

## GIOVANNI PALATUCCI

Giovanni Palatucci's life is a fine example of what a righteous man is. His extraordinary character does not depend on the events he witnessed, but on the way he perceived them and on the way he acted.

Giovanni Palatucci was born in Montella, near Avellino on the 31 May 1909, to a well off family. He was brought up according to very strong christian principles which certainly shaped his frame of mind: this might account for his distinctive behaviour in later years, during the second world war. He entered police service in Genoa, and then he was appointed Chief of the Foreigners' Office in the town of Fiume, where he got in touch with the Jewish question.

In 1938 Italy enforced the racial laws against Jews.

Giovanni Palatucci then faced a dilemma: as a man and as a Christian he refused antisemitism, as a civil servant he had to enforce these laws. He decided not to take part in the fascist anti-semitic drive. He managed to keep his position and to exploit the opportunities he was given by his job to help the Jews, by forging documents and visas to Jews threatened with deportation.

He also sent many refugees to a large internment camp in southern Italy that was protected by his uncle, Giuseppe Maria Palatucci, Bishop of Campagna.

In Fiume as Germany's ally he carried on rescue operations even after the beginning of war in 1940 next to Germany. In Yugoslavia the Italian occupation areas became places for refugees, mainly Jews, from the whole Centre Europe, and Fiume was a common stop to escape to Italy, Palestine and Switzerland. Palatucci's role turned out to be decisive in order to save thousands of people.

He decided to join those men that the regime wanted to eliminate, and not only did he save their life, but he also awarded them the necessary dignity to live, Palatucci's actions are reported by those who were saved. In her narration Miriana Tramontina conveys us not only the bare facts she witnessed, but also the feelings aroused by this exceptional man.

Palatucci was certainly driven by his religious faith, which impressed those who surrounded him.

Miriana Tramontina concludes her narration saying: "He sympathized with the others. My mother's opinion about this man was that only he who lives his daily according to the Gospel can become so important for the others, because you can have such a strength and courage only if you believe in God."

This same dialogue has allowed him to discover the truth behind his Christian faith and to find his God in whatever he did. So, we were able to understand that mysterious mechanism according to which man, instead of ignoring the problem, shared the sufferings of his fellow human beings.

Certainly Palatucci's deeds wouldn't have been successful if hadn't had people he could rely on, like policeman Giuseppe Veneroso and the agent Americo Cucciniello. The latter refers to what Palatucci used to say to him when he asked his cooperation to save people: - Treat them with human solidarity.-

In spite of the secrecy of his actions, Palatucci was arrested the night between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of September 1944 "because of his contacts with the enemy' intelligence" and not for saving Jewish people. He was arrested on a pretext, because they were unable to find evidence of his actions, and he was deported to Dachau, where he died not long afterwards.

Palatucci showed us that good actions are always possible, but also that there are no shortcuts. Respect and justice require moral responsibility, courage and a constant will to help the others. As Roszi Neumann says: - Palatucci went beyond the commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". He loved his neighbour more than himself.-

**Beatrice Di Marco**