Come here,” and brought me towards the Church of Our Lady of Graces!
- In the second vision in dream, which I had on the eve of October 2, 2003, someone like a mysterious angel met me. He was friendly and told me he was 33 years old.

The marvelous thing is that these two visions in dreams would become reality on the day I met Friar Volantino for the first time. It was October 2, 2003, the feast of the Guardian Angels. I went to a Church in a place called “the Holy Father of Perriere” – which refers to St. Francis of Paola. The priest, who had never seen me before, asked me, “Who are you?” But the thing that really struck me, so much so that my legs began to tremble as soon as I entered the church, was that there, in the front, I saw the statue of St. Francis of Paola, who was *the very same person* I had seen a few days ago in a dream (in the form of a giant man)! But I didn't yet understand. After the Holy Mass, I had the immense grace of speaking for the first

4 ST. AUGUSTINE, *De moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae*, 1,3,4: PL 32, 1312.

5 ST. THOMAS, *Expositio Simbolum Apostolicum*, 1.

time with Friar Volantino (who, later, would just so happen be called “a giant of the spirit” by a Catholic priest in a letter⁶ written on October 2, 2006!). Friar Volantino and his community had been welcomed by the Bishop of this region which was named after St. Francis of Paola. It was Friar Volantino who, with open arms, seeing that I searched with all my heart for the Will of God, told me the Message of Our Lady of Fatima: “**Come here** (in prayer and sacrifice) for six consecutive months, and I will tell you who I am and what I want from you!” Well, in light of all this, the meaning of the first dream became clear – where I saw St. Francis of Paola with open arms telling me, “Come here!” In fact, this invitation was given me by Friar Volantino – without him knowing anything about the dream – at the moment when he read me the Message of Fatima. It was clear to me that the Lord was calling me to “Come here” in the family of the Little Friars who were found in the place named after “the Holy Father of Perriere,” St. Francis of Paola! And there, Mary would tell me what she wanted from me (which would later prove true!)! I was also astonished when, on that famous date of October 2, Friar Volantino told me that he was 33 years old – exactly like the mysterious angel who, the night before, had appeared to me in a dream (cf. Luke 20, 34-36)!! Let us also listen to what the first reading of the Mass of October 2, 2003 had to say: “Behold, I am sending an angel before you to guard your way and to let you enter into the land I prepared. Respect his presence, listen to his voice...” (Ex 23:20-22). And yes, Friar Volantino – in consecrating himself totally to the Lord and in trying to live the Gospel *sine glossa* in his intelligent integrity – was, in a certain way, that angel for me (cf. Luke 20:34-36). He was that 33-year-old courageous messenger of Elohim (that is, the messenger of the Triune and Only God), to whom I should listen and whom the Lord had put before me to guard me and guide me in a truly Catholic way on the journey towards a Blessed and Glorious Immortality!!

In fact, this humble little brother lived the way I had been wanting to live: he tried to live like St. Francis of Assisi – or, even better, like Jesus himself, trying to imitate Him step by step! In him I saw the life of the Good Jesus, who grew in him day by day (cf. Eph 4:13), given that this little brother tried both in his example of life and in his well-balanced words (cf. Sir 21:25) to continually imitate the Divine Savior!

Once, someone said of Friar Volantino, “He is like a spring from which I draw to quench my thirst!”⁷ In short, from the very beginning, it was as if Jesus and Our Lady Poverty, with all of their charm, had stolen my heart through the example of life of Friar Volantino and the Little Friars and Nuns of Jesus and Mary (also called *Volantini Verdi*), as it is written: “You have stolen my heart...You have stolen my heart with only a glance.” (SoS 4:9) Full of joy and firm in my decision – according to the advice of the Lord (cf. Matt 19:21; Luke 14:33) – I left everything: university, girlfriend, family, etc. At long last, I joined the community of the *Volantini Verdi* to fly towards the heights of the Will of God.

AFTER I ENTERED THE COMMUNITY OF LITTLE FRIARS AND NUNS OF JESUS AND MARY...

I entered into the community of the Little Friars on October 3, 2003, the feast of the Transitus of St. Francis of Assisi. I immediately experienced a perfect harmony. Here are the spiritual fruits that came from my divinely-willed entry into this religious family: **firm certainty** that God exists and that there is Resurrection of the dead (cf. Heb 11:6) and that Paradise, Purgatory, and Hell exist (this is what an esteemed person wrote admiring the certainty of the faith of Friar Volantino: “I get the chills listening to Friar Volantino when, with infinite certainty and joy, he says that he has the mathematical certainty that Heaven EXISTS, as well as purgatory and hell!”⁸); love for the Holy Mother Church (Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic); the desire to attain Beatific Immortality; the desire to conform myself completely to Christ; certain discernment with regard to salvation and full salvation; participation in the sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist; joy which replaced my sadness (cf. Ps 70:5); peace (at last!) which replaced my confusion (cf. Luke 2:29; Ps 119:165); the desire to become a great saint by trying to live the Gospel in a radical way (cf. Matt 5:19); the desire to save – in Christ and in his Church – as many souls as possible (cf. 1Pet 1:9; 1Cor 9:16,19,22-23); a love for Sacred Scripture as well as the Apostolic Tradition and the Magisterium (cf. *Dei Verbum* n. 21); and the desire to preach the Gospel in the whole world (cf. Matt 16:15)!

⁶ Letter written by Don Carlo Cittadino on October 2, 2006.

⁷ Antonella Bruni, one of her letters.

⁸ Letter written to Castrolibero on May 1, 2007 by Franco Balbo.

Besides these fruits – and the fact that there are about 17 of us who are totally consecrated to the Lord – in about 3 years I have also witnessed the formation of more than 70 Marian Groups of Prayer (for a total of hundreds of people called “*Allies of the Little Ones*”). These lay members promise: 1) to try to pray the Holy Meditated Rosary at least 4 times a month; 2) to try to go to Holy Mass at least weekly, receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, and Confessing often; 3) to try to, as far as possible, do concrete acts of charity, especially by helping the *Volantini Verdi* in their work of prayer and evangelization. Here are some testimonies of our “*Allies*”:

- One is of my earthly mother, who writes this: “...When my son, after meeting Friar Volantino and his brothers (on October 2), came home speaking to me of them with such joy and love and telling me that he also wanted to live like them – going through the streets to proclaim the word of Our Lord Jesus Christ and to live on Providence alone in absolute poverty, without a fixed dwelling place – I answered that it was impossible to return to the time of St. Francis of Assisi. But I had to change my opinion, because they have shown me, with their perseverance and example of life, that when it comes to trying to fully live the Gospel of Jesus, the times are always the same – yesterday, today, and forever...”⁹
- Another Ally writes, “This is what the Little Friars and Nuns of Jesus and Mary are...Lights of God, friends of our hearts. We await them with anticipation...We need them, they reinforce our faith, they strengthen our foundations...”¹⁰

There would be too many other testimonies and good fruits from the *Volantini Verdi* to list them all here – such as people who wanted to commit suicide and are now joyful in their journey of faith; people who were atheists and now believe; innumerable people who have promised to return to the Sacraments; priests who were in crisis but, thanks to the Gospel witness of these “*Little Ones*,” have reinvigorated their faith and continued to steadfastly carry out their ministry; numerous vocations; etc...

NOW, I COME TO THE CONCLUSION...

Sincere and profound are the words of Archbishop Giuseppe Agostino, ex vice-President of the Italian Bishops’ Conference: “*The experience of the Little Friars and Nuns is clearly evangelical. They do not take the Gospel, as sometimes happens, simply as a blessing of the organization of one’s own life, but rather as it is – a break with the ‘old man,’ the man of sin, and a vital experience with the poor, suffering Christ. These brothers of ours have the charism of the radicality of the Gospel. They live it, even amidst many misunderstandings, with a commitment to totality and with the stirring signs of poverty and of generous reference to the spirit of Christian freedom. They have always given a good witness...*”¹¹

Jesus says: “This is why the Father loves me: because I lay down my life, but I will then take it up again...This command I have received from my Father” (John 10:17-18). And yes, great is the mystery of each life given totally to Christ, and great is the mystery of the *Volantini Verdi*: bold young people who have received this command (suggested, not imposed) of the Eternal Father, “**to lay down one’s life**” in the service of Christ and his Church. Great is the mystery, great is the sacrifice, but – in holy perseverance – great will be the reward, and great will be the number of souls saved (cf. Matt 19:27-29)!!

With all my heart – thank you Jesus, thank you Mary, and thank you Friar Volantino: for from your decided and continuous effort to give your “Yes” to God, this great fire of Divine Love has been born and is spreading, oriented towards the Infinite Beatitude of the Kingdom of Heaven, for all eternity! Amen!!

MAY YOU REFLECT WELL ON ALL OF THIS...AND MAY YOU BECOME A SAINT!

IN FAITH:

Friar Giuseppe Maria Gazzella Jones

Begun on May 31, 2008 [Visitation of the B.V. Mary]
and finished on June 2, 2008 [Sts. Marcellinus and Peter]

9 Maggio Angela, letter written May 18, 2007.

10 Annibale Rainone, lettere written May 3, 2007.

11 cf. Archbishop Mons. Giuseppe Agostino, letter written June 4, 2007. B.V.