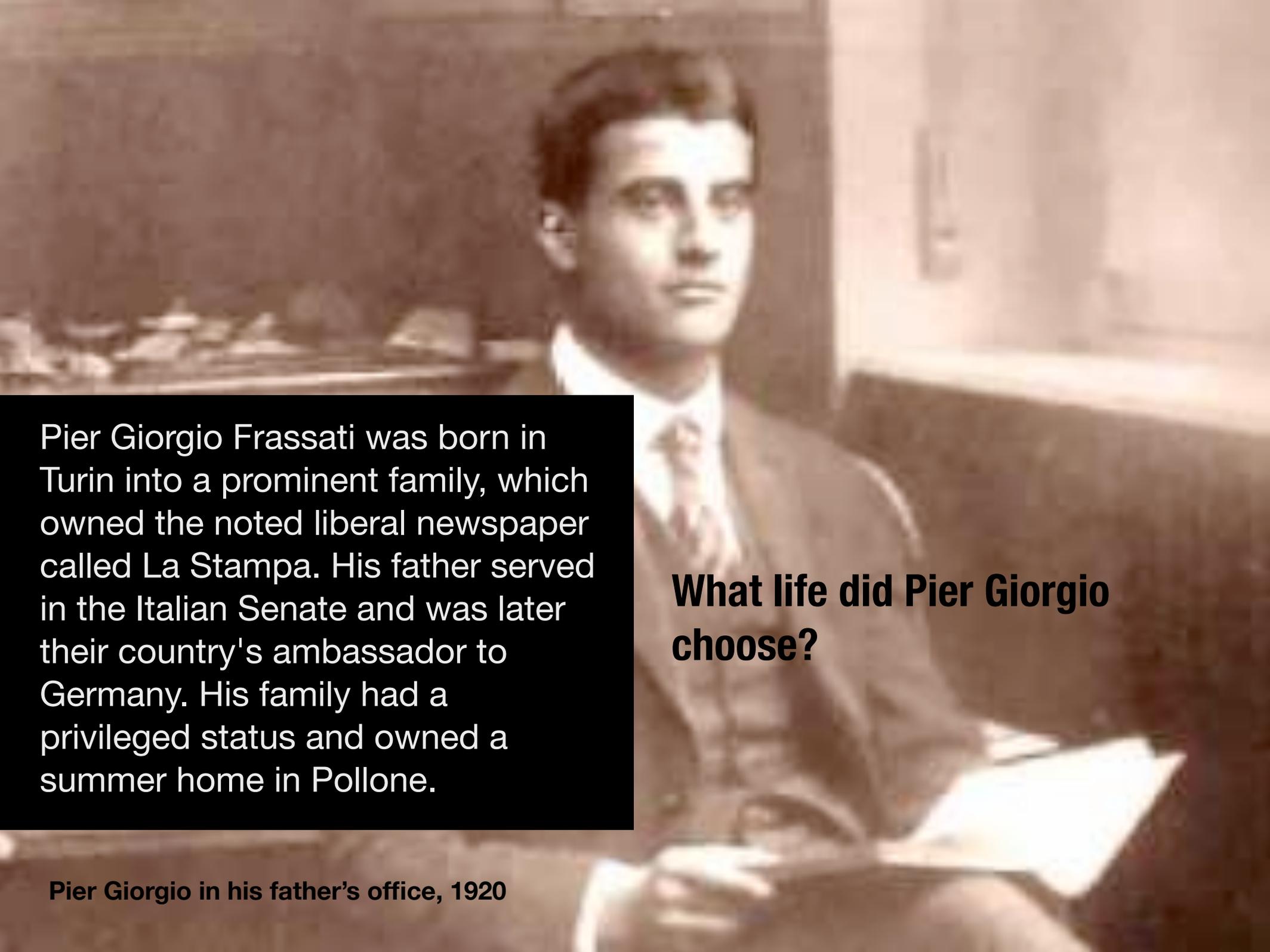


Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati

The courage to choose what
is essential in life





Pier Giorgio Frassati was born in Turin into a prominent family, which owned the noted liberal newspaper called La Stampa. His father served in the Italian Senate and was later their country's ambassador to Germany. His family had a privileged status and owned a summer home in Pollone.

What life did Pier Giorgio choose?

Pier Giorgio in his father's office, 1920



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Pier Giorgio gave his money to people he saw as more "needy" than he was, often giving his train fare to the poor and walking back home or riding in third class. He would also literally give the poor the clothes off his back, returning home without the sweater or jacket he had been wearing when he left.

Pier Giorgio in his father's office, 1920





Pier Giorgio's father was an agnostic. Both of his parents were unreligious. They misunderstood and disapproved of any type of piety or intense Catholicism.

What did Pier Giorgio do?

Pier Giorgio and his father Alfredo



Pier Giorgio's father was an agnostic. Both of his parents were unreligious. They misunderstood and disapproved of any type of piety or intense Catholicism.

At an early age, Pier Giorgio joined the Marian Sodality and the Apostleship of Prayer, and obtained permission to receive daily Communion (which was rare at that time). He developed a deep spiritual life. The Holy Eucharist and the Blessed Virgin were the two poles of his world of prayer. Pier Giorgio prayed daily, offering, among other prayers, a daily rosary on his knees by his bedside. Often his father would find him asleep in this position.

Although his parents' misunderstandings were painful to him, he bore this treatment silently, and with great love.

Pier Giorgio and his father Alfredo

Meditation

Making courageous choices means walking on a path of discipline in our lives, in the quietness of the day-to-day, when no one else is looking.



Although Pier Giorgio took his studies very seriously, he often struggled in school. In fact, on two separate occasions, he had to repeat a grade. Pier Giorgio was disappointed when he failed because he knew it disappointed his parents.

What happened next?



Although Pier Giorgio took his studies very seriously, he often struggled in school. In fact, on two separate occasions, he had to repeat a grade. Pier Giorgio was disappointed when he failed because he knew it disappointed his parents.

All this turned out to be a blessing in disguise. To make up the year, he transferred to the Sociale-- the Social Institute of Turin-- which was run by the Jesuit Fathers. At the Sociale, the seeds of his spiritual life were planted and nourished, and he later grew to become "the Man of the Eight Beatitudes."

Both his devout prayer life, and frequent acts of charity were very important to Pier Giorgio.

He saw the needs... but did he also see the bigger picture?



Yes. He would often say, "Charity is not enough; we need social reform." As his sister Luciana explained, "Catholic social teaching could never remain simply a theory with [Pier Giorgio]." He set his faith concretely into action through spirited political activism during the Fascist period in World War I Italy. He became a very active member of the People's Party, which promoted the Catholic Church's social teaching based on the principles of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum*. He even helped establish a daily newspaper, called *Momento*, based on these principles.



Meditation

Isaiah 35:8 And a great road will go through that once deserted land. It will be named the Highway of Holiness. Evil-minded people will never travel on it. It will be only for those who walk in God's ways; fools will never walk there.



Once while participating in a Church-organized demonstration in Rome, police violence broke out and the police began to arrest demonstrators.

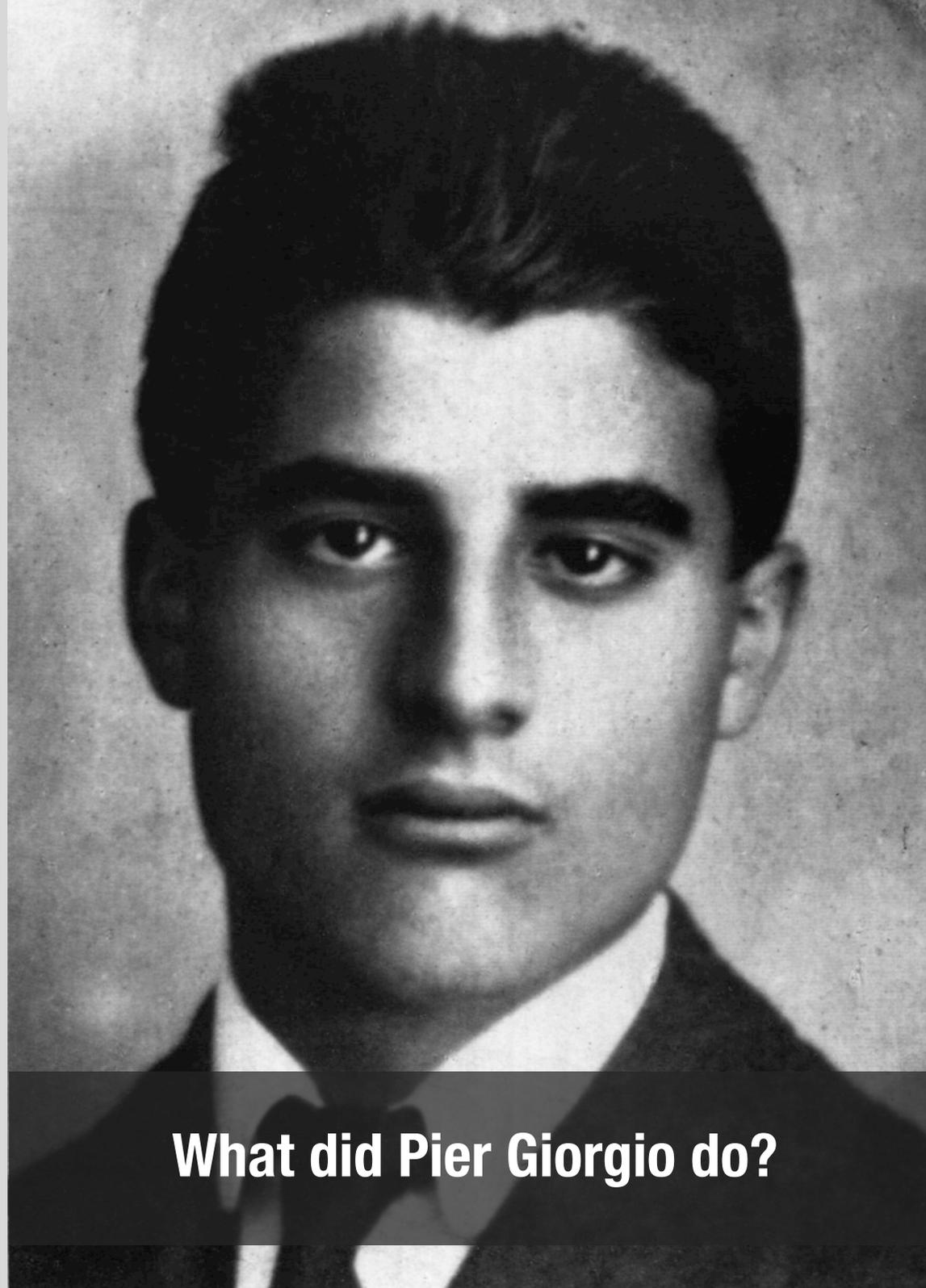
What did Pier Giorgio choose to do?



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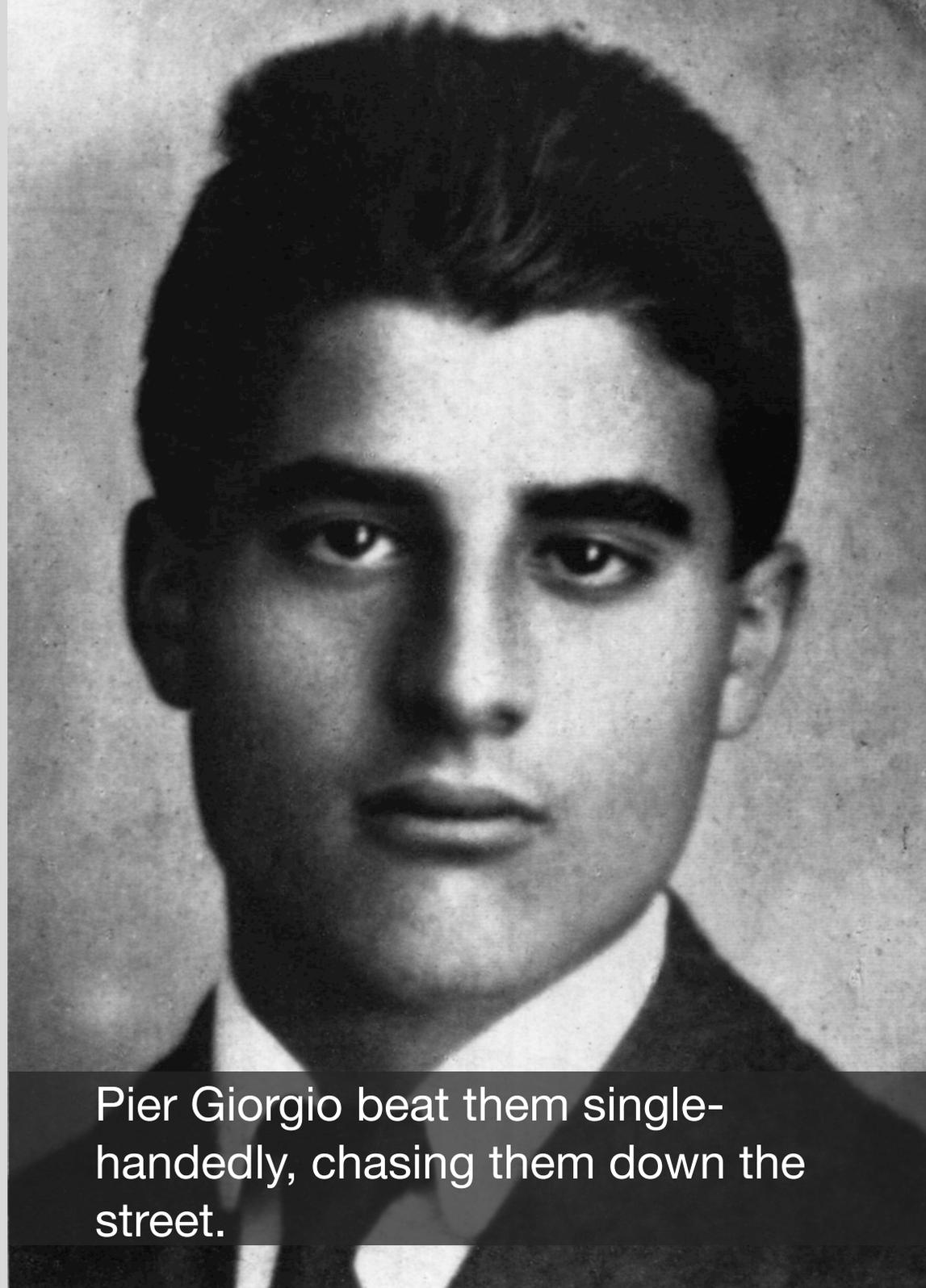
Pier Giorgio rallied the other young people by grabbing the banner which the police had knocked out of someone else's hands. He held it even higher while using the pole to ward off their blows. When the demonstrators were arrested by the police, he refused special treatment that he might have received because of his father's political position, preferring to stay with his friends.

Pier Giorgio was strongly anti-fascist and did nothing to hide his political views. One night a group of fascists broke into his family's home to attack him and his father.



What did Pier Giorgio do?

Pier Giorgio was strongly anti-fascist and did nothing to hide his political views. One night a group of fascists broke into his family's home to attack him and his father.



Pier Giorgio beat them single-handedly, chasing them down the street.

Meditation

There are two kinds of courage: there's the courageous act: a knight fighting a dragon or a firefighter rushing into a burning building. These are extreme events most of us won't ever face. There's a second kind of courage: the decision to do the right thing even when it's unpopular, uncelebrated, or unnoticed.

Pier Giorgio decided to become a mining engineer, studying at the Royal Polytechnic University of Turin.



Why? For the money? The status?

Pier Giorgio decided to become a mining engineer, studying at the Royal Polytechnic University of Turin.



So he could “serve Christ better among the miners,” as he told a friend.





Pier Giorgio often sacrificed vacations at the Frassati summer home in Pollone (near Turin).

Why?



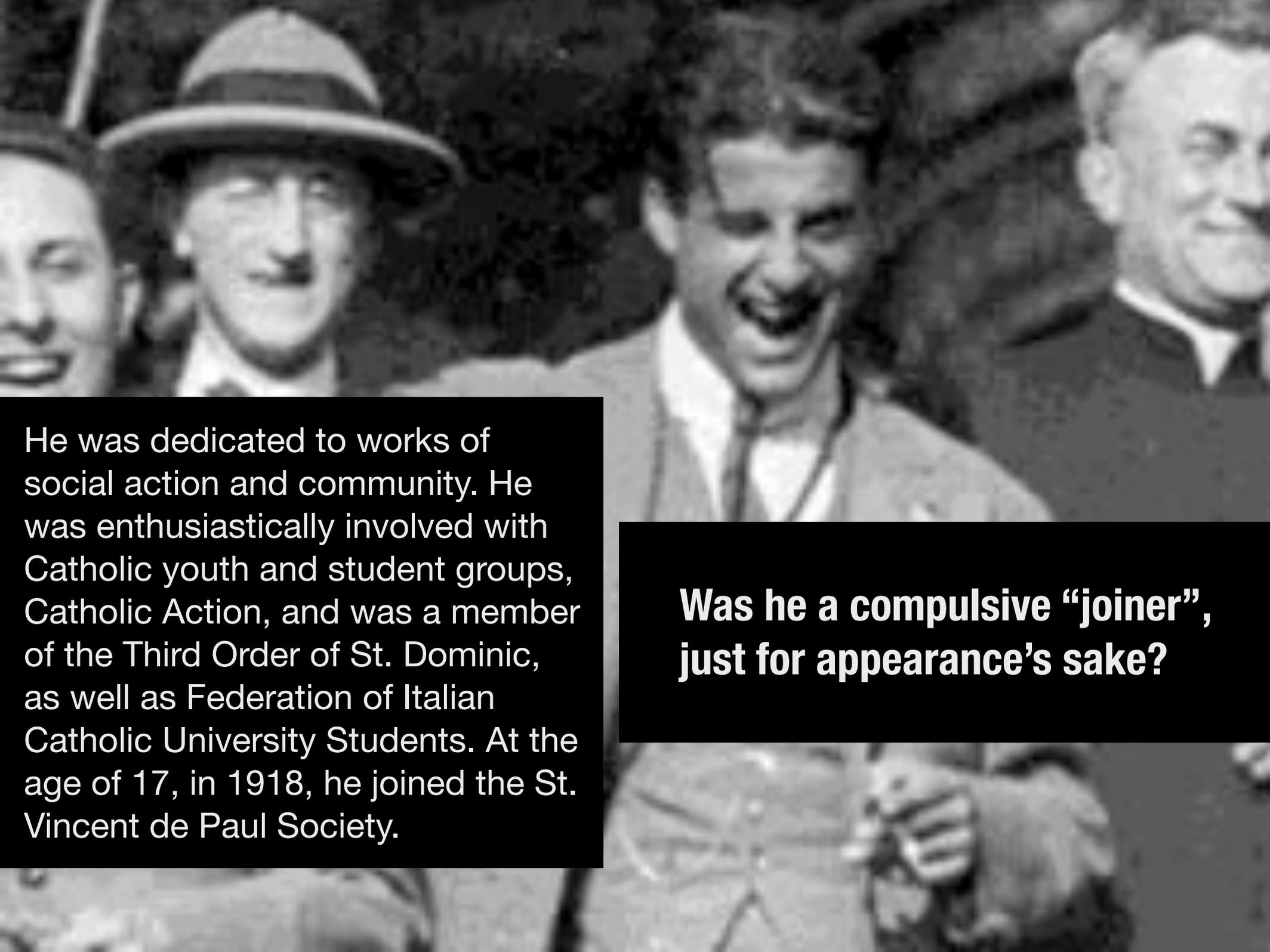
Pier Giorgio often sacrificed vacations at the Frassati summer home in Pollone (near Turin).

Because, as he said, “If everybody leaves Turin, who will take care of the poor?”

Meditation

The Narrow Gate

Matthew 7:13 Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.



He was dedicated to works of social action and community. He was enthusiastically involved with Catholic youth and student groups, Catholic Action, and was a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic, as well as Federation of Italian Catholic University Students. At the age of 17, in 1918, he joined the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Was he a compulsive “joiner”, just for appearance’s sake?



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Despite the many organizations to which Frassati belonged, records show that he was active and involved in each, fulfilling all the duties of membership. With the St. Vincent de Paul Society he dedicated much of his time to serving the sick and the needy, caring for orphans, and assisting the demobilized servicemen returning from World War I.

Pope John Paul II, in his beatification homily for Pier Giorgio, said that in these groups, especially the Federation of Italian Catholic University Students, “he found the true gymnasium of his Christian training”.

Pier Giorgio disagreed at times with how things were being handled within a certain Conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.



What did he do?

In 1922, he wrote to his friend Carlo, "If you really want to know, one of my ideas is that I would abolish certain conferences of St. Vincent..." His frustration stemmed from the decision of the Conference to stop helping a destitute family because of immoral activity on the part of one of the family members. Pier Giorgio thought the family should be instructed in proper conduct rather than abandoned.

Eventually, he resigned from that Conference and joined another.



Meditation

Sometimes taking a stand may be easy, especially when the choice is clear and our family and friends support us in the decision. At times, however, we may have to stand alone.



After living through the First World War, Pier Giorgio wrote the following: "Through charity, peace is sown among men, not the peace that the world gives but the true peace that only faith in Christ can give us, making us brothers and sisters." In 1921, he enthusiastically helped organize the first convention of Pax Romana, an association which had as its purpose the unification of all Catholic students in the world, to work together for universal peace.

Did Pier Giorgio ever serve in the military?



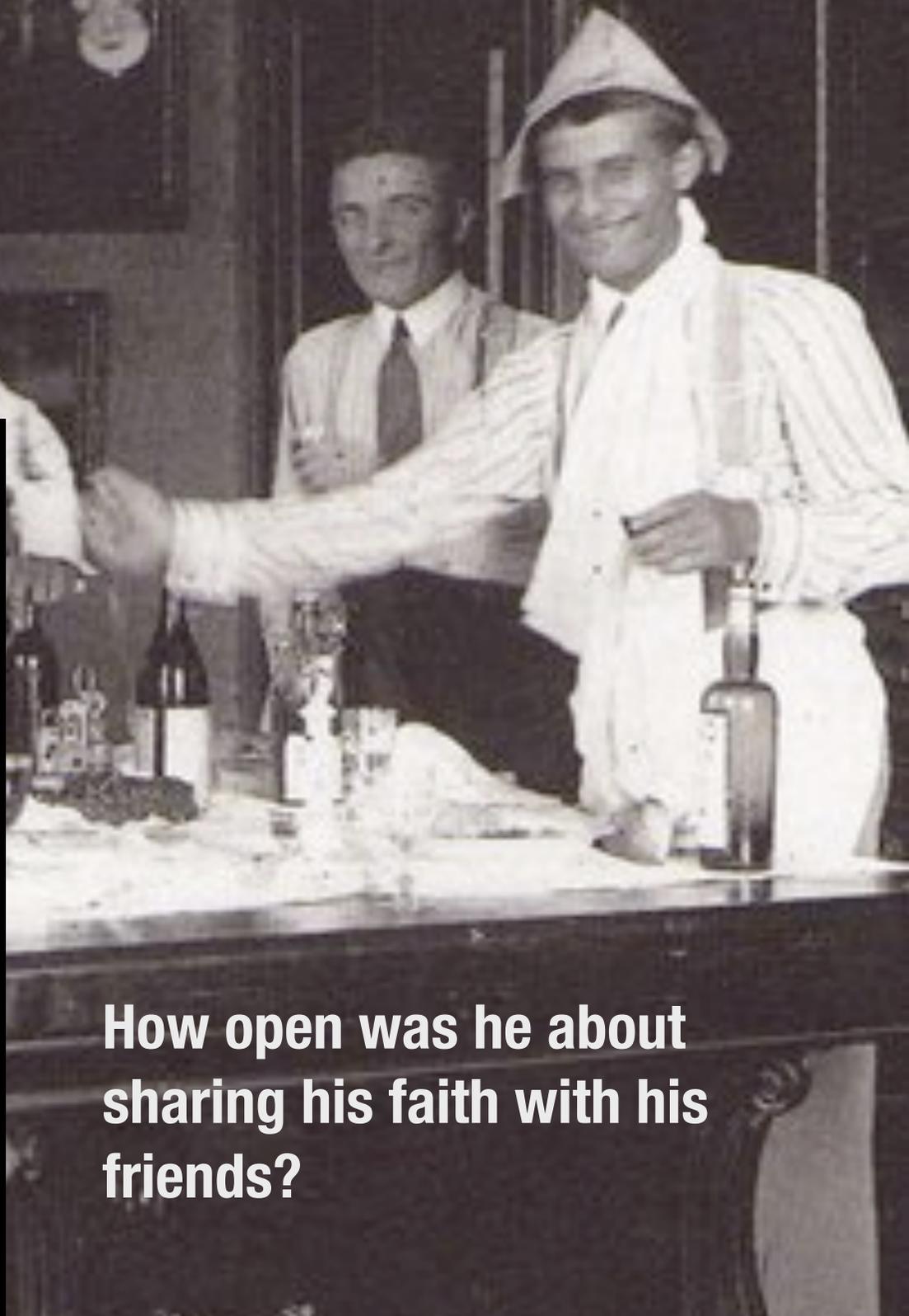
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Until December 31, 2004, young men in Italy were required to fulfill a period of military service. In 1920, Pier Giorgio wrote to his friend Carlo Bellingeri: "The 22nd of September I'm going to Biella for the military medical exam." He passed the physical and planned to fulfill his military obligation upon the completion of his university degree. "I must also work in a hurry because the years rush by and I must still serve my country..." All of Pier Giorgio's plans were cut short, however, with his unexpected death in 1925.



Pier Giorgio was handsome, vibrant, and natural. These attractive characteristics drew people to him. He was an avid outdoorsman and loved hiking, riding horses, and skiing. Mountain climbing was one of his favorite sports. He often went to the theater, to the opera, and to museums.

He was never one to pass on playing a practical joke, either. He was described by friends as "an explosion of joy."



How open was he about sharing his faith with his friends?



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Outings in the mountains, which he organized with his friends, also served as opportunities for his apostolic work. He never lost the chance to lead his friends to Mass, to the reading of Scripture, and to pray the rosary. He had many good friends and he shared his faith with them with ease and openness.

Knowing that his friends were starting to go their separate ways as they were finishing college, marrying, beginning careers, etc., his desire was that they would form a permanent bond through union in prayer and be a source of mutual spiritual support for one another as they met the daily challenges of life.

Meditation

You might be called upon one day to talk to a friend or coworker who is:

- struggling financially
- struggling with their faith
- trying to get up the courage to take a stand on some issue

What will you say?

Music was a big part of the Frassati household and Pier Giorgio loved it. As a child, he took piano lessons for a brief period. He had an appreciation of the arts, often attending the opera or symphony. In letters to his family and friends, Pier Giorgio made many references to concerts he attended.

He enjoyed singing on his trips to the mountains and ski slopes. He mentions it to a friend Nora Figna on a postcard he sent on February 10, 1924: "Skiing and singing in these happy hours..."

Wow, so Pier Giorgio was gifted musically as well?



Of all the stories that have been told about Pier Giorgio and his love for singing, the one most often repeated is that he sang often and loud and very noticeably out of tune!



Just before receiving his university degree, at the age of 24, Pier Giorgio contracted poliomyelitis, which doctors later speculated he caught from the sick whom he tended.

How did Pier Giorgio handle this?



He actually neglected his own health because his grandmother was also dying; thus his illness was too advanced to treat when doctors discovered how sick he was.

His last preoccupation was for the poor. On the eve of his death, with a paralyzed hand he scribbled a message to a friend, asking him to take the medicine needed for injections to be given to Converso, a poor sick man he had been visiting.

After six days of terrible suffering Pier Giorgio died at the age of 24 on July 4, 1925.



Pier Giorgio's family expected Turin's elite and political figures to come to offer their condolences and attend the funeral; they naturally expected to find many of his friends there as well.

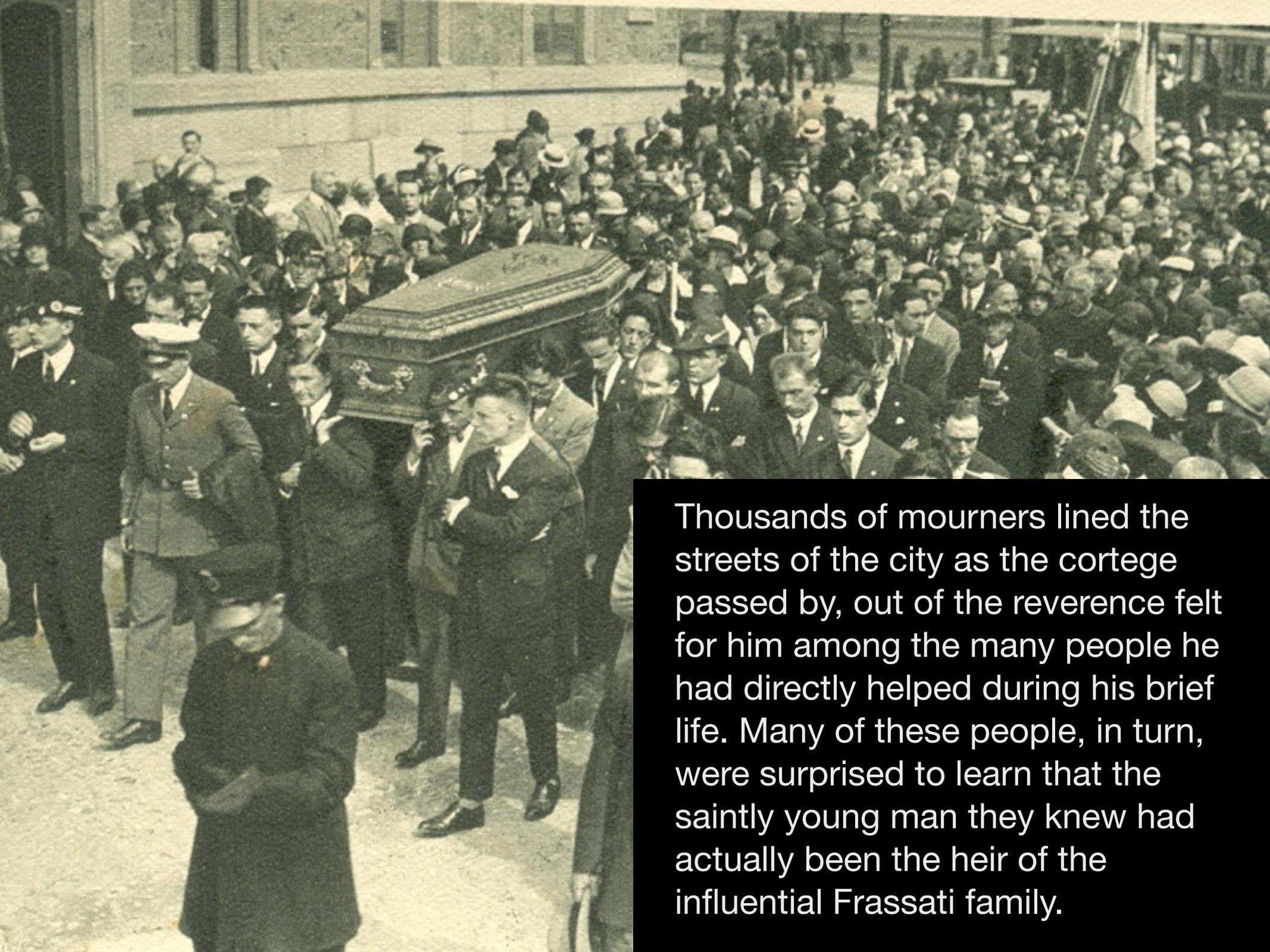


What happened at his funeral?



When news of Pier Giorgio's death reached the neighborhood and city, the Frassati parents, who had no idea about the generous self-donation of their young son, were astonished by the sight of thousands of people crowded outside their mansion on the day of their son's funeral Mass and burial.





Thousands of mourners lined the streets of the city as the cortege passed by, out of the reverence felt for him among the many people he had directly helped during his brief life. Many of these people, in turn, were surprised to learn that the saintly young man they knew had actually been the heir of the influential Frassati family.

Benedict XVI to the Youth in Turin, May 2, 2010

“Have the courage to choose what is essential in life... Like [Pier Giorgio],” the Holy Father said, “discover that it is worth it to commit oneself for God and with God, to respond to his call in the fundamental decisions and the daily ones, even when it is costly.”



Prayer for the Courage to Be Great

Heavenly Father,

Give me the courage to strive for the highest goals,
to flee every temptation to be mediocre.

Enable me to aspire to greatness, as Pier Giorgio did,
and to open my heart with joy to Your call to holiness.

Free me from the fear of failure.

I want to be, Lord, firmly and forever united to You.

Grant me the graces I ask You through Pier Giorgio's intercession,
by the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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