

It was written of her in death, "... you found the consumation of your holocaust in the burning of the air disaster of Monrovia...." In the Book of Life, here was truly a holocaust from her early years.

Teresa Vicchiarelli was born in Campobasso, Italy, on December 30, 1909, of Elisa and Lorenzo Vecchiarelli. Although much loved by her parents, as were all her sisters and brothers, her childhood memories ended at the age of seven with the sudden death of her father, a member of the armed forces of Victor Emmanuel. At this tender age, Teresa began to learn the meaning as well as the cost of self-immolation in the exercise of love. To alleviate the sufferings of her grief-stricken mother, she accepted the responsibility of caring for the younger members of the family while maintaining her home in the same degree of perfection to which her mother had been accustomed. Although she may have been a remarkable child in this sense, she was, according to her own words, "...often tempted toward the pleasures of the world". She was irresistibly drawn to music and dancing, both of which were presented to test her when at the age of fifteen she brought to reality her desire to enter a convent. This desire became a cause of semi-anguish for her. As she herself related, she was so strongly attached to her family that until her first profession she had faithfully and fervently begged God to send her home; this despite the fact that on the occasion of visits to her family, she invariably yearned for the moment of return to her Sisters in Christ.

Having found Him Whose love drew her even more strongly than that of her family, Teresa was received into the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint John the Baptist and given the name, Sister Cesarina of Saint Joseph. But even the joyful day of her religious reception was to have its cloud. She had desired the honor of bearing the name of her dear departed father. Her Spouse seemed to have a different honor in mind for her. With the denial of this small desire, He opened to her His Way of Life: Thabor, not as it was to His Apostles, but as it was to Himself: a moment of glory with Calvary always in sight. So it was that in later years, as a superior, she would often exhort her spiritual daughters to thank the Lord for every joy, but to thank Him more particularly when these joys would be accompanied by some small share in His sufferings. Her spiritual daughters recall her saying that God had been very generous with her; He never gave her happiness that was not escorted by some sorrow.

After her first profession on September 8, 1928, Sister Cesarina was assigned as assistant mistress of children at Viale Giulio Cesare. Arriving in the United States on January 23, 1932, she continued this work at St. Lucy's, Newark, New Jersey, where she also taught second grade and gave Italian lessons to adults of the parish. Her precise and meticulous method in all her labors, a veritable trade-mark of the spirit that prompted the action of this delicate soul, were even more evident in her humble but determined endeavors to bring these young souls closer to God despite the obstacle of her language barrier. Christ rewarded her efforts by granting her desire for perpetual profession on August 29, 1934.

In February of 1938, Sister Caesar, as she was now known in the United States, was transferred to Mt. St. John in Gladstone, New Jersey, where she continued her work with the orphans. On September 4, 1948, she received her first assignment as superior at St. Dominic Convent in the Bronx, New York. From there in February of 1952 she was transferred to the convent of the Most Precious Blood in Brooklyn, New York, where she took up the office of superior and helped with parish work. Following this six-year term she went for a brief period as superior to the day nursery of Our Lady of Loreto in New York, from which assignment she was called to be superior at the Motherhouse in White Plains in October 1958. Her last assignment was at St. Lucy's, Newark, as superior in August, 1964. Thus, her journey of life unsuspectingly drawing to a close, she returned whence she had begun in the United States. Here, for almost three years, she continued her life of exemplary piety, religious observance, and Christ-like charity.

Having been granted the privilege of attending the ordination of her nephew, she left for Rome on December 15, 1966. As if to give verification of her oft-repeated admonition, the Lord permitted that the joyous occasion of ordination should be followed by the death of her own mother. With her usual faith in God's Will, Mother Caesar accepted this, not only as the temporal sorrow that it was, but as a spiritual gift of God that she should be present at her mother's death. She wrote to the Sisters in Newark, "... in questa terra tutto a fine...."

On March 2, 1967, Mother Caesar was to have traveled to Argentina where she would visit briefly to console an elder brother and sister on the loss of their mother. However, in accordance with her ever-present love of charity, she rearranged her plans to accommodate Mother Angela Saulo who was also to visit relatives in Argentina, but whose papers had not yet arrived. Three days later the two sisters left Rome with the grace of sacramental Penance as well as the indulgence, "in articulo mortis" which they had requested and obtained. On March 5, 1967, the plane on which they were traveling, making a stop at Monrovia, Liberia, crashed and burst into flames, sending these souls of God on their final journey to be embraced by their Eternal Spouse.

Among her sisters in religion there are those who stand in admiration of her exact observance of the Holy Rule and Community exercises as well as her private devotions. Her day was never complete without some time spent with Our Lady's Rosary and the Lord's Way of the Cross. Those who have worked intimately with her are witnesses of the "magnetism" with which charity drew her heart; charity, unknown to others, and to which these witnesses all but pledged their secrecy.

MAY SHE REST IN PEACE!