

*Venerable Mother Clelia Merloni*  
*Foundress of the Congregation of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*

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*The Early Years*

Clelia Merloni was born to Teresa Brandinelli and Joachim Merloni on March 10, 1861, in Forlì, Italy. On the same day she was baptized into the Roman Catholic Church in the Cathedral of Forlì. In 1864 Clelia's mother died and her grandmother became her guardian.

Her father remarried in 1866. Maria Giovanna Boeri became Clelia's stepmother. From her stepmother and her grandmother, Clelia eagerly absorbed a true Christian spirit and enthusiasm for the love of God. However, her father became increasingly absorbed in his work and his rising socio-economic status. He withdrew from the church and became an anticlerical freemason. He loved his daughter and, despite her frail health in her early years, gave her the best education possible in preparation for her future role in the family business. It was during this time that Clelia attended a private school in the suburbs of the city. In addition to the basic subjects— reading, writing, and mathematics- Clelia learned to sew, to draw, and to play the piano.

Mr. Merloni developed into a great industrialist and attempted to share his ambitions with his daughter. His impulsive ways, however, were at odds with the upbringing that Clelia's grandmother and stepmother were striving for. Clelia, with her lively and decisive temperament, was already showing signs that her father's ambitious business goals were not for her. Because of this conflict, Clelia's grandmother was driven from the home by her father, and her step-mother, after several years of struggle in her marriage, also left to live with relatives.

Clelia would often retreat to her room where she would pray and do penance for her father's misdeeds. She was known to wear a pebble in her shoe in order to offer the pain for her father's good. Because of Clelia's suffering for her father's withdrawal from the Church, she decided to give a more noble and authentic meaning to her existence, offering her life to redeem him. Thus she renounced her father's plans for her in order to consecrate her entire being to Christ and for others.