

# Archbishop of Ravenna, ready to do God's will

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In May of 1902, Conforti was named Bishop of Ravenna by Pope Leo XIII. It could have been a deadly blow to Conforti and his newly born congregation. In his conversation with the Pope, Conforti shared his dream of going to China, and the Pope told him that his field of work was Ravenna, "the China of Italy." The Pope continued: "I summoned you to Rome in person so that you could hear from the mouth of the Pontiff himself what he asks of you. So be ready to do the will of God and He will give you the grace necessary for the fulfillment of His plan."



On June 11th, 1902 at St. Paul Church outside the Walls in Rome, Guido was consecrated Bishop. He also made his religious profession together with the vow to dedicate himself without reserve to the proclamation of the Gospel "ad gentes." This assignment proved to be a Way of the Cross.

Bishop Conforti arrived in Ravenna with a plan of action. He saw ignorance of the faith as the major problem in the diocese. His was a plan of education and catechesis, parish visits and encouragement for the local clergy and seminarians. He challenged priests and seminarians to lead deep spiritual lives. It was a renewal movement for all. This plan was not always met with kindness... At times people and clergy reacted with coldness and hostility.

But after two years in that diocese, Conforti's physical stamina weakened tremendously. He resigned after the counsel of doctors. On October 6, 1904 Pius X accepted his resignation on health grounds. He retired to Parma and his congregation where he dedicated his energies to the formation of his young candidates to missionary life and to the drafting of the Constitutions of the Xaverian missionaries.

He wrote to his friend and confidant, Cardinal Andrea Ferrari of Milan: "*I just ask to retire in the solitude of my seminary, among the brothers of my missionary community. I will commit the rest of my few days in life to these young students, who are longing for the victories of faith and of martyrdom.*"



Giuseppe Brambilla - Antonio Sartori - Luigi Calza - Giovanni Bonardi Jan. 18, 1904

His return to Parma was not a welcomed sight. Conforti took this retirement as a humbling experience. Yet, he also saw in this failure the visible hand of God, who was providing him with time to get better, and the possibility to better establish his congregation. He sent to China the first group of missionaries in 1904, and among them, Fr. Louis Calza, the future bishop of Cheng Chow.

In the ceremony of the giving of the Crucifix, Conforti said: *"The Crucifix is the master-book from which saints were made, and from which we also must be formed. All the teachings found in the Gospel are exemplified in the Crucifix."* He was talking from his personal life. It seemed that no one in China wanted to accept his missionaries, unless they would join a different congregation. Conforti suffered a lot because of this lack of trust in the energies of his new congregation.

For Conforti, religious life would complement the missionary life. *"Faith and the Gospel assure us that the missionary life, joined to the profession of religious vows, represents the greatest calling found within the church."* Bishop Conforti could see that religious life was the most concrete and attracting way of witnessing the message of Christ to those who were called to found new Christian communities.