Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Spirituality
Religious Life



Photo of Blessed Clelia Merloni's reading glasses on display in her bedroom in the Generalate of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome, Italy. (Sr. Doretta Jean D'Albero)



by Sr. Kathryn Press

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November is a great month for saints. We celebrated the universal call to holiness with the solemnity of All Saints — particularly those hidden and unrecognized saints — on the first day of the month. Throughout November the universal and local church acknowledges the countless men and women who lived in imitation of Jesus.

A few examples: All Saints and Blessed of the Society of Jesus (Nov. 5); All Saints of Ireland; All Saints of Africa (both on Nov. 6); All Saints of Wales (Nov. 8). The list continues with the feast of All Saints of the Benedictine and Cistercian Orders (Nov. 13) and All Saints of the Carmelite Order (Nov. 14). Later still (Nov. 24), we have the memorial of St. Andrew Dũng-Lạc and his over 100 companions. We have "so great a cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) to inspire and encourage us!

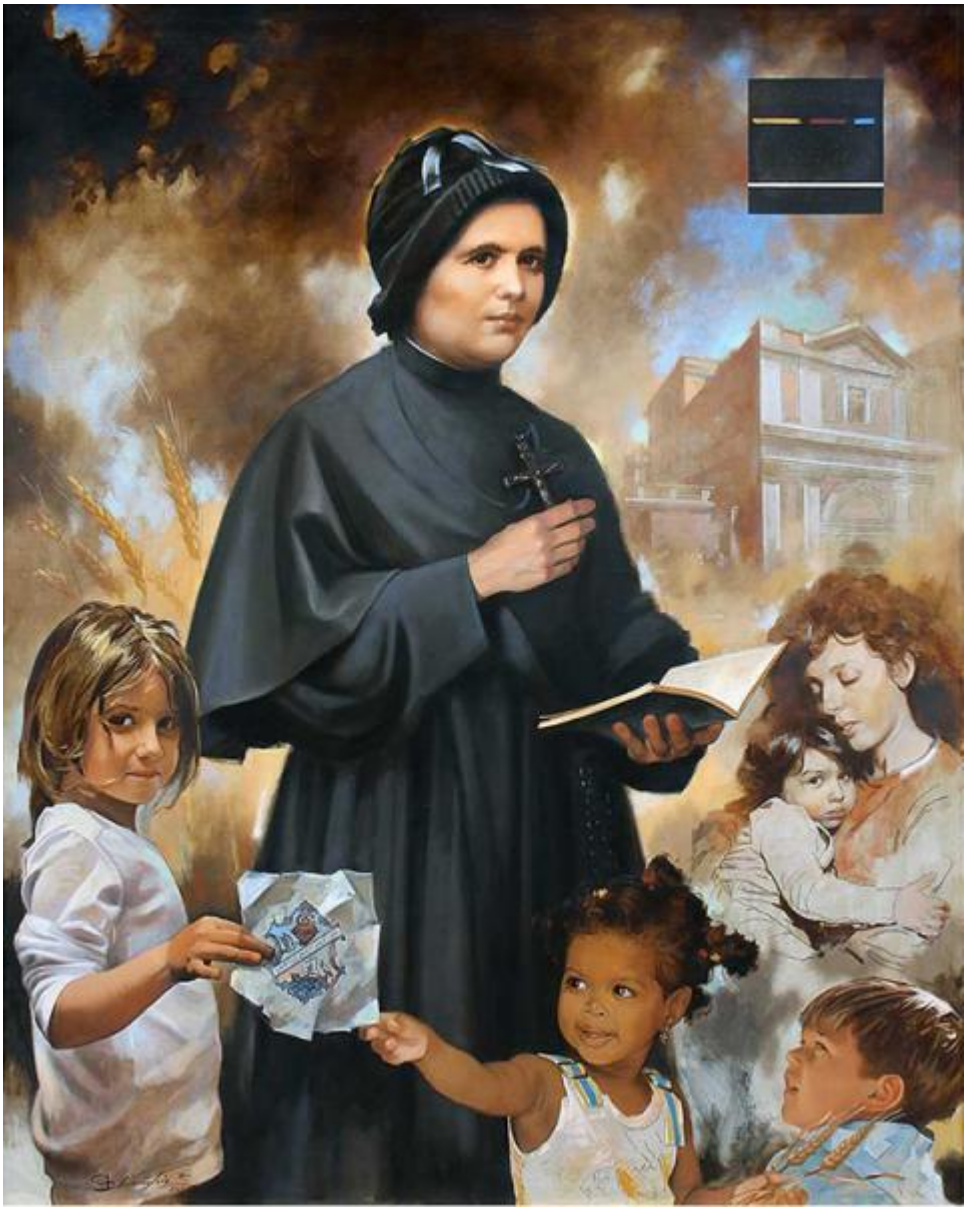
A lesser-known celebration in November would be that of Blessed Clelia Merloni (Nov. 20). Beatified just three years ago, Blessed Clelia is the foundress of my religious community, the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Her vision, her way of seeing the world, shapes who I am today as a religious sister. Together with more than 800 of her spiritual daughters worldwide, I carry a small flame of that charism which impels me make the Sacred Heart of Jesus better known, loved and served.

This coming July (2022), my sisters from across the globe will gather in Italy for our 18th general chapter. We have been praying daily in preparation for this Spirit-led event which helps us to reexamine our charism and focus our future. The prayer in anticipation of this multi-day meeting has the theme "*Love with the Heart of Christ – see with the eyes of Clelia*." Loving with the Heart of Christ seems somewhat self-explanatory (not necessarily easy!): Love like Jesus. Love my neighbor; love my enemy. Go to the margins.

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Reflecting on "*see with the eyes of Clelia*" gave me greater pause. How is Blessed Clelia inviting *me* to see the world through *her* eyes?

Clelia Merloni (1861-1930) was a woman of wide horizons. Nothing was out of the question for her if it could help someone know Jesus! To see with the eyes of Clelia, I asked myself, *Who did she see?* Firstly, she saw souls! She saw the dignity of each person, loved by God, before her. In Italy at the turn of the 19th century, she saw plenty who persecuted the church, including her father. Before her were orphans and uneducated children in need of care and religious instruction. She saw Italians emigrating to Brazil and the United States in hope of a better life.



"Il Progetto di Dio per Clelia" ("God's Plan for Clelia") painting by Giusseppe Antonio Lomuscio (Courtesy of the artist and Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus)

What did she see? Pain punctuated Clelia's life. At a young age she saw the death of her mother and her father's mistress, and it left a deep impression on her. She also saw and felt deep love and care from her grandmother at home and the sisters who taught her in school. Many years later she had a dream where a priest ran away with her money — only to discover upon waking it was all true! Even within the congregation she founded, she saw and heard great division among her spiritual daughters.

Why did she see the world in the way she did? Lying on her deathbed at age 33, she prayed a novena to Our Lady. Miraculously recovering, she vowed to found a new congregation to serve the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Throughout her life, Clelia experienced God's love for her in particular and was undeterred in following his will for her. She had a deep desire for other people to know God's tender love for them.

How did she see the world? Clelia was a woman of humility. She lived with a deep and radical trust in the merciful and loving heart of Jesus. She saw the world through physical suffering and exile from her community. Mostly, I believe, that she saw the world the way she did because she loved with the Heart of Christ and saw the world as *he* did.

November is a great month for saints, but there are plenty of saints we celebrate the other 11 months of the year if you are looking for spiritual friendship. Hopefully there is someone with whom you feel a kindred connection. For me, I look at the world through the eyes of Blessed Clelia. For you, perhaps it's Blessed Carlo Acutis, Servant of God Emil Kapaun, Little Nellie of Holy God, Servant of God Julius Nyerere, St. Mary MacKillop, or St. Teresa of the Andes.

Regardless of who inspires you, they all lead us to love with the Heart of Christ. Each of these holy men and women — the named and the unnamed — lived their life in imitation of him … in their acceptance of suffering, by their evangelical zeal, in living their faith in everyday life, in caring for souls, by their humility and simplicity, with their prayers.

To better see with the eyes of the saints as we follow Jesus, I ask:

- *Who* inspires you to love with the Heart of Jesus?
- *When* and *where* did they love like Jesus?
- *What* did they do and *how* did they do it?

- *Why* did they choose to serve God in this particular way?

All you holy men and women, pray for us!