
Fr. Rattoballi remembers Paolo Borsellino: “A man of the Beatitudes”

Don Cesare Rattoballi, parish priest of the Annunciation of Our Lord Parish, on the outskirts of Palermo, remembers Paolo Borsellino on the 29th anniversary of the bombing in Via d'Amelio, where the magistrate lost his life together with members of his police escort, his "guardian angels." He remembers him as a "man of the beatitudes", a "martyr for justice", highlighting his steadfast faith, that gave him "the extraordinary and unwavering courage to devote his life to others." The priest confessed the magistrate assassinated by the Sicilian Mafia two days before the Via d'Amelio bombing. During the memorial service for the victims of the Capaci massacre, the priest was at the side of the widow of his late cousin Vito Schifani, when from the pulpit she made a plea for the conversion of the Mafiosi. Since that day, his priestly ministry and the judge's commitment and life crossed paths several times. "I have no wish to recriminate, but it must be said that Paolo was left alone to pursue the values of justice in which he believed. His family was always there for him, but he was abandoned by certain public authorities." **Which role model has Paolo Borsellino left as his legacy?** Paolo was a devout Catholic, and the faith was the guiding principle of his life. He would always attend Sunday Mass. His attachment to the faith made him especially sensitive to his fellow others, and instilled the profound respect he nurtured for the human person. That respect is reflected in the many testimonies of people who had been close to him, as well as of casual acquaintances.

I learned about his relationship with the Eucharist from members of his police escort. When he was travelling outside Palermo, especially on public holidays, he would never forget to attend Mass. He would tell his "angels" that he "was going to Mass." Occasionally, his escort would say to him, "Let's skip it this Sunday!". And he would reply: "I have an appointment!". When Paolo was killed, a number of them told me: "Now we understand whence he drew his courage and kindness." What did the family represent for Paolo Borsellino? Paolo had many married friends. It could be said that Paolo was a "marriage counsellor." Many of these couples would turn to him for guidance. He listened to them and offered them constructive advice on their marriage and family life. He tried to keep families together, as he recognised their preciousness. His family of origin transmitted to him the importance of dialogue, which shaped Paolo's ability to listen, confirmed by so many accounts and, above all, by the people he interrogated for investigations. Justice was also a core value to him. What motivated that vocation? Paolo had a deep sense of justice. He felt it was his duty to shed light on the many shady aspects of incidents occurring in Sicily. So much so that it became an authentic vocation. He was aware of the risks he was running and used to say: "more than the risks, I have accepted the consequences of my job, of where and especially how I carry it out." He acted this way because he strongly believed in the nature of his profession. A few weeks before his assassination we were in his studio at his home and he told me that the explosives were there for him. I replied: "Isn't there anything that can be done to ensure your safety?" , as had occurred during the Maxi Trial, when he was removed from Palermo. He assuredly replied: "I am a man of the institutions and I firmly believe in everything I have chosen to do. I cannot run away or go into hiding: I am prepared for whatever may happen." What are your thoughts today, in the light of what has happened? I am very disappointed with all the authorities in charge of Paolo's protection. They were aware that he risked being killed and did nothing to prevent it. In the light of the evidence we have today, I am not surprised that some magistrates within the judiciary were envious of Paolo's role. To the extent that the Anti-Mafia team, headed by magistrate Antonio Caponnetto, was dismantled. After the Capaci massacre, you asked Paolo Borsellino to take part in an event.... I invited Paolo to participate in a torchlight procession organised by the AGESCI scouts – of which I was the regional assistant - marking the one-month anniversary of the death of Giovanni Falcone, to commemorate him together with Francesca Morvillo and his escort, among whom was my late cousin, Vito Schifani. Five thousand youths of the AGESCI scouts arrived in Palermo from all

over Italy. I asked Paolo to deliver a speech for them. It was unforgettable. We agreed to write a message in connection with the testimony we were going to entrust to them: the Beautitudes of the Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Five, verses one to 12. Paul was captivated by this magna carta of Christians, which he identified with. In particular, verses 6 and 10 and especially dear to me: 6: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will have their fill. 10: Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. In your opinion, to what extent do these two verses reflect the life of Paolo Borsellino? In particular, Paolo reflected in them not only his professional path, but also his vocational choice as a magistrate, which he pursued with competence and passion. He kept in touch with young people, who would write to him and to whom he would reply. He told me that talking to young people, with a view to forming the consciences of the younger generations, and educating them to avoid all involvement with the Mafia or organised crime, was the successful way forward. We could thus draw on the words of St John Paul II, namely that Paolo Borsellino is one of the martyrs for justice and indirectly for the faith.



It was on a Friday morning before his assassination. Two days before - on 17 July 1992 - I had gone to the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Court of Palermo, to see him in his office. We discussed the situation following the Capaci massacre, the testimony I was offering together with my cousin's wife, Mrs Rosaria Costa. After his eulogy at the memorial service, many Mafiosi tried to get in touch with Paolo Borsellino, as some of them were not happy with the Mafia's course of action. We made an appointment to meet again the following week. As I was bidding farewell, he said: "Don't leave yet, I must say confession. I am preparing myself, you never know when the time will come." His love for the Lord was great, and if he was to appear before Him, he wanted to do so with a pure conscience. His faith in Christ gave him the strength to face his martyrdom, as did his belief in the value of justice. What was the trigger behind Borsellino's death? There had been an upheaval in civil society. The practice of the "pizzo" (protection money that legal and illegal businesses pay to the Mafia, TN) was being denounced, and there was a widespread commitment to promote legality, from schools to associations. Having had role models like Falcone and Borsellino, a number of young people became members of the judiciary or engaged in social work. It was the reaction that Paolo had wished for.

Filippo Passantino