



VATICAN - Don Guanella, "father of the poor" in 4 continents: over 12 thousand pilgrims for his canonization on World Mission Day

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - With the World Assembly of Guanella Lay Movement the program of initiatives for the canonization of Blessed Don Luigi Guanella, founder of the Servants of Charity and the Daughters of St. Mary of Divine Providence started today in Rome. The appointment will be attended by some 100 delegates from Europe, America, Africa and Asia. On Saturday the afternoon, at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, there will be a prayer vigil. On Sunday, October 23, World Mission Day, the canonization presided by Pope Benedict XVI in St. Peter's Square. On Monday 24, the liturgical feast of St. Luigi Guanella, will be held at St. Peter's Basilica, at 10 am the Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving led by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, with the renewal of the promises of the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence, the Servants of Charity and Guanellians Cooperators. At the Basilica of St. Joseph in Rome at Trionfale, at 4pm, there will be the perpetual professions of the religious Guanellian. In the following days, the program will continue with the pilgrimage to Como and the birthplace of the saint.

More than 12 thousand pilgrims will attend the canonization of Don Guanella and to the related initiatives, among them a thousand come from abroad and a thousand from the diocese of Como. Even the Swiss diocese in Lugano will be widely represented. The Guanellians are present in four continents. In Italy, in Como and Rome, the houses are considered the most important and significant. In Como, the House of Divine Providence, is the mother House where, around the shrine of the Sacred Heart, the first charity of the Founder developed. The Province Cruz del Sur has 26 centers operating in Argentina, Chile and Paraguay, the Province Santa Cruz has 25 in four regions of Brazil, the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe has 9 in Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico and Spain. The Province Divine Providence has 18 centers operating in India, the Philippines and the United States. The African Delegation Our Lady of Hope has 7 in Ghana, Nigeria and Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition to the General Curia with 2 operating centers, including the International Theological Seminary of Rome and Fiuggi, the Roman Province St. Joseph has 25 operational centers scattered throughout central and southern Italy, plus a community in Poland. The Sacred Heart Province has 32 centers operating in Northern Italy, Switzerland and Israel.

Luigi Guanella was born in the province of Sondrio, on 19 December 1842. He always distinguished himself for his great faith enriched and nourished by popular piety, which he learned by being close to the simple and the poor. He studied in various diocesan seminaries. In 1866 he was ordained, and shortly after, appointed pastor. He devoted himself with great zeal towards the young people, and fascinated by the Salesian charism, he made contact with Don Bosco and in 1875 became a Salesian. He remained in the Salesian Congregation for three years before being recalled to the diocese by the Bishop, who sent him to direct a hospice for the poor elderly. There he found a group of Ursuline nuns who organized a congregation: the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence, dedicated to the education of youth, especially the most poor and marginalized, the sick, the elderly neglected. Supported by the Bishop, he also founded the male branch: the Servants of Charity, with the same purpose. His congregations flourished especially in Italy, Switzerland and the United States. In order to support the people who were dying he founded the Pious Transit Union of St. Joseph. He built several churches and works for emigrants and the marginalized. He died in Como on October 24, 1915. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 21/10/2011)