

## **Julian Ciabattini (Mario) [June 8, 1943 - September 14, 2024]**

Julian shared his life story numerous times throughout the years, and we have put together some of his comments, so it is Julian himself who is recounting his story.

“I was born August 8, 1943 in Valdarno in Tuscany to two hard-working parents, for whom family was everything. I am the youngest of three children. As a child, I attended church regularly, and while no different from my peers, the seed to a call of faith was sown in my soul. Then there was the period of adolescence with its turbulences. I never lost my faith, however, I did not attend Mass.

In the early 1960s, a history teacher at school encouraged us to open ourselves up to world problems. Most students were enthralled and influenced by his Marxist ideas. However, it dawned on me that the answer to life was the Gospel. As I actively participated in the debates, a certainty grew within me: to spend my life for others. I was already working in a good firm, doing statistics, but I was thinking of doing sociology, and following my inspiration to go to Brazil to do social work.

In 1967, when I was 24 years old, I heard about Loppiano, a few miles from where I lived, where the Focolare Movement has a school of formation for young people coming from all over the world. Intrigued, I decided to go and see. I was struck by the songs and especially by the experiences. The Gospel could truly be lived and be put into practice with the person you are with, in the present moment.

Every week I went back to Loppiano and, without being aware of it, my life was changing. A priest with whom I often had discussions about politics said to me: ‘You know, Julian, you should go to Loppiano more often, because when you return, you are different, and it is easier to talk to you.’

Jesus was becoming more important than my ideas. Even at home, they were amazed because I was staying longer at the table, and I was no longer responding in monosyllables to my parents. However, their amazement went up to the highest degree when they saw me washing dishes for the first time! I was more and more convinced that love is the answer to the world’s problems.

After three months of these ‘visits’ to Loppiano, I asked if I could stay there. They said yes, and I arrived in January 1967. I was fascinated by Chiara’s first discoveries, the first experiences of Jesus among us. I was attracted by the possibility of ‘reliving Mary to generate the presence of Jesus’. This was a credible Gospel.

Light, light and then a block. When I heard about Jesus Forsaken (Jesus on the cross when he felt forsaken even by his Father), I would face a block. I didn’t understand, it didn’t fit, I couldn’t get anything out of it. And life became complicated. I went through a difficult time and I wanted to pack my bags and leave, but the experience was true, always more and more true, and undeniable. Right at that moment, a friend of ours, Aurelio Lagorio, died, and his sudden departure struck me and gave me strength. After almost a year, I gave my unconditional yes to Jesus Forsaken for life.”

At the end of his formation in Loppiano, in 1969, Julian first went to the focolare in Belgium. Then in 1970, he left for Canada and stayed in Toronto for almost 14 years. He then moved to the New

York focolare where he lived for 18 years. In 2002, he was called to the Centre of the Movement as a Councillor for North America, and then he was re-elected as a Councillor for Italy. After that, he returned to Loppiano in 2014.

Chiara gave Julian this Word of Life, “Be dressed for action and have your lamp lit” (Luke 12, 35). Julian always had his lamp lit!

Here are a few lines written by Julian to Chiara in 2002 which summarize his life. He said: “Dearest Chiara, after all these years of focolare life, I feel that living mutual love is everything. I have in my heart what you once told us: If a mother’s love, which is boundless, unselfish, always forgiving, is the closest to divine love; if a father’s love is the one you can lean on and gives you security; if brotherly love gives you courage in facing life; then, our love for one another must contain all these elements. This is the family of Mary. And I ask for the grace to always live this way, to give life to this beautiful family.”

We ourselves can say: “Thank you, Julian, you have been for so many a mother, for so many a father, for all of us a brother and a friend. May Mary reward you!”