

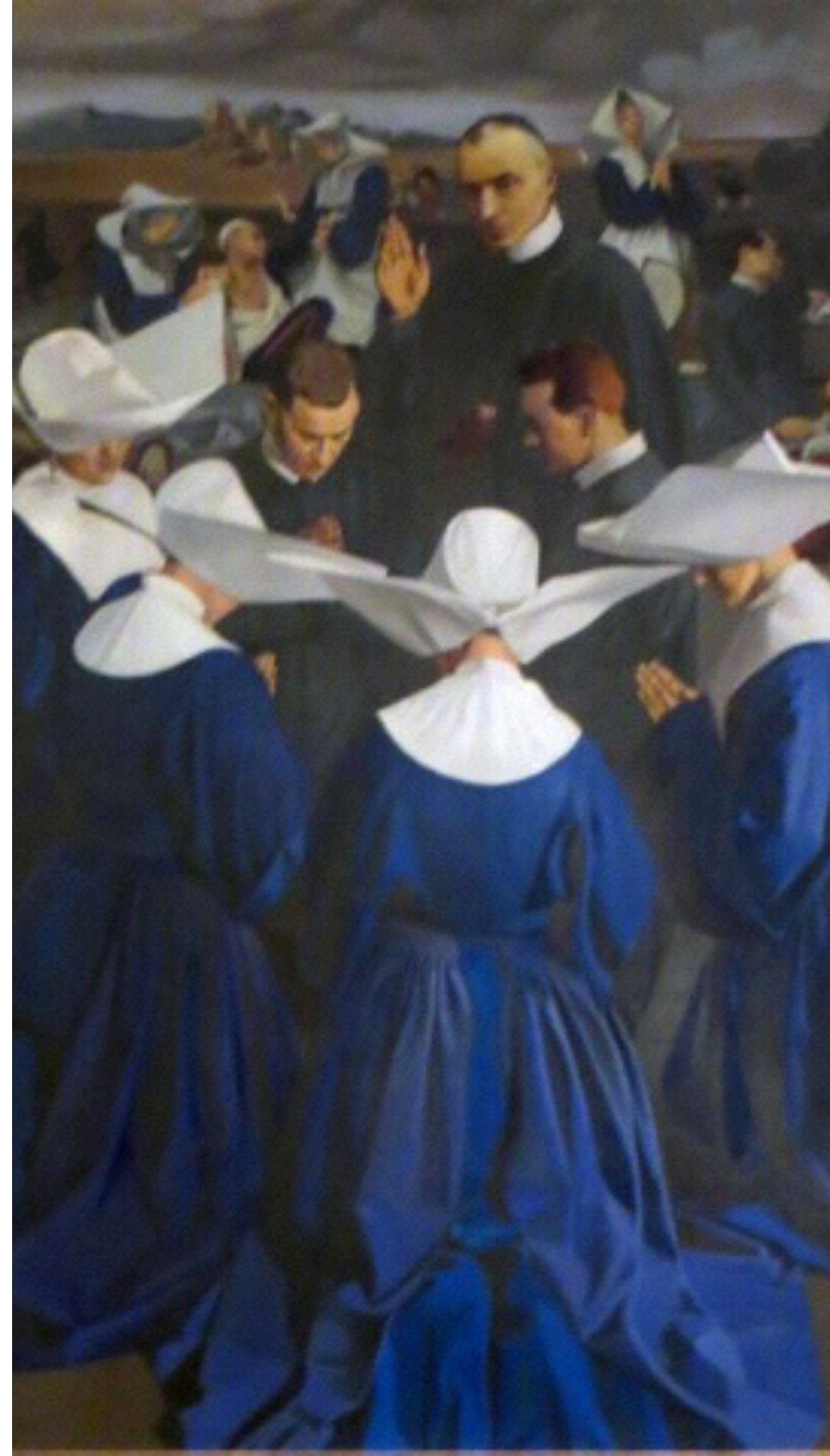


**BLESSED MARCANTONIO DURANDO, C.M.**

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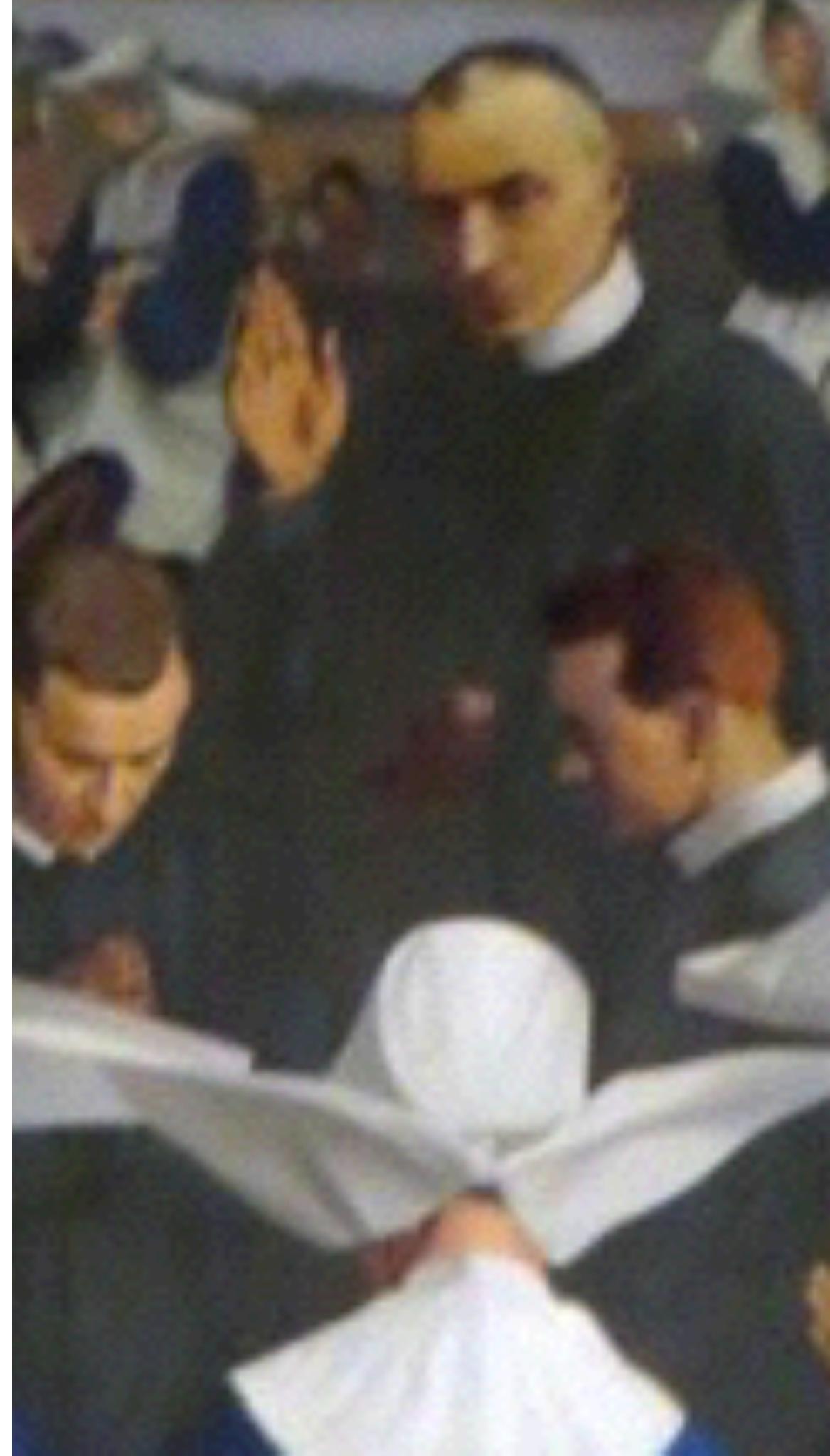
*the story of the “Mercy Units” of Turin, Italy*

The Mercy Units, Le Misericordie, were, in 19th century Turin, the equivalent of les charités in St. Vincent's Paris. Just as the first sisters took their name from those, and were called Les Filles de la Charité, the sisters in Turin became known as Le Suore della Misericordia.





The Mercy Units were mainly the work of the Ladies of Charity, who supported them financially. The Daughters of Charity were the arm which pushed them forward, and Blessed Durando was the mind behind it.



The Mercy Units were private centers of social assistance, where a poor person found not only hot soup in winter, a wardrobe of clothes to choose from, and basic medical treatment, but also often a job.

Above all, though, what the person encountered was so much Christian friendliness and charity. It was not help given with a hidden motive, but Christian love, which leveled social differences.

As time went on various other works developed around these centers, such as refuges for children from poor backgrounds or who were neglected because their mothers were working, orphanages, small nursing homes for the elderly, home visits to the poor and sick, etc.

The full-time sisters, who lived in the Mercy Units so as to be always on call for those who needed them, were poor like those whom they helped.



Visiting the poor in their homes made the Daughters of Charity aware of other needs which had to be met. There were in particular two types of persons who needed above all a home and a family. These were elderly women with no one to care for them, and young girls whose working mothers could not look after them.



At the suggestion of Marcantonio Durando the Countess Alfieri was pleased to provide a remedy for these needs, and she set up, in her own home, a “mini-hospital” for the old women, and a combined refuge, school and workshop for the girls, both children and teenagers.





The driving force behind all this activity was Fr. Durando, and he was often also the most generous benefactor. Sr. Mattaccheo wrote about these beginnings:

*He was the president of the Misericordia house. I remember that all those women, busy about the works of the house, would not move a leaf without Father noticing.*



One of the best all-round Mercy Units was the first one, that of San Massimo and the Madonna of the Angels. It was established in 1854 and was directed by the Servant of God Sr. Maria Clarac. Over the winter this unit would give out up to 14,000 helpings of soup. Its refuge cared for up to 400 children.



Four more Mercy Units were opened after that, with the final one opened by Fr. Durando in 1879, shortly before his death. Thus Turin had a network of works of charity to which the poor could freely come, knowing that they would be welcomed and helped.

For this and other reasons Bl. Durando rightly became known as “the little St. Vincent of Italy.”



*Durando from an 1861 General Assembly  
Group Photo*



## CREDITS

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