

Her work was soon to end. Around the year 1976, Adele experienced the first symptoms of an intestinal tumor and underwent an operation at the *Clinic S. Giuseppe*. The condition did not improve, but continued to advance and cause discomfort for the next four years. During this prolonged illness, she and her sister-friend Giuseppina, continued to visit the various institutions, encouraging the managers and workers, and offering consolation to the residents.

Adele died on August 11, 1980, in Milan, with a reputation of great holiness. During the funeral homily by Monsignor Libero Tresoldi in *S. Ambrogio* church, he declared that Adele "was a woman of faith who had surrendered herself to God, was docile to His wishes, and had a deep capacity for greatness." She was buried in the Resurrection Cemetery of Lucinasco, Italy.

In her honor, a book was published in 1986, which included glowing testimonials attesting to her gift for charity, her love of the unfortunate, and her love of God.

Her Cause for beatification has been opened, much to the satisfaction of those who knew her, and to those who were charitably helped in her many institutions. †

## Amata Cerretelli

SS

1907-1963

(56 av)

Foundress and Carmelite Tertiary

ITALY



• Sygda  
• Lodebe  
• Spervelt  
• Spertlet  
• "The Family"

Sickly from the day of her birth, suffering during her lifetime of fifty-six years from a variety of illnesses, one can only marvel at Amata Cerretelli's patience and pleasant humor in spite of pain that she accepted for the love of God. Yet, despite a catalog of ailments, Amata established an organization, *La Famiglia*, that is very much in operation today.

After her birth in Campi Besenzio, a village outside Florence, Italy, Amata was baptized on the day of her birth because of her frail condition. For the next nine years, she suffered from what the doctor diagnosed as rheumatism of the arteries. During brief respites, Amata could walk, but with great difficulty. This endured until she was eighteen years old, but then she developed a speech defect, and because of her illness, she was forced to walk in a stooped condition. A family who knew her mother, suggested that Amata be sent to them in the country, where she might benefit from a change of climate, but the local specialist despaired of being able to help her, and suggested that

she be sent home. This produced another problem, since she injured her head when she fell at the train station.

During times when she recovered a little, she helped in the family's café, and resumed her daily attendance at Mass. Although the family experienced financial difficulties and had to sell half their property, they were able to give Amata a small allowance, which she in turn gave to the poor.

Amata's condition became critical when she was eighteen, and was confined to bed for six months. The parents borrowed money to have a specialist examine their daughter, but he diagnosed her condition as grim, and fully expected Amata to die. But to the amazement of the specialist, and the pastor who was called to administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, Amata slowly recovered.

Then came a family crisis when the father was arrested and falsely accused of selling black-market tobacco products. For eleven months, the father was detained in a cell with eleven other prisoners, losing weight because of the meager rations. Amata and her mother denied themselves to bring him more food, but he refused to eat what they brought, since his cellmates were also suffering privations. Since the families of the other prisoners were far away, Amata and her mother somehow were able to bring all of them something to eat each day, even though the two women were forced to observe a strict fast. When the father was released, his license to sell tobacco was revoked, which put a heavier strain on the family business that was already experiencing a loss of trade. Unfortunately, another loan had to be made to cover medical and business expenses.

Amata's health again declined. The diagnosis was infected tonsils. An operation was performed for their removal, but because of her frail condition, she was forced to undergo the procedure without anesthesia. When she did not improve, and was experiencing excruciating pain, the doctor amended his diagnosis to include her kidneys and trouble with her spine.

After recovering, Amata was again bedridden, this time with a tumor on the bottom of her foot. Because of the family's financial

situation, the doctor decided to remove the tumor in his office. The tumor, however, returned. Fearing a malignancy, the doctor thought it best to remove the entire foot, but the mother appealed to St. Anthony with a favorable result, since the tumor disappeared. Soon after, Amata developed problems of the throat, which required a second operation. As a result, Amata was to experience slurred speech until her death.

The family was faced with more problems when they experienced difficulty in paying the interest on three loans they had made to cover expenses. A public auction was declared and their property sold. The family was given one month to vacate their home. In spite of her poor health and serious financial difficulties, Amata urged her parents to accept the will of God, with all three praying fervently that God would look after them.

With a slight improvement in her health, Amata and her friend Carmen Arini, who was to write Amata's first biography, looked for an apartment that would serve their families. When all was settled, Amata found work in a factory, where speed was expected. Because of a lack of proper nourishment and her frail health, Amata collapsed and was bedridden throughout the winter. In the spring, her father, who was also experiencing poor health, died.

Since Amata was an attractive young lady and had a number of admirers, her friends urged her to marry, since both she and her mother would then experience security. But Amata would not listen to their reasonings, declaring that this would be an unfair burden to place on a husband, and, moreover, her frail condition would limit the attention she would be able to give a family. The religious life was suggested, but again Amata would not hear of it, saying that her vocation was to the secular state, where God wanted her to be. Her only wish was to fulfill the duties of her state of life.

Amata next found work in a shop that manufactured artificial flowers and decorative feathers. For two years, she continued at this position even though she was afflicted with a variety of illnesses. First, two abscesses developed around her nose that caused a swelling of her

whole head and an inability to eat or drink. When a high fever developed, she was confined to bed. Once this was cured, she developed a sciatica attack in her left thigh that lasted for a time, and even prevented her from attending Christmas Mass. When this subsided, a pain in the finger of her left hand caused such pain a doctor recognized an infection under the nail and removed it, again without an anesthetic. A second nail was also removed. Next, her appendix was removed, as was a large quantity of infectious material from her abdomen. Her recovery period lasted a month.

Amata's prayerful attitude during these trials was astounding. She accepted her pains as her participation in Our Lord's Way of the Cross, and as God's will for her. She endured all as her participation in Christ's passion for the redemption of the world.

The onslaught of World War II brought other difficulties when a bomb hit their home, sparing only two rooms. Again, she escaped serious injury when a bomb fell near her in the street, destroying surrounding buildings.

Despite all the privations brought about by the war and her own frail health, Amata concerned herself with those worse off than herself. Her charity extended to an elderly, paralyzed niece of the deceased parish priest. Since the elderly woman was unable to care for herself, Amata helped by visiting her each day to bathe her and clean her house. Until the end of the war, Amata prepared two meals for the woman each day until the invalid went to her eternal reward.

During this time, Amata was also caring for her own mother, who was sickly from a lack of proper nourishment. Amata again fell ill with a condition that provoked vomiting, which completely baffled the doctor. A cyst then developed on her left eyelid, requiring an operation to correct the eye, which was immobile. Next, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was ordered to enter a sanatorium, but relatives took her into their home until she was better.

A new phase in Amata's life, and that of her friend Carmen, was the meeting of a Carmelite priest of the Ancient Observance, Father Augustine Bartolini, in 1948. It was this good priest who became her

spiritual adviser and helped her to form the organization known as The Family. Amata had, by this time, attracted to herself a group of women who joined her frequently for prayer. This group of ten petitioned for acceptance as Third Order members of the Carmelite family, and were admitted as such in February 1957. Amata accepted the name of Amata of Jesus at her reception, a name that is on her tombstone.

Amata was already advanced in the spiritual life by means of her acceptance of suffering as the will of God, and progressed even more rapidly under Father Augustine's guidance. She was especially devoted to the Blessed Sacrament, and was grieved when her illnesses prevented her from daily reception of the sacrament. When her health permitted, she spent hours before the Blessed Sacrament in deep contemplation. Amata realized that she had been privileged to participate in the Lord's sufferings for the salvation of souls, and fought gallantly against the devil's insinuations to the contrary. She was especially devoted to the souls in purgatory, and accepted her sufferings and other sacrifices for their relief. However, her charity did not extend to poor souls only, but included the living as well, especially those who were ill or poor.

The lay movement known as The Family was centered in the Carmelite house in Castellina, one of the hill towns overlooking Florence, Italy. The Family had several branches of the apostolate, each working in a different area of need. For some years, The Family owned textile mills, which were organized on the Catholic principles of social justice outlined by the Church. The workers were brought together in the mill's chapel for daily Mass, and the Rosary was prayed during the workday. In addition, regular meetings were held to provide instructions on the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church.

To unite the members on social levels, various sporting teams were organized. Hunters belonged to the St. Martin group, and fishermen belonged to the St. Peter's group. St. Raphael was the patron of engaged couples. Young people known as Swallows kept in contact with those who had left the Church, while Samaritans looked after

the sick. There were other social groups, along with enthusiastic cycling championships.

It is amazing that The Family's various branches of social and religious activities were directed by Amata and the good priest, even while she suffered physically and financially. Although in great pain, she was driven to organize every possible apostolate that would bring glory to God. She suffered through the whole organizational process of The Family, but her goal was foremost in her mind and heart. Somehow, through the grace of God, she was able to subordinate her sufferings to the goals of the organization to assist people in their spiritual journeys, as well as those who were in dire need of The Family's services.

Suffering physically and financially all her life, Amata continued to help those in need, and through her organization assisted countless fellow sufferers, not only those who were poor or sick, but countless others who were on the fringe of society. Those who were victims of prejudice, dishonesty, or cruel poverty were helped, as well as those who were ostracized by society, including adulterers and even lepers. God alone knows all the good that was achieved by this organization founded by Amata, who was a credit to her Carmelite family.

Toward the end, Amata was known to have said, "I'm no longer good for anything. I only know how to suffer." Yet, the love of God continued to drive her to people who needed a helping hand, a compassionate ear, or an encouraging word.

The beginning of the end started at Christmastime in 1962, when she attended services with greater fervor than usual. At this time, she was living with the Gelli family, who had offered her hospitality. In early January, she developed a severe cold that progressed with a high fever and spasms, which shook her whole body. With her body feeling as though on fire, she asked to receive the last sacraments of the Church. The Franciscan friar who came to her bedside was amazed at her abandonment to the will of God. She lingered for a few days, assisted by members of The Family. After falling into a coma, she breathed her last on January 26, 1963, in the presence of her longtime friend, Carmen.

Her influence, which had affected so many, was also extended to one of the sons of the Gelli family, who entered Carmel and is now an ordained priest working with Father Augustine Bartolini in the direction of The Family.

At the time of Amata's death, several thousand were numbered as members of The Family, which continues to bring peace and charity to those in need. †