

## SERVANT OF GOD DOMENICA BEDONNI WIDOW BERNARDINI (1889-1971)

### CHRISTIAN LAYWOMAN AND MOTHER

Domenica was born in Verica (Modena) on April 12th, 1889. Her parents, Enrico and Matilde Bedonni Caselli, were very pious farmers, who owned a house and land. At home, she was taught—especially through examples—to pray and engage in works of charity. She attended catechism in the parish and received primary education in the village school. Towards the age of eighteen, after a mission preached in her parish, she briefly felt the desire to enter religious life, but she soon moved towards marriage. In 1913, Domenica met Sergio, a young widower, who had recently returned from the United States. They prepared for marriage by praying and reading the Gospel together, and shared the project of having a big, ideal Christian family, open to the priestly, religious and missionary vocations. They married in the parish church of Verica, on May 19th, 1914.

They spent their lives between home, church and the fields in two mountain towns, Verica and Sassoguidano. The chronicles mention no events there. They lived in perfect harmony, founded on common prayer, although they had very different personalities: she was lively, quick, and sociable, with fine tastes; he was calm, quiet, meditative, and oblivious to refinement. In the first thirteen years of their marriage, they gave birth to ten children. She was a happy mother and thankful to God, because they were healthy, beautiful, good and intelligent.

Domenica's dedication to her husband and children was complete. The foundation of their family life was prayer: morning and evening prayer (with the daily rosary), mass on feast days, despite the distance to church and her frequent pregnancies; they belonged to the Fraternity of the Blessed Sacrament and Eucharistic Adoration; once their children were grown, they went to Mass each day and celebrated the Franciscan **Third Order Office**. While the father educated his children above all by his example, the mother taught them. She was their first catechist. Six daughters and two sons consecrated themselves to God in religious and missionary life. The mother suffered greatly from this detachment; but she was proud of their vocation. She accompanied them and supported them constantly through prayer, offering her sacrifices for them, and writing more than 600 letters, which transmit feelings, considerations, and advice inspired by faith. After 1927, the parents and their children only met twice again all together in the family home: first in 1955 and then in May 1963, to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Sergio and Domenica. Animated by an intense missionary spirit, the parents adopted a seminarian from Nigeria, welcoming him with affection and practically, as a true son. The young man, Felix Job Abe, became a priest, and then Archbishop of Ibadan and President of the Nigerian Bishops' Conference. From 1960 onwards, the Bernardini couple, now advanced in age, spent wintertime in Modena with their daughter Maria, a nurse at the hospital. Ill and experiencing a painful crisis of despair, Sergio spent the last two years of his life suffering. His wife always remained close to him, day and night, even in the presence of their children. She supported him with words and gestures of love, and with wisdom inspired by faith. She was at his side when he died, on October 12th, 1966, comforting him by the serenity he found in her, as she had persistently asked the Lord.

Widowed, Domenica remained permanently in Modena with her daughter Maria, who was married, but childless. Hospitalized at the Polyclinic in Modena after a stroke, Domenica, conscious until the last moment, died on February 27, 1971, surrounded by all the children, except Sister Amalia, who was in Mexico