

GREAT MEDICAL LIVES;

SAINT JOSEPH MOSCATI (1880-1927)



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"For I was sick and you visited me" (Mt. 25:46). There can be little doubt Saint Giuseppe Moscati carried these words daily into his clinical work. Lifelong works of charity, built virtues in him (and others no doubt) which have reaped heavenly reward. Saint Giuseppe Moscati (1880-1927) was a physician as well as a medical school professor. He was canonized in 1987. He was also a biochemist.

At his canonization Blessed John Paul II said: "Holiness is man's union with God in the power of the Paschal Mystery of Christ, in the power of the Spirit of Truth and Love . . . Love has the power to unite man with God. And this definitive love matures through the various works of charity that a man performs in the course of his life."

He was the seventh of nine children born to aristocratic Italian parents. His father's was a magistrate who would still serve at the altar when they attended Mass in the chapel of the Poor Clares. When just a teenager, Giuseppe's older brother (who was in the artillery) fell from a horse and gave himself permanent brain damage. Through years of tending his sick brother at home, Giuseppe's desire to do medicine grew. So he went to medical school in 1897 at Naples. This was tricky for a young Catholic as there was open agnosticism and anti-clericalism at that time. He qualified in 1903. And then went on to work in the Hospital for Incurables in Naples while also teaching in the university. As well as a bit of biochemistry he practiced holistically. "Remember," he once wrote to a young doctor, one of his former students, "that you must treat not only bodies, but also souls, with counsel that appeals to their minds and hearts rather than with cold prescriptions to be sent in to the pharmacist."

He is quoted as saying that "one must attend first to the salvation of the soul and only then to that of the body." Through his practice, he helped many lapsed Catholics to return to the Sacraments. His favorite patients were the poor, the homeless, the religious and the priests - all from whom he would never accept payment. He actually went as far as secretly leaving his money within a patient's prescription or under a patient's pillow. He clearly saw his work as an apostolate. One day he even refused payment from all his patients saying "These are working folk. What have we that has not been given us by Our Lord? Woe to us if we do not make good use of God's gifts!" As Blessed John Paul II said "In addition to the resources of his acclaimed skill in caring for the sick he used the warmth of his humanity and the witness of his faith."

"Not science, but charity has transformed the world,"

When Mount Vesuvius erupted in April 1906, he volunteered to evacuate a nursing home in the danger zone. He also practised during a cholera epidemic in 1911 and treated about 3,000 soldiers during World War I.

He died after lunch in 1927 having been to Mass and received holy communion (as he did each day). He was 47. The miracle for his canonization was the inexplicable cure of a young man who was dying of leukemia. His mother dreamed of a doctor in a white coat, whom she identified when her pastor showed her a photo of Blessed Giuseppe. Through his intercession, her son was cured and returned to his job as an ironworker. The young man, Giuseppe Fusco, attended the canonization ceremony and presented to the Pope a wrought-iron face of Christ which he had made. His feast day is November 16.

REFERENCE

Michael J. Miller. "Joseph Moscati: Saint, doctor, and miracle-worker." Lay Witness (March/April 2004).

