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Love Without Measure

The illustrated story of the life of
Father Sosio Del Prete and Sister Antonietta Giugliano,
Founders of the Little Maidservants of Christ the King





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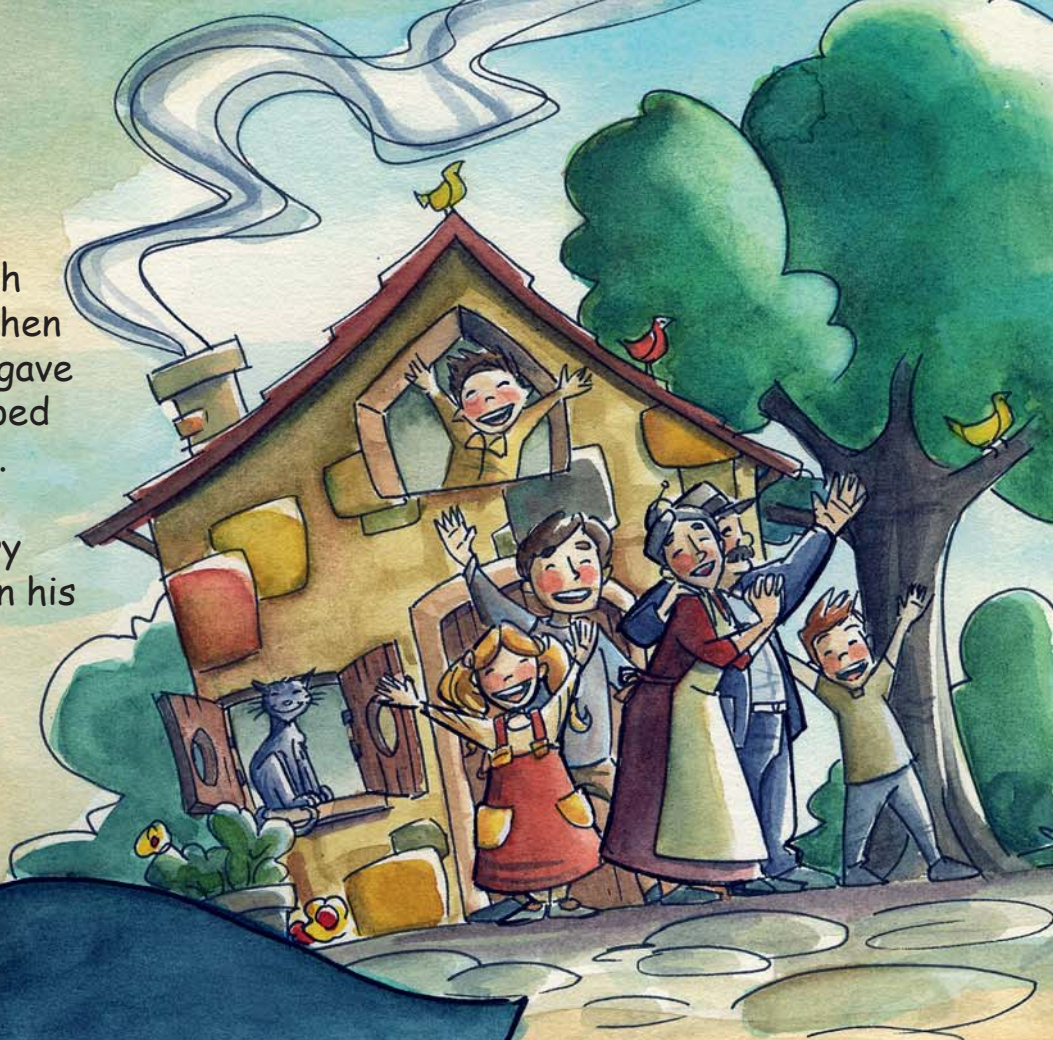
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Illustrations by Amerigo Pinelli

This is the story of a man and a woman, Vincenzo and Antonietta who decided to offer their lives to God so that He could render them more beautiful.

To give ... has it ever happened to you? When you are happy, your heart bursts with the desire to offer something to the people you love. Vincenzo and Antonietta were so happy and in love with God, that they decided to offer Him the most beautiful of gifts: their lives. But, let's begin at the beginning.

Christmas had just finished, the streets were still echoing with the festive season, when Concetta Di Lorenzo gave birth to a child wrapped in a very special light. They called the baby Vincenzo and his story was already written in his surname: Del Prete (of the priest).



All this happened
at Frattamaggiore,
in the province of Naples
on 28th December 1885.

Vincenzo was born into a family
which was deeply rooted in Christianity and whose
fruits matured quickly: just think, the young Del
Prete decided to become a friar in the footsteps
of Saint Francis of Assisi at the tender age of 16.

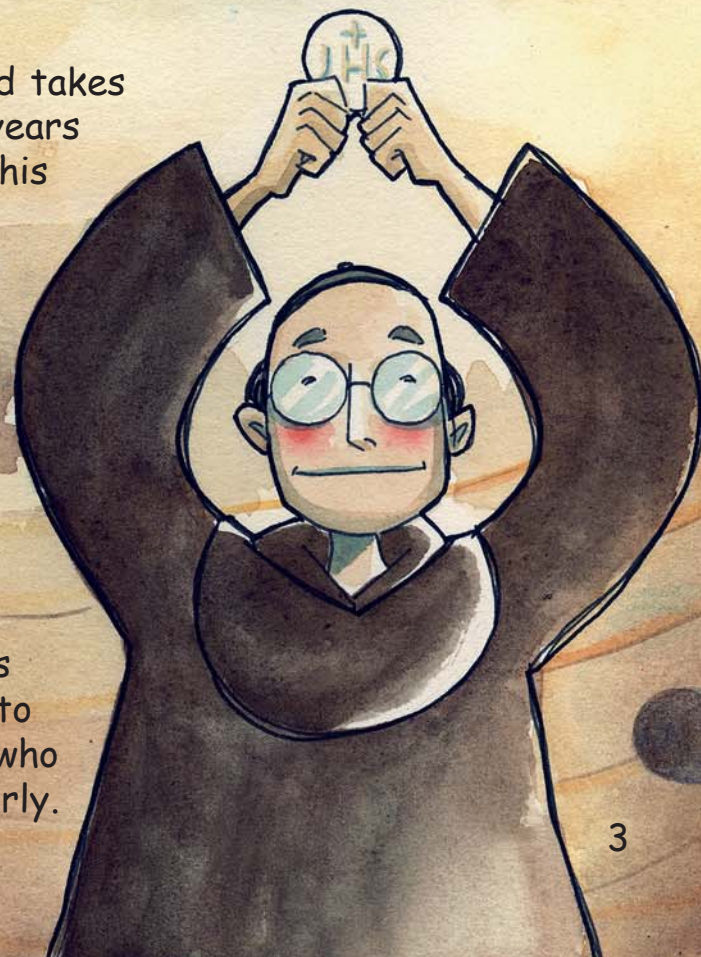
He left everything to follow Jesus, the family,
the village, his friends. "Religious life, my life, is
important for me because, more than any other,
it pulls me towards God" He wrote. And what is
more beautiful than to be near the person you love?
On 8th December 1905, Feast of the Immaculate
Conception, Vincenzo's dream of his life is finally

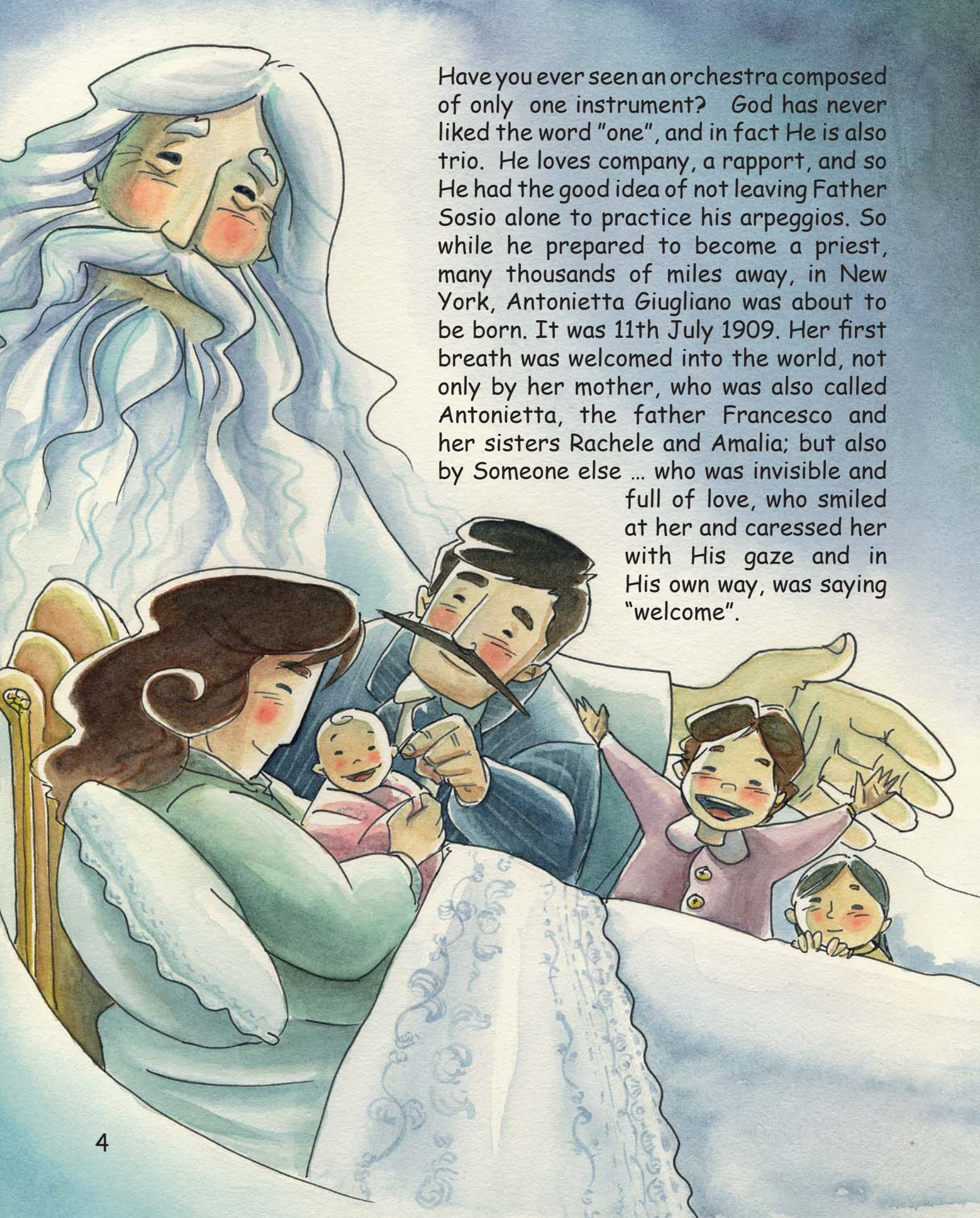




fulfilled and he becomes God's and takes the name of Father Sosio. At 25 years old, he victoriously celebrates his first mass.

Apart from his love for God, our friar also had another passion; music. He learnt to play the piano and to compose melodies and texts of a religious character very quickly. Father Sosio knew that in order to create an important symphony, it is necessary to tune the instruments well. For this reason he listened attentively to the voice of God in his heart, who instructed him sweetly and tenderly.



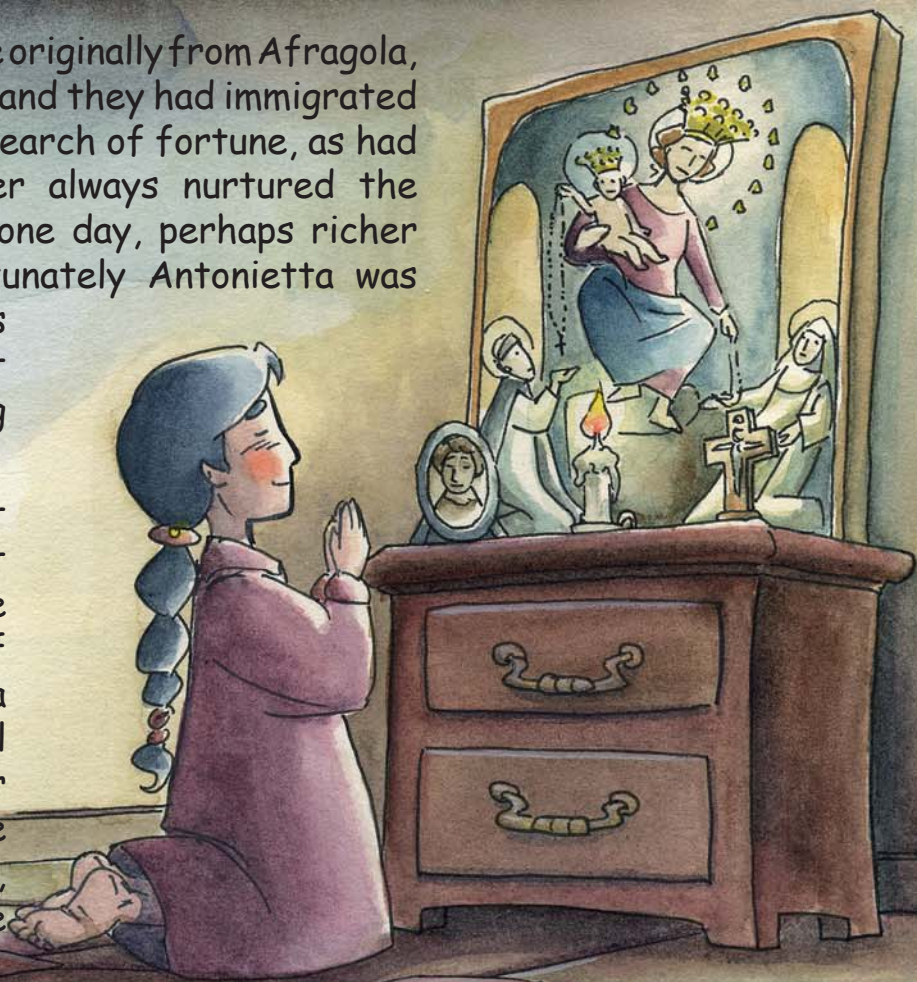


Have you ever seen an orchestra composed of only one instrument? God has never liked the word "one", and in fact He is also trio. He loves company, a rapport, and so He had the good idea of not leaving Father Sosio alone to practice his arpeggios. So while he prepared to become a priest, many thousands of miles away, in New York, Antonietta Giugliano was about to be born. It was 11th July 1909. Her first breath was welcomed into the world, not only by her mother, who was also called Antonietta, the father Francesco and her sisters Rachele and Amalia; but also by Someone else ... who was invisible and full of love, who smiled at her and caressed her with His gaze and in His own way, was saying "welcome".



Antonietta's parents were originally from Afragola, in the province of Naples and they had immigrated to the United States in search of fortune, as had many. They had however always nurtured the idea of returning home one day, perhaps richer and happier. But unfortunately Antonietta was orphaned at only 5 years old. Her mother died. It was 1914, the beginning of the first world war.

However the little girl met another mother straight away, the Madonna. She always entrusted herself in prayer to the Madonna calling her my "beautiful lady". In front of Her image, she said "You have taken my life, my mother, everything. Now, I have only you".





It was time for the Giugliano family to leave. They said "goodbye" to America and they returned to their homeland. So Antonietta, at six years old, suddenly found herself in Afragola with her father and sisters - lost amongst the houses, faces and landscapes which were unfamiliar to her.

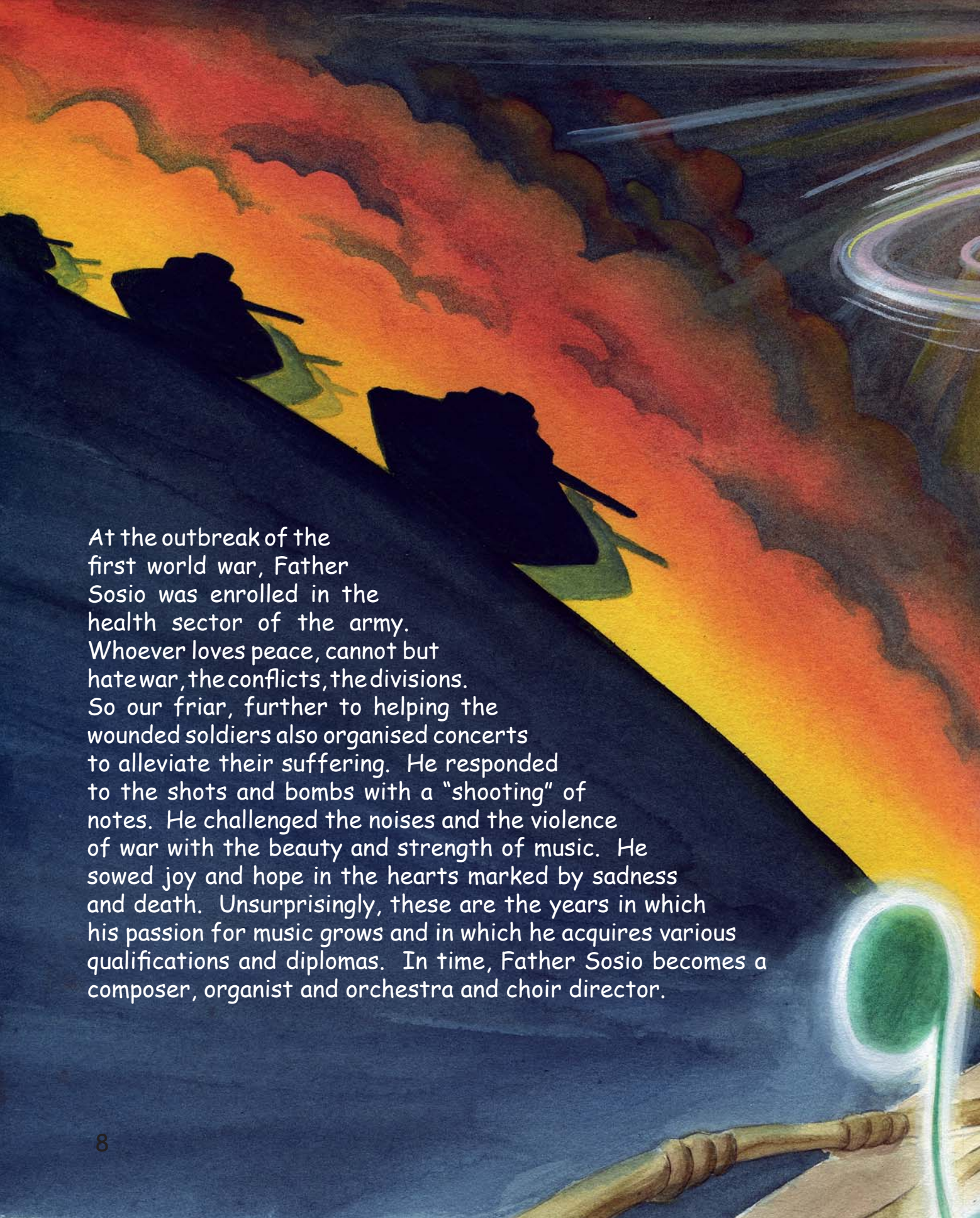
She was then entrusted to the Sisters of *Charity of Regina Coeli* of Naples, where she frequented school. She began reading the Bible and





she became keen on reading all about the lives of saints. Her favourite book was "*History of a Soul*" by Saint Teresa of Baby Jesus. Teresa, just like Antonietta, had lost her mother at an early age and Teresa, like Antonietta also had a strong desire in her heart: to love without measure. But how is it done? Is it possible? Something ... or Someone seemed to tell her that it was. Someone who was always near her and who was pleased with this little, wounded child who was, nonetheless courageous and alight with love.





At the outbreak of the first world war, Father Sosio was enrolled in the health sector of the army. Whoever loves peace, cannot but hate war, the conflicts, the divisions. So our friar, further to helping the wounded soldiers also organised concerts to alleviate their suffering. He responded to the shots and bombs with a "shooting" of notes. He challenged the noises and the violence of war with the beauty and strength of music. He sowed joy and hope in the hearts marked by sadness and death. Unsurprisingly, these are the years in which his passion for music grows and in which he acquires various qualifications and diplomas. In time, Father Sosio becomes a composer, organist and orchestra and choir director.





At 16 years old Antonietta returns to her family and she begins to dedicate herself to the poor, to orphans, to the sick. She felt deep compassion for those in need. But how could she alleviate their suffering? What "medicine" could she use? It is written in the Bible that "Everything you want to be done unto you, do unto others" (Mt 7, 12). *Pour love into every wound*: that was what had to be done. That what God himself, first of all, had done for her.

So, whilst her friends thought of enjoyment and of suitors, Antonietta grew in charity. She organised her time by writing and following a very rigorous *set of rules* from which to live by: wake up at 5.30; mass at 6.30; help the poor; reading, prayer and so on.

As the days passed, a desire, which becomes deeper and deeper fills her heart ... to donate her life to God. She decides to visit her cousin, a nun and missionary along with Raffaolina, her friend and confidante, so as to listen to her experiences. The meeting inspired her. Antonietta had decided: She wanted to leave and travel far away to announce the Gospel, the beauty and the love of God!

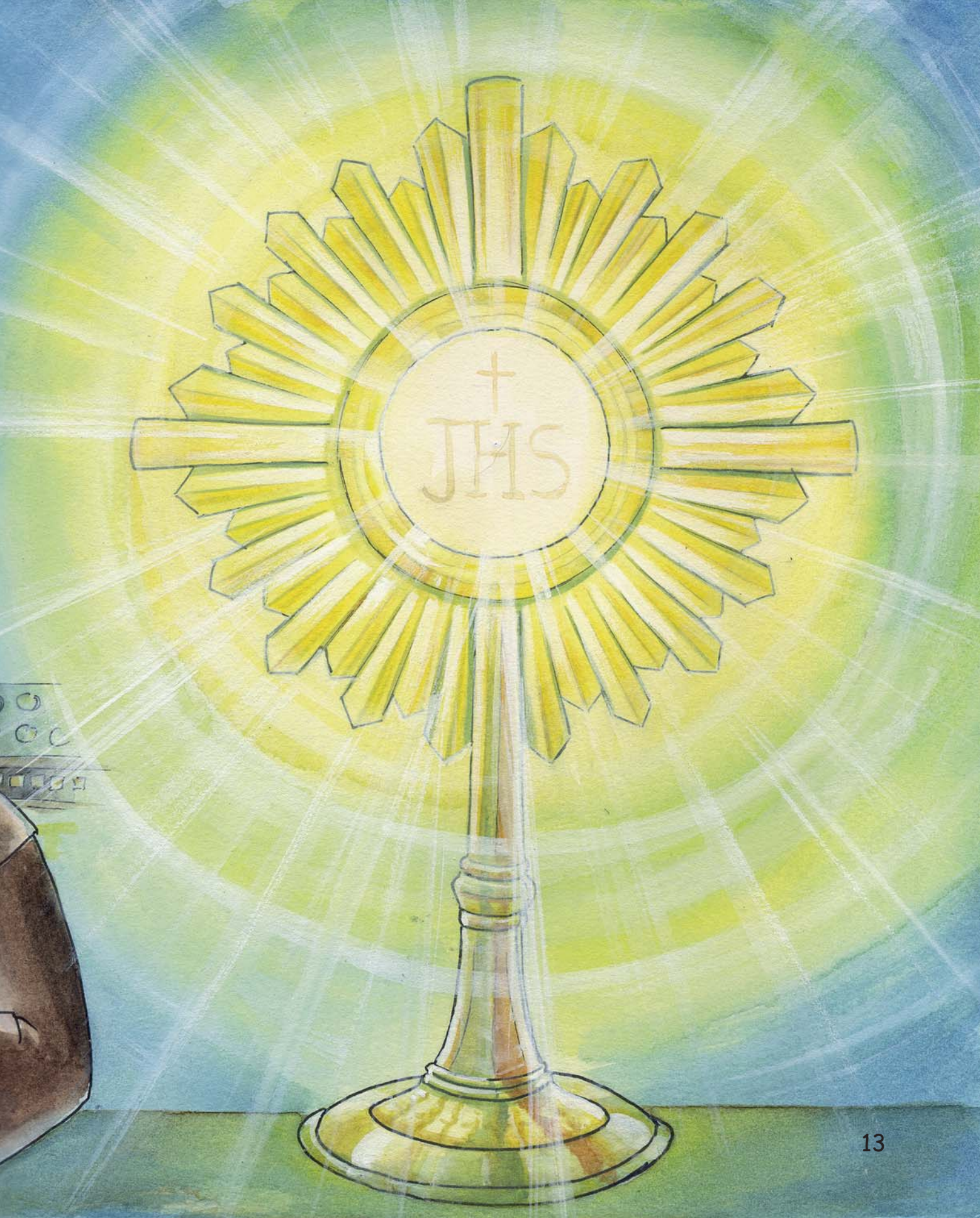


A relation, however, who was a priest, advised her first of all to go and speak to a Franciscan Father, Father Sosio Del Prete of the Convent of Saint Anthony. Father Sosio was famous for his charitable works. And as Antonietta's natural father died in 1929, another father was appearing on the horizon...

Antonietta was 20 years old when she timidly and filled with anxiety presented herself to Father Sosio to speak to him of her aspirations. He listened to her attentively and from that moment on became her spiritual guide.

Father Sosio spent many hours, sometimes entire nights contemplating Jesus present in the Tabernacle and wrote "*What never-ending love! Only a God could conceive such a vast and grandiose plan: leave himself as food for humankind*". The Eucharist was the engine of all his activities, the source from which he absorbed love to donate it to whoever thirsted for it.



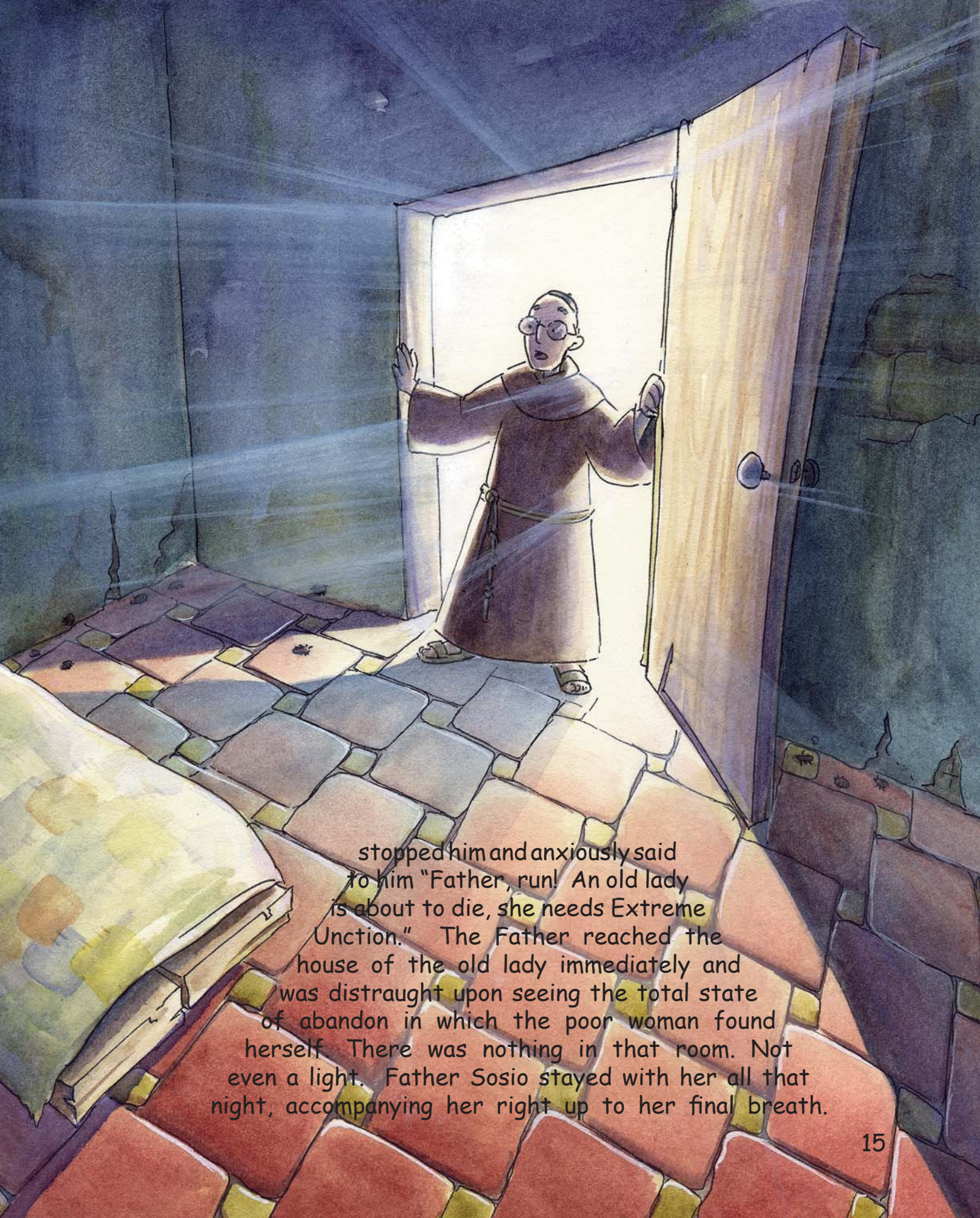




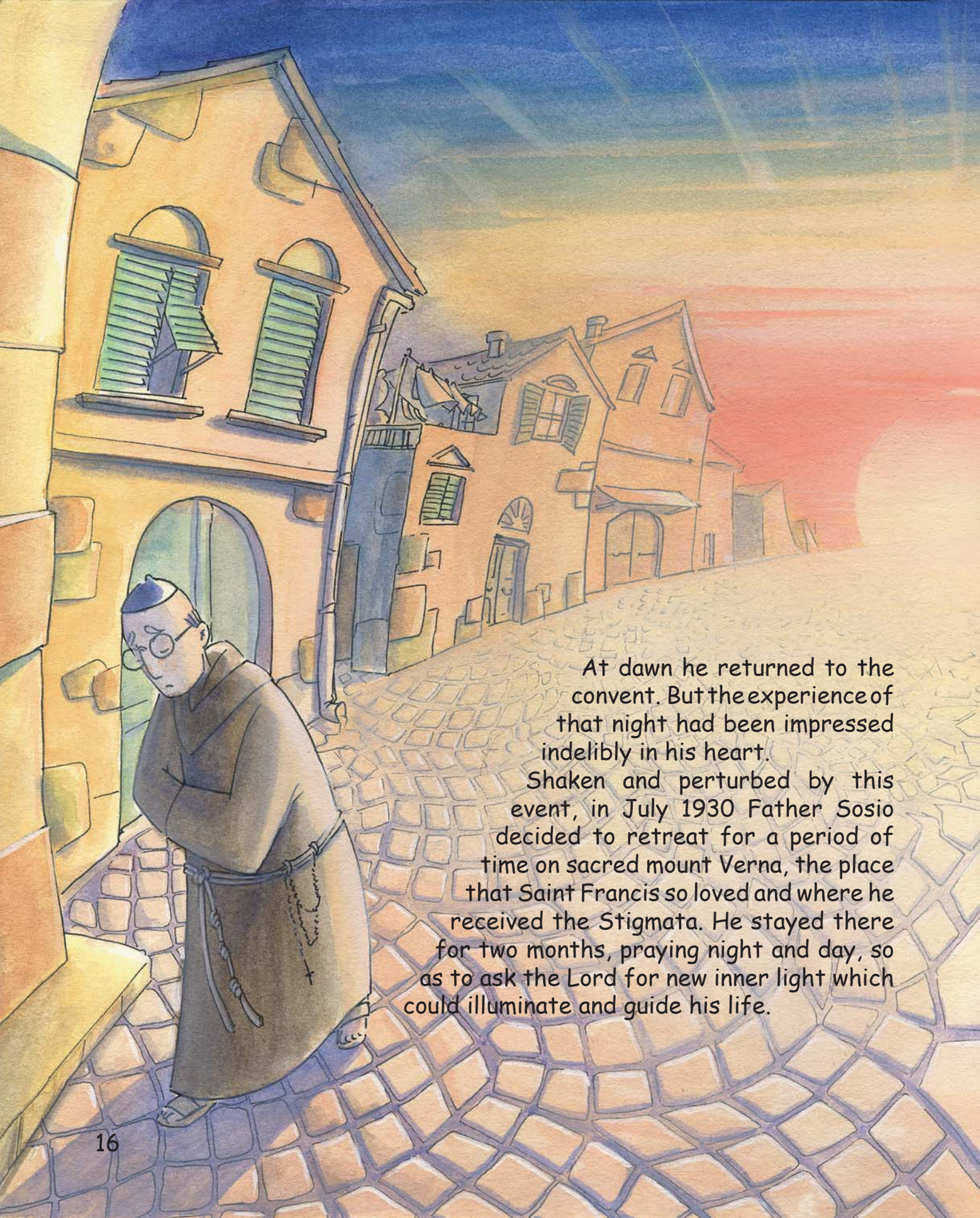
The poor were his favourites. He met them everywhere: in the convent, on the road, in the houses ... and in each one of them he could see a need and a cry to which he could not respond ... but the loudest cry gripped him one night in May 1930.

It was in the evening, Father Sosio was returning to the convent when Mariannina, a beggar-woman in front of Saint Anthony church



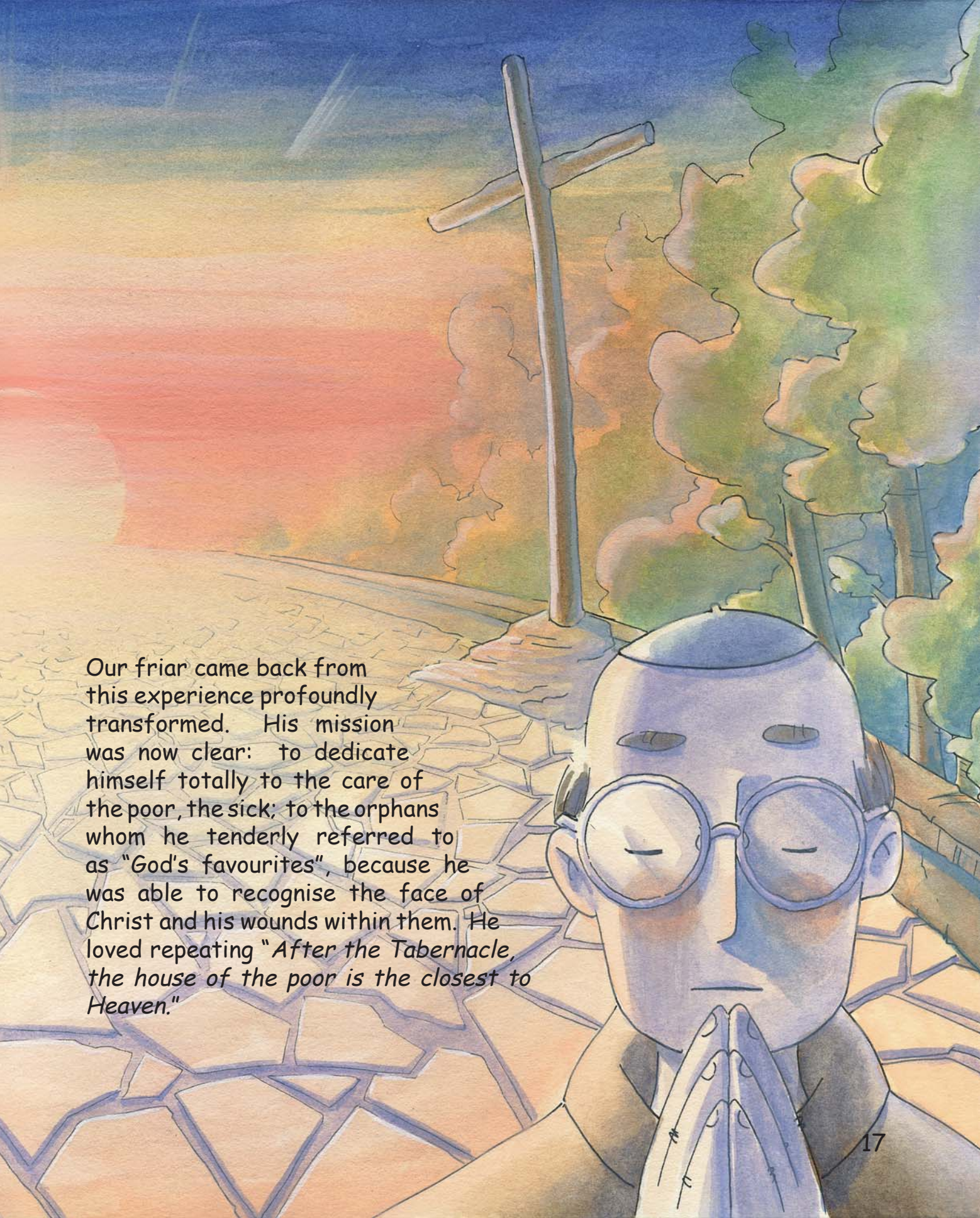


stopped him and anxiously said to him "Father, run! An old lady is about to die, she needs Extreme Unction." The Father reached the house of the old lady immediately and was distraught upon seeing the total state of abandon in which the poor woman found herself. There was nothing in that room. Not even a light. Father Sosio stayed with her all that night, accompanying her right up to her final breath.

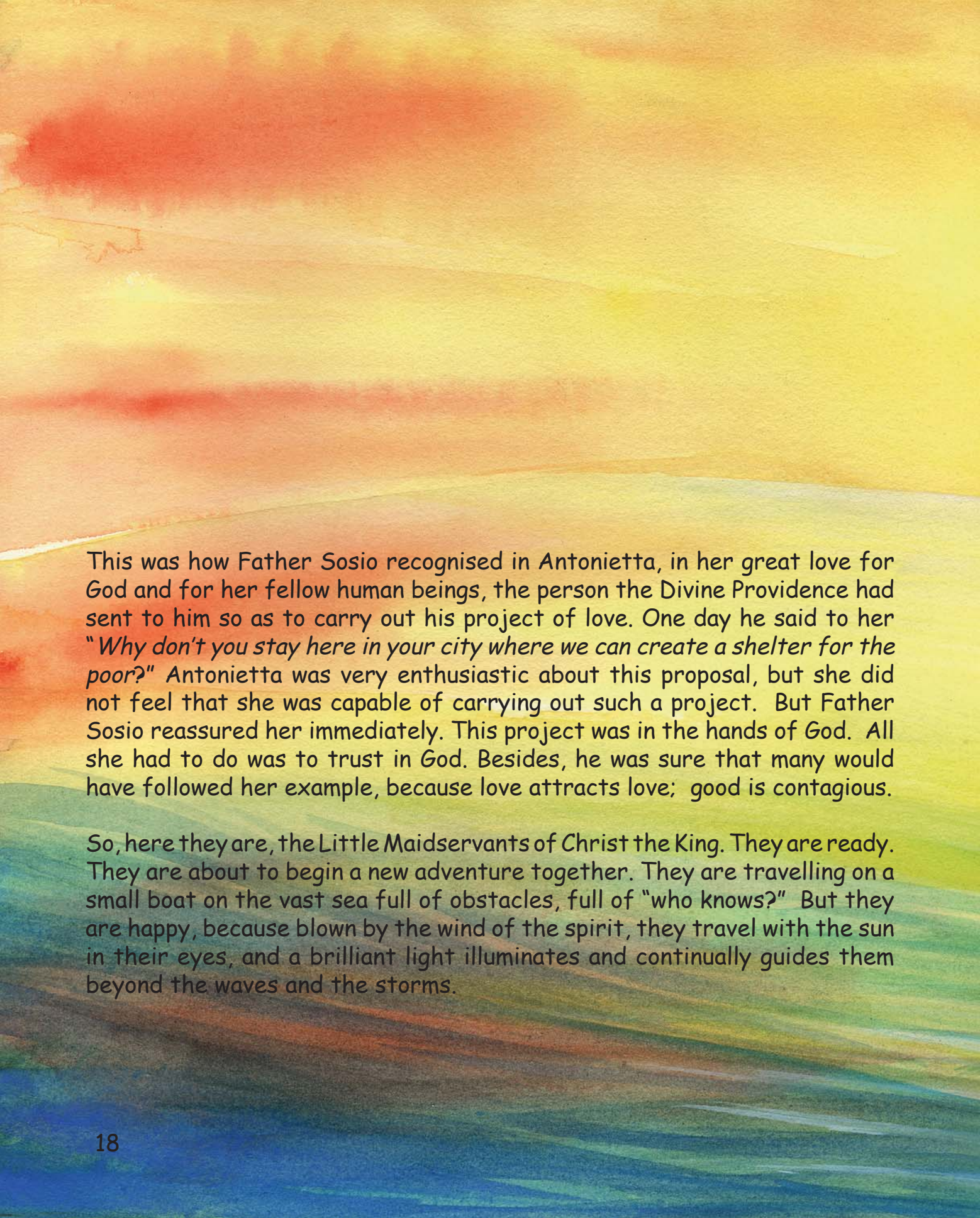


At dawn he returned to the convent. But the experience of that night had been impressed indelibly in his heart.

Shaken and perturbed by this event, in July 1930 Father Sosio decided to retreat for a period of time on sacred mount Verna, the place that Saint Francis so loved and where he received the Stigmata. He stayed there for two months, praying night and day, so as to ask the Lord for new inner light which could illuminate and guide his life.

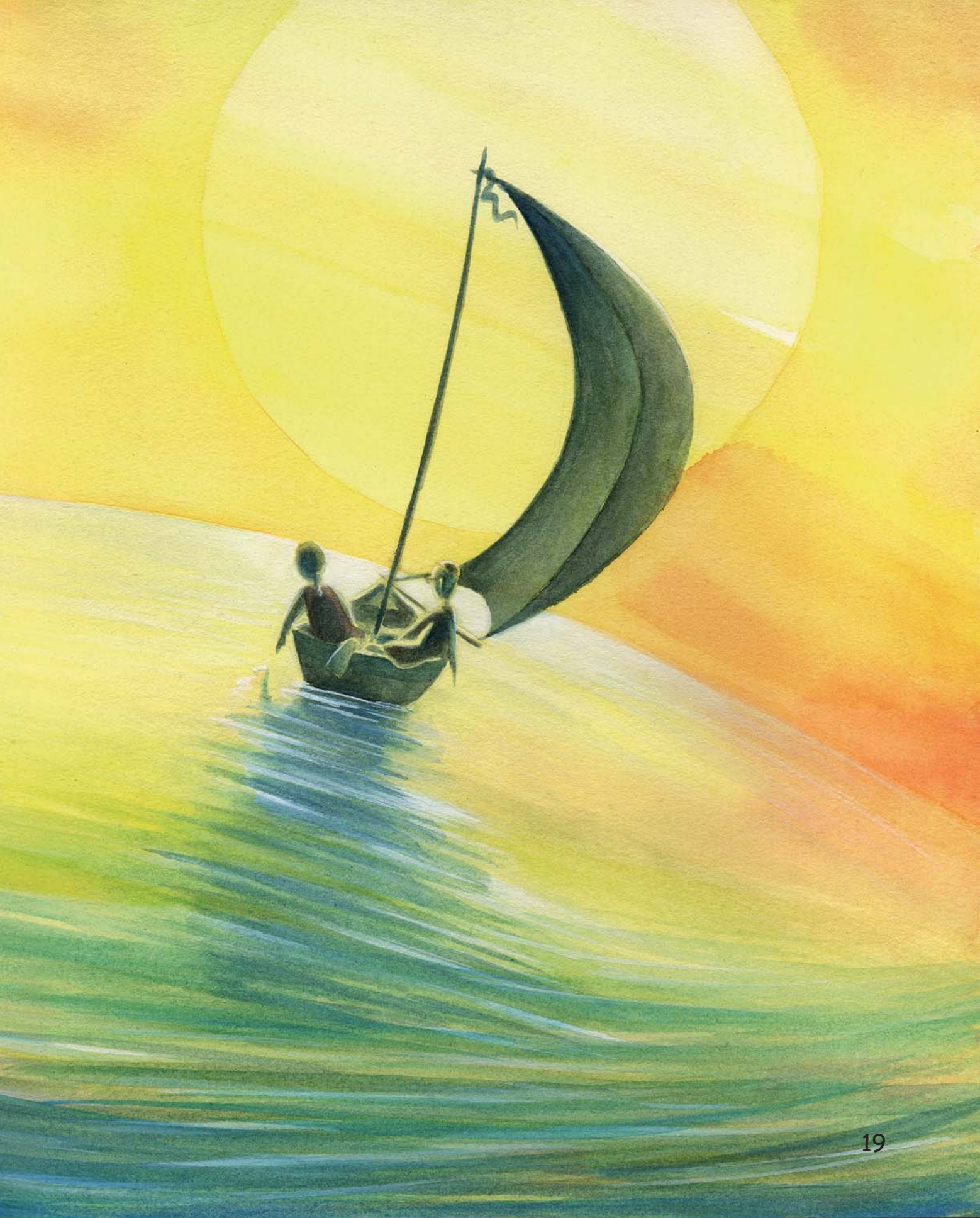
A watercolor illustration of a friar with a shaved head and glasses, wearing a brown habit, with his hands clasped in prayer. He is standing on a cobblestone path. In the background, there is a simple wooden cross on a hill, with green trees to the right and a sunset or sunrise sky in shades of orange, yellow, and blue to the left.

Our friar came back from this experience profoundly transformed. His mission was now clear: to dedicate himself totally to the care of the poor, the sick; to the orphans whom he tenderly referred to as "God's favourites", because he was able to recognise the face of Christ and his wounds within them. He loved repeating "*After the Tabernacle, the house of the poor is the closest to Heaven.*"



This was how Father Sosio recognised in Antonietta, in her great love for God and for her fellow human beings, the person the Divine Providence had sent to him so as to carry out his project of love. One day he said to her "*Why don't you stay here in your city where we can create a shelter for the poor?*" Antonietta was very enthusiastic about this proposal, but she did not feel that she was capable of carrying out such a project. But Father Sosio reassured her immediately. This project was in the hands of God. All she had to do was to trust in God. Besides, he was sure that many would have followed her example, because love attracts love; good is contagious.

So, here they are, the Little Maidservants of Christ the King. They are ready. They are about to begin a new adventure together. They are travelling on a small boat on the vast sea full of obstacles, full of "who knows?" But they are happy, because blown by the wind of the spirit, they travel with the sun in their eyes, and a brilliant light illuminates and continually guides them beyond the waves and the storms.





The path to follow, however, was not easy. Antonietta's family did not accept her choice, but she didn't allow herself to be discouraged, and faced with her family's resistance, she did not hesitate to take shelter with the Catechist nuns of Casoria. No-one knew where she had gone apart from her faithful friend Raffaelina who then welcomed her into her house in Afragola.



You see how strong Antonietta was? No-one could have stopped her. It wasn't long before she was able to buy a building in the centre of the city which became the Mother House of the Institute. The adventure had finally begun!



Everyone gave a hand to refurbish and make this first house really beautiful. The work which had to be carried out was certainly a lot and the money wasn't sufficient. Antonietta had an idea, she called together all her friends and she took them to the steps of the Saint Anthony church to ask for alms just like the beggars did, and whilst Antonietta was quite at ease, her companions appeared to be timid and rather embarrassed, above all when they met family and people they knew. But they soon got over this sense of embarrassment because they were ready to do anything in order to carry out God's project.



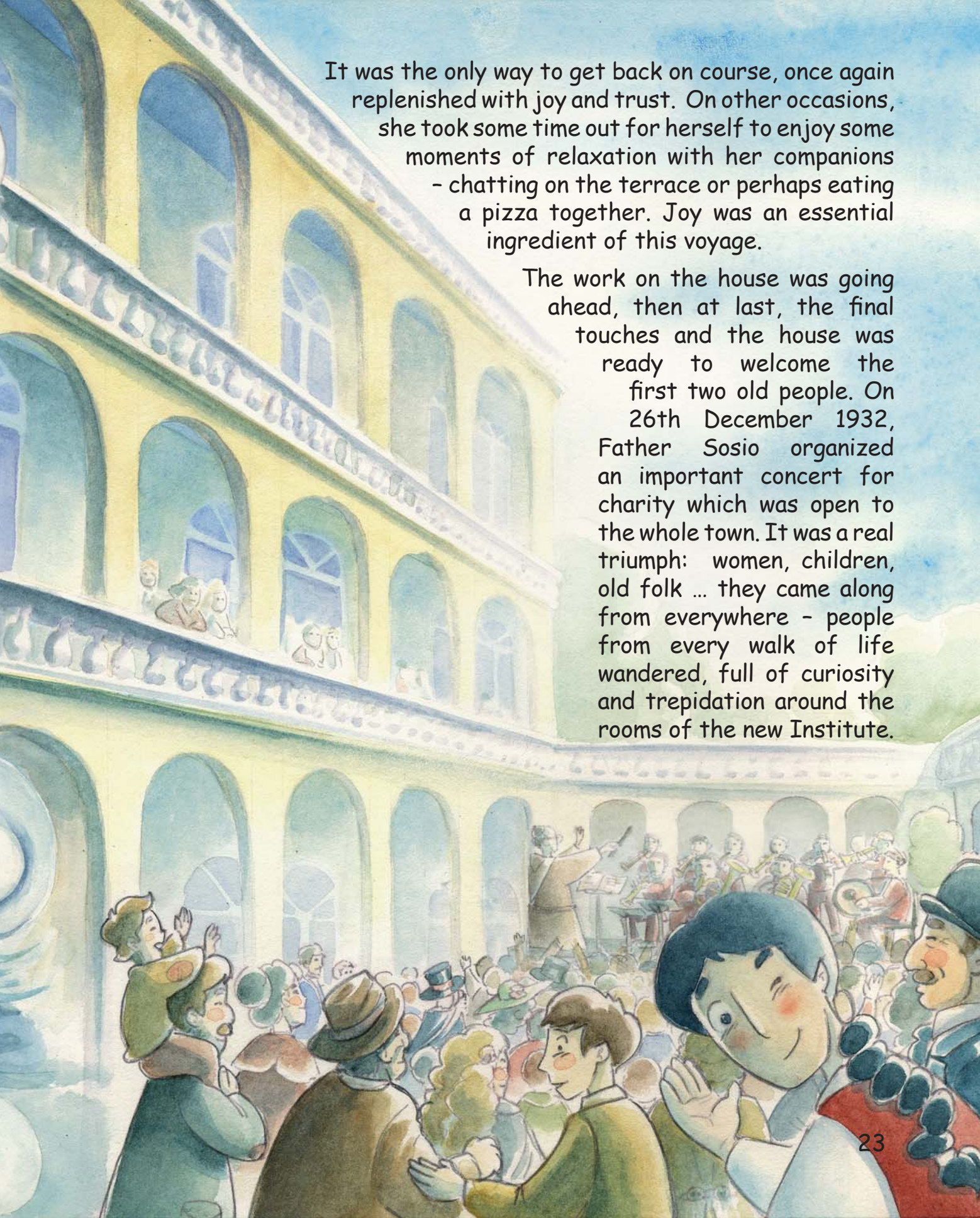


In the meantime Father Sosio elaborated the rules of the Institute which was budding and he called it "The Little Maidservants of Christ the King". He himself designed their emblem. But in what does the royalty of Christ consist? Jesus did not come

amongst us as a powerful king, but as a humble servant ready to give his life for others. The arms with which he fights and wins are not those of force and power, but of meekness and love. The Little Maidservants were also to use these tools to collaborate in the realisation of His reign.

When Antonietta felt battered by the waves, she knew that she had to stop, close her eyes and pray in order for the sea to calm down again.





It was the only way to get back on course, once again replenished with joy and trust. On other occasions, she took some time out for herself to enjoy some moments of relaxation with her companions - chatting on the terrace or perhaps eating a pizza together. Joy was an essential ingredient of this voyage.

The work on the house was going ahead, then at last, the final touches and the house was ready to welcome the first two old people. On 26th December 1932, Father Sosio organized an important concert for charity which was open to the whole town. It was a real triumph: women, children, old folk ... they came along from everywhere - people from every walk of life wandered, full of curiosity and trepidation around the rooms of the new Institute.

After an intense period of spiritual training, the girls are ready to say "yes" to their King, to become His brides. In 1935 Antonietta and another seven girls finally took their vows. The ceremony is a huge feast of light and flowers with fireworks which announce the arrival of Cardinal Alessio Ascalesi from Naples. Antonietta is in the first line, next to her is Raffaelina, who becomes Sister Franceschina and then Erminia who takes the name of Sister Pazienza.

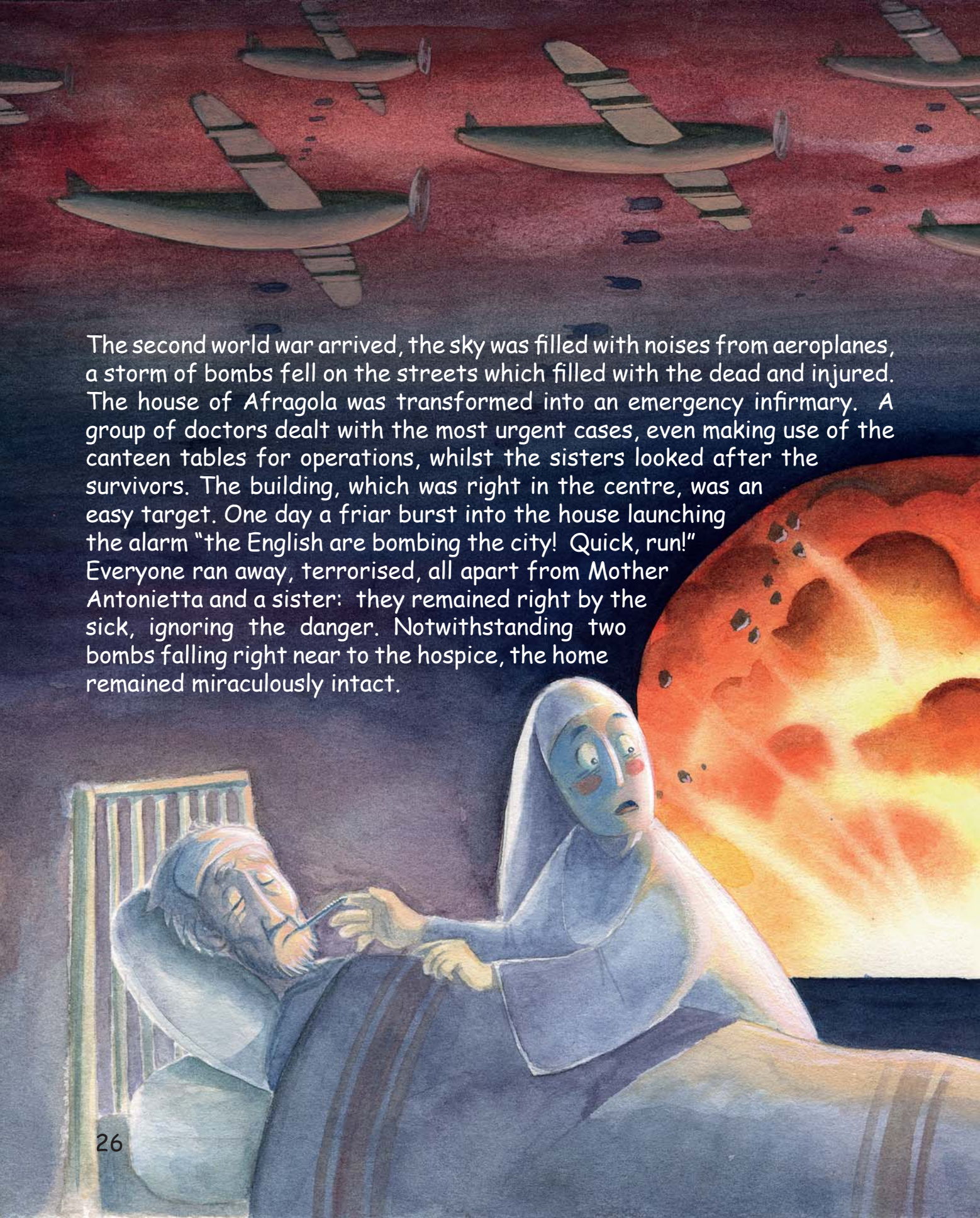
As soon as Antonietta receives the Eucharist her face lights up, an indescribable joy fills her heart. She had never been so happy, and in that



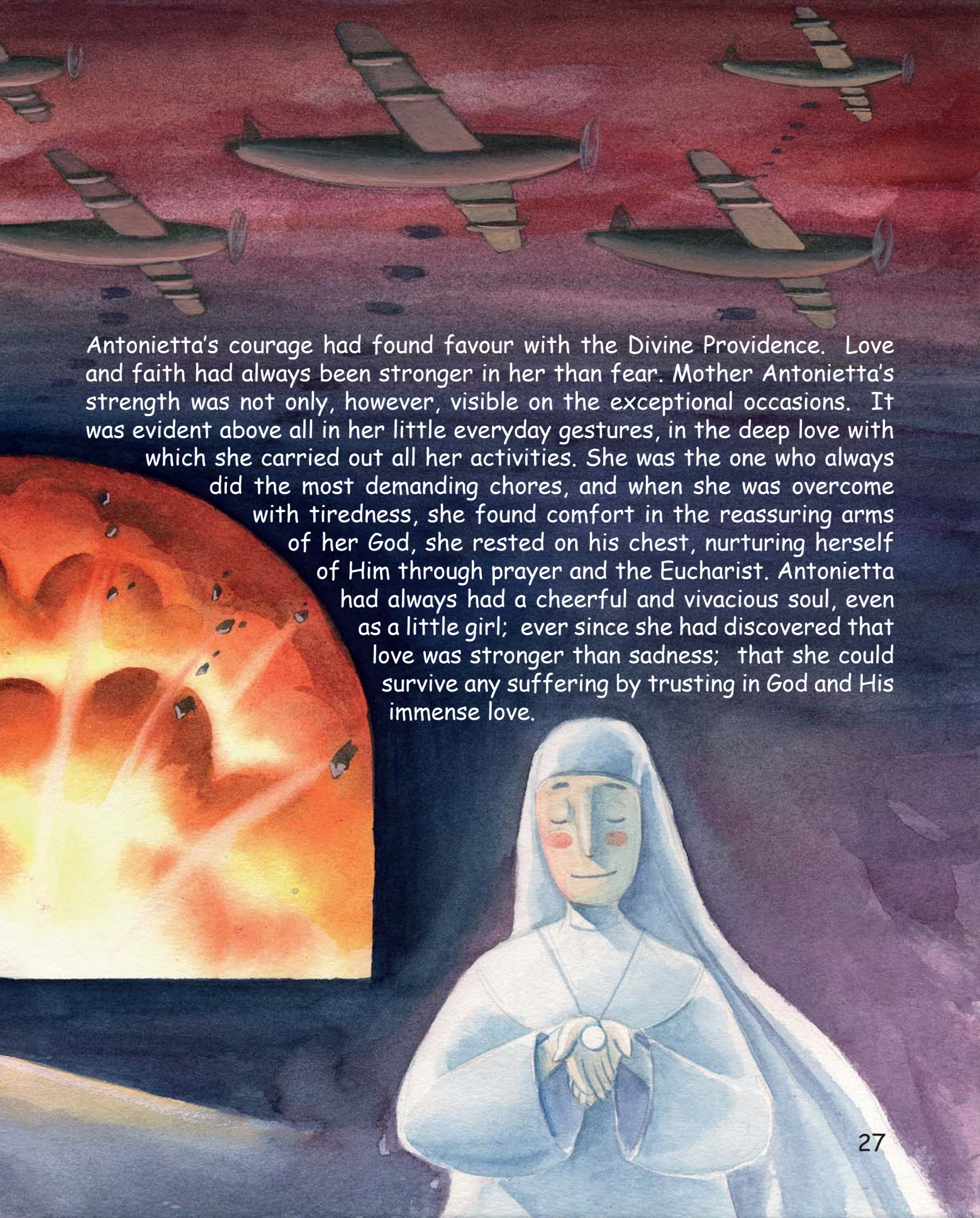
room full of people, she feels protected, enfolded in an invisible hug which will never abandon her. From that day on, she is known as Sister Antonietta of Jesus, the Mother.

The house of Afragola, was only the first brick of a big construction. Others followed in Torre Annunziata, Portici, Boscoreale, Naples, Castellammare di Stabia, Posillipo, San Giuseppe Vesuviano and Frattamaggiore, in which old people are welcomed, but not only; the young street urchins, the so-called "scugnizzi" are educated and trained there too.

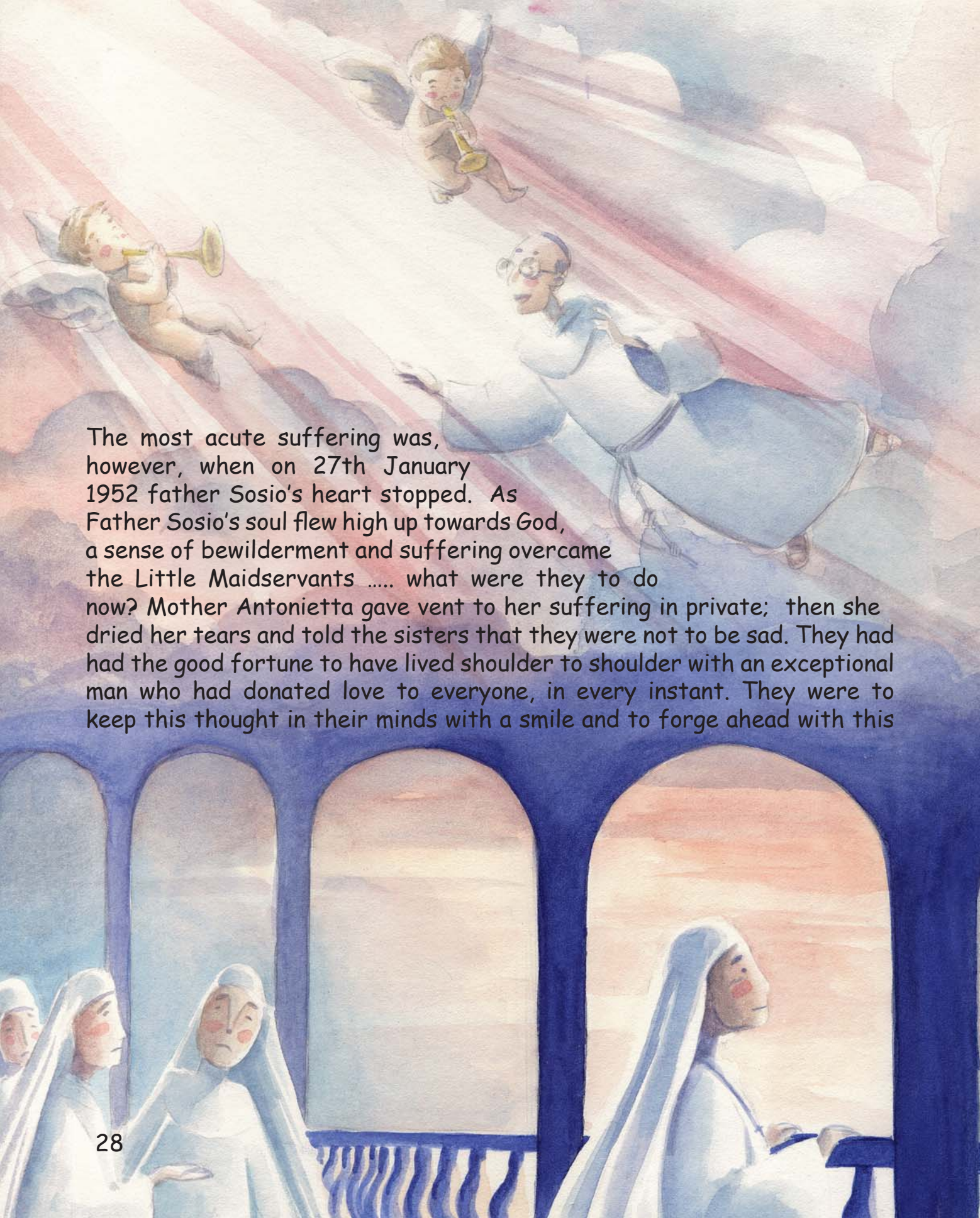




The second world war arrived, the sky was filled with noises from aeroplanes, a storm of bombs fell on the streets which filled with the dead and injured. The house of Afragola was transformed into an emergency infirmary. A group of doctors dealt with the most urgent cases, even making use of the canteen tables for operations, whilst the sisters looked after the survivors. The building, which was right in the centre, was an easy target. One day a friar burst into the house launching the alarm "the English are bombing the city! Quick, run!" Everyone ran away, terrorised, all apart from Mother Antonietta and a sister: they remained right by the sick, ignoring the danger. Notwithstanding two bombs falling right near to the hospice, the home remained miraculously intact.

The illustration is a watercolor-style artwork. In the foreground, a woman in a light blue or white religious habit is shown from the waist up, with her hands clasped in prayer and her eyes closed. She has a serene expression. The background is a deep, dark purple or blue. In the upper portion, several vintage-style biplanes are flying across the sky. On the left side, there is a large, bright, fiery orange and yellow shape, resembling a large heart or a stylized flame, with some small dark specks scattered around it. The overall mood is one of peaceful devotion amidst a backdrop of conflict or war.

Antonietta's courage had found favour with the Divine Providence. Love and faith had always been stronger in her than fear. Mother Antonietta's strength was not only, however, visible on the exceptional occasions. It was evident above all in her little everyday gestures, in the deep love with which she carried out all her activities. She was the one who always did the most demanding chores, and when she was overcome with tiredness, she found comfort in the reassuring arms of her God, she rested on his chest, nurturing herself of Him through prayer and the Eucharist. Antonietta had always had a cheerful and vivacious soul, even as a little girl; ever since she had discovered that love was stronger than sadness; that she could survive any suffering by trusting in God and His immense love.



The most acute suffering was, however, when on 27th January 1952 father Sosio's heart stopped. As Father Sosio's soul flew high up towards God, a sense of bewilderment and suffering overcame the Little Maidservants what were they to do now? Mother Antonietta gave vent to her suffering in private; then she dried her tears and told the sisters that they were not to be sad. They had had the good fortune to have lived shoulder to shoulder with an exceptional man who had donated love to everyone, in every instant. They were to keep this thought in their minds with a smile and to forge ahead with this

inheritance in humility and perseverance.

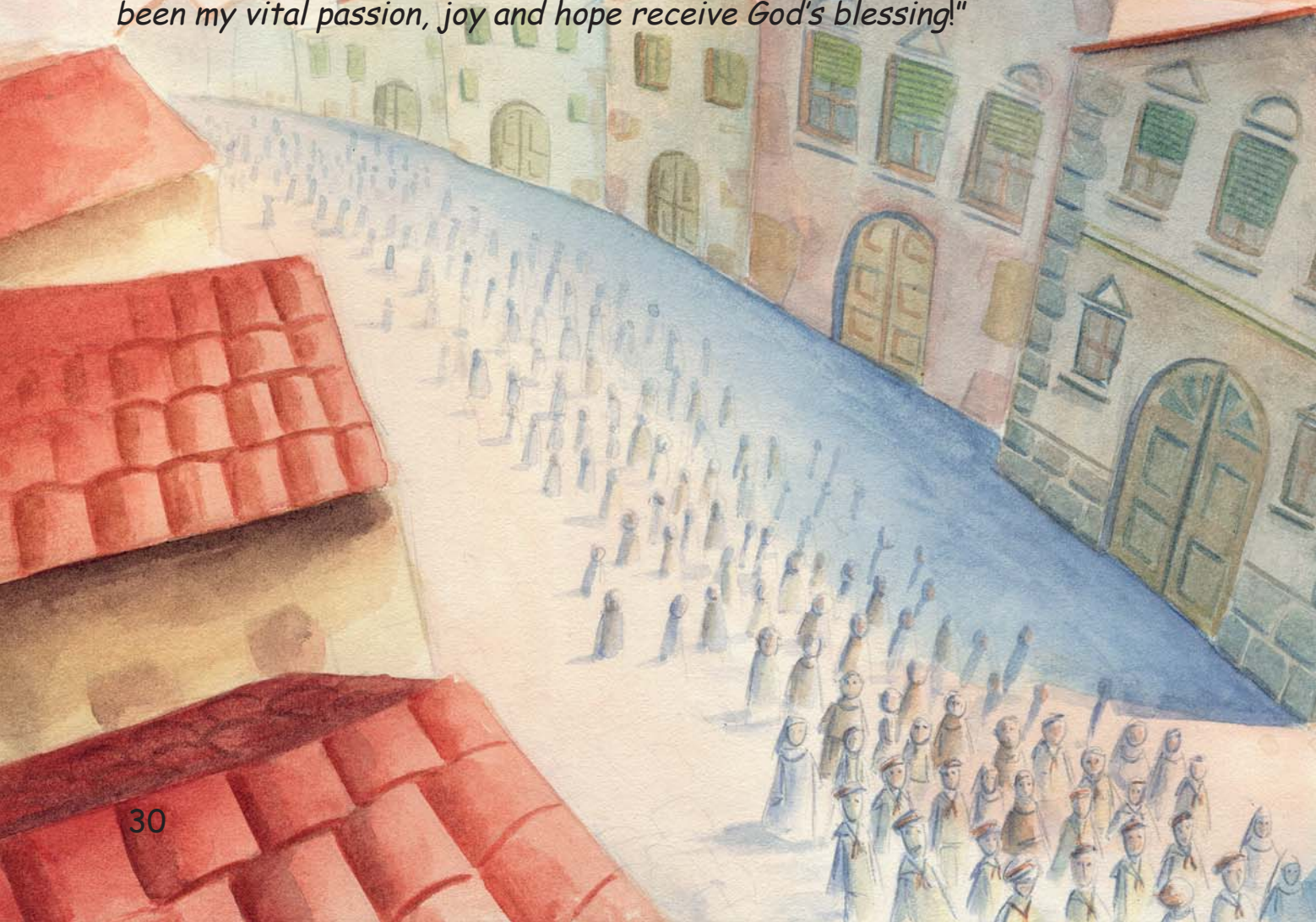
After Father Sosio's death, Mother Antonietta was supported in the running of the Institute by another Franciscan, Father Giacinto Ruggiero. They were able to create many initiatives and cultural endeavours together, one of which being the big library which is still open to the public in the city of Portici. They also popularised the devotion to the Madonna of Liberation from Calamities and had a Sanctuary dedicated to her built in Boscoreale.

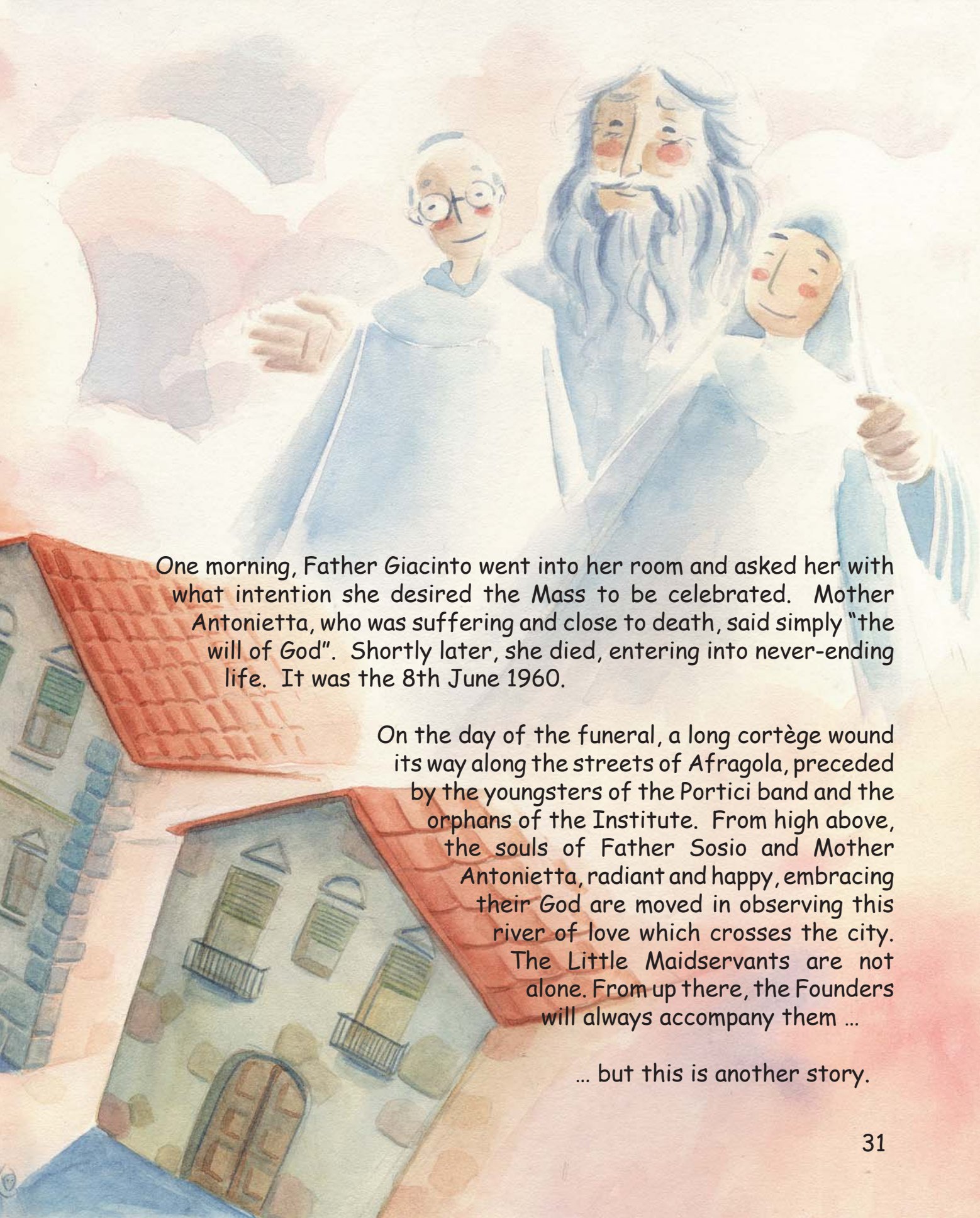




Mother Antonietta's physical strength slowly began to abandon her. Unfortunately cancer had taken hold in her body.

She was now bedridden. She made up a will, expressing her last wishes, entrusting the helm of that small boat which had now become a big ship, to the faithful Sister Franceschina, and consigning all her beloved daughters, the Little Maidservants, to God, *"May these daughters of mine, who have been my vital passion, joy and hope receive God's blessing!"*

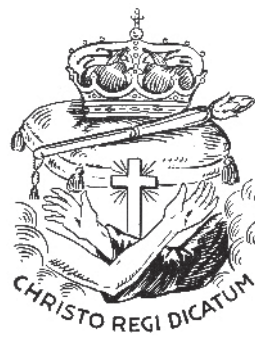


An illustration at the top of the page shows three figures in religious clothing floating in a hazy, pinkish sky. On the left is a man with glasses and a blue habit. In the center is a man with a long white beard and a blue habit. On the right is a woman in a blue habit holding a white veil. Below them, the red-tiled roofs and windows of a town are visible, looking up at the figures.

One morning, Father Giacinto went into her room and asked her with what intention she desired the Mass to be celebrated. Mother Antonietta, who was suffering and close to death, said simply "the will of God". Shortly later, she died, entering into never-ending life. It was the 8th June 1960.

On the day of the funeral, a long cortège wound its way along the streets of Afragola, preceded by the youngsters of the Portici band and the orphans of the Institute. From high above, the souls of Father Sosio and Mother Antonietta, radiant and happy, embracing their God are moved in observing this river of love which crosses the city. The Little Maidservants are not alone. From up there, the Founders will always accompany them ...

... but this is another story.





The little maidservants of Christ the King are in:

Italy

Romania

The Philippine Islands

Indonesia

A centre in India will be opening shortly



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