

The End of the War in Europe

V-E DAY

MAY 8, 1945



The first half of 1945 saw a rapid series of events that brought an end to the fighting in Europe.

- January 27 – The death camps in Auschwitz, Poland, were discovered and liberated.
- January 28 – The Battle of the Bulge ended on the Western Front. From then on, the German Forces retreated back into Germany itself.

From the end of January until the end of April:

- 800,000 German soldiers surrendered or were taken as prisoners on the Eastern Front.
- 1,500,000 German soldiers surrendered or were taken as prisoners on the Western Front.



April 12, 1945: President Roosevelt died.
Truman became President.

From mid-April onward, the end was inevitable:

- April 15 - 60,000 prisoners were liberated from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.
- April 19 - American Forces discovered the concentration camp in Dachau.
- April 27 - Benito Mussolini was captured in Milan and executed the following day.
- April 29 - German Forces in Italy surrendered.
- April 30 - Hitler committed suicide in his bunker beneath the streets of Berlin while the city was being taken by Soviet Forces.
- May 2 - The Battle of Berlin concluded and the German Forces surrendered to Soviet Forces.
- May 4 - Germany surrendered control of NW Germany, Bavaria, Bohemia, Denmark and the Netherlands.
- May 5 - All German U-Boats were ordered to cease offensive operations.
- May 6 - Reich Marshall Hermann Goering decided to surrender to American Forces rather than be captured by the Soviets.
- May 7-8 - All remaining German Forces surrendered unconditionally to Allied Forces.



May 8, 1945 was declared as V-E Day. The fighting in Europe was officially over.

Five Salvatorian Martyrs

Like every family across the continent, the Salvatorians in Europe also suffered during the war years. Some of our community houses and churches were damaged or destroyed; many suffered the loss of family members back home; and five Salvatorians, whom we now consider as “Martyrs,” had been killed for protecting and ministering to others:



Fr. Reinhold Unterberg SDS - Age 46 (+ May 23, 1940)

German Province

- Beaten to death in a Nazi concentration camp for refusing to divulge the names of young people who had attended his retreat house.

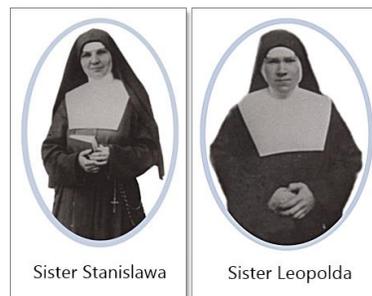
Fr. Methodius Mičola SDS - Age 31 (+ July 3, 1942) ***Czech Province***

- Shot by a Gestapo death-squad for preaching against the Nazi regime and for ministering to those who had lost family members in the camps.

Sr. Stanisława Falkus SDS and **Sr. Leopolda Ludwig SDS**

(+ January 27, 1945) ***Polish Province***

- Shot by Russian soldiers as they tried to protect the members of the community.



Fr. Titus Helde SDS - Age 39 (+ April 22, 1945) ***Austrian Province***

- Shot by a Russian soldier for protecting a group of women and girls who were hidden in the church buildings. Many women and girls of the town had been attacked and raped by soldiers in the days prior.

The ***Chronicles*** of the Salvatorian Sisters at St. Mary’s Convent in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, contain just one brief entry for May 8, summing up the feelings of all the Salvatorians across the USA:

May 8th – V-E Day.

Deo gratias! No school. Throughout the day the Sisters prayed in half-hour shifts in earnest thanksgiving and supplication.



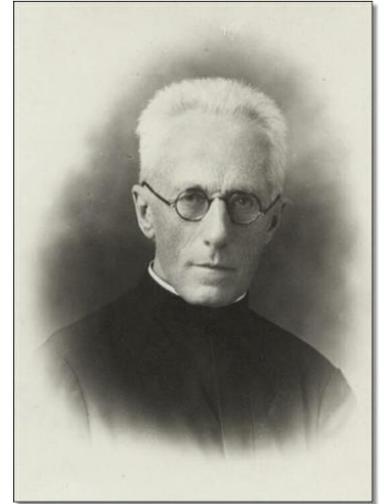


The Death of the Founder's Successor

Fr. Pancratius Pfeiffer SDS

MAY 12, 1945

In 1915, Fr. Pancratius Pfeiffer became the Second Superior General of the Society of the Divine Savior. The Founder of the community, Fr. Francis Mary-of-the-Cross Jordan – while retaining the title of “Father General” until his death in 1918 – stepped aside from the full-time administrative duties of the Society and allowed Fr. Pancratius to take on the mantle of leadership, a position he would hold for the next 30 years – years that spanned the time from the earliest days of World War I to the final days of World War II and the tense years between the wars. They were not easy years for the Society. They were not easy years for the world!



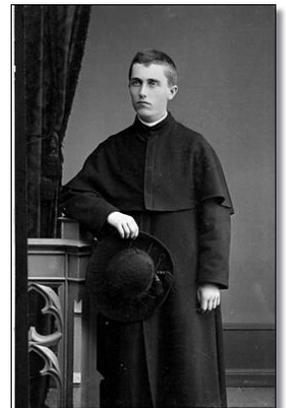
And just when it seemed that a glimmer of hope and the prospect of world peace might be on the horizon, and Fr. Pancratius might be able to lead the community in easier days, his life was suddenly and tragically cut short, just four days after V-E Day marked the end of the war in Europe.

On his return from celebrating Mass on the Feast of the Ascension with the Salvatorian Sisters, Father Pancratius was accidentally knocked down by a British military police vehicle on a busy street in the Largo Cavalleggeri section of Rome, not far from the Vatican. He died on May 12, 1945, as a result of the injuries, although not before clearing the driver of the car of any blame.



His Funeral Mass took place in the Church of the Holy Spirit and was attended by numerous cardinals, bishops, religious superiors and other dignitaries, including Prince Carlo Pacelli and his brother Giulio, Duke Caparelli, Baron Ernst von Weizsäcker, the German Ambassador to the Vatican, and Father Paolo Dezza SJ, the rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

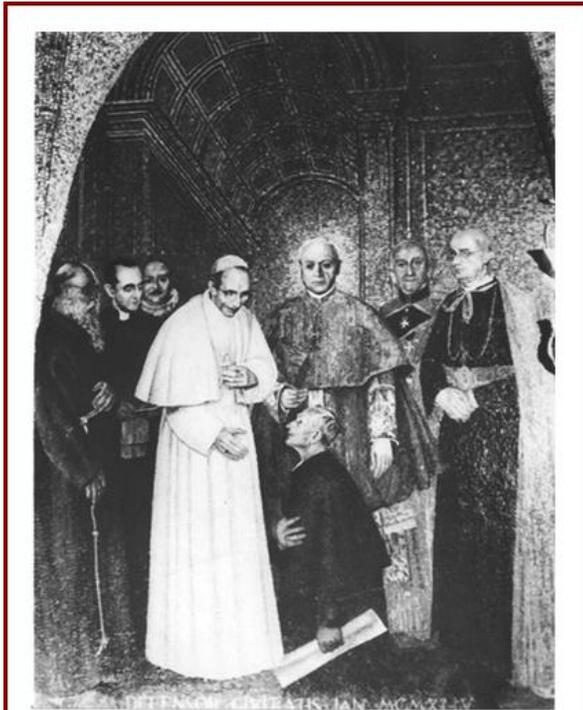
In regard to his early life, he was born Marcus Pfeiffer on October 18, 1872, in Brunnen, Bavaria. In 1888, he made the decision to look into religious life. He traveled to Rome in March of 1889 to meet with the Salvatorians. He began his Novitiate in October of that year and made his profession on October 4, 1890. He was ordained a priest in 1896. In 1902 he was elected as General Treasurer of the Society, and from that time onward he was involved in the administration of the Society in some capacity until his death.



Fr. Pancratius became well-known throughout Rome and in the Vatican. From 1908 until the start of World War I, he served as a Secretary for Pope Pius X, in the office that was in charge of receptions and papal audiences. During World War II, in the nine months of the German occupation of Rome, he met numerous times on behalf of Pope Pius XII himself with military leaders of the occupying army, trying to save the life of someone facing execution or to plead for someone's release from prison.

In Rome alone 400 hostages and condemned prisoners were saved, among them at least eight Jews freed on their way to execution. Quietly but courageously the smallest nation on earth defied the

measures of Europe's military masters. From the Salvatorian headquarters, Pfeiffer carried out these life-saving operations and maintained a tentative connection between the Vatican and the Gestapo. On his cunning hung the lives of many, and Pius XII gave Father Pancratius carte blanche ... to work in the Pope's name as intermediary between the Holy See and the German command without the need for specific official authorization. The German commander acknowledged Father Pancratius because he highly esteemed his absolute sincerity. No one can count how many people he saved, hid or received, acting on behalf of the Pope. These papal interventions, gentle as they were, were only partially successful, however. In his work ***"Rome and the Jews,"*** Jewish theologian and historian Pinchas E. Lapidé writes: "All in all, 1,259 people were arrested in the Roman raid. After freeing those who were only half-Jewish or married to Jews, thanks to Father Pancratius Pfeiffer and others, 'only' 1,007 were ultimately transported to Auschwitz on October 18, 1943." (Source: ***"The General Without Weapons"*** – Salvatorian General Archives – 2005)



This mosaic, featuring Pope Pius XII blessing Fr. Pancratius, is one of many mosaics displayed in the underground crypt of the Cathedral of St. Emidio in the town of Ascoli Piceno, northeast of Rome. Fr. Pancratius pleaded with the Nazi commanders, on behalf of the Pope, to spare the city from being destroyed during World War II.

Within the Salvatorian community also, Fr. Pancratius was able to accomplish many goals: to help reinforce Salvatorian identity following the death of the Founder; to expand the community on the international level and to work towards greater collaboration



with the Salvatorian Sisters in joint ministries; and to manage the Society in the tense years between the World Wars. He also wrote the first book on the life of Father Jordan. There is no doubt that he was a great witness to Salvatorian values, willing to place the needs of others first – even when it was extremely perilous to do so.



The city of Rome acknowledged Fr. Pfeiffer's role during the occupation by naming the street on the west side of the Society's Motherhouse in his honor.



The End of the War in the Pacific

V-J DAY

AUGUST 15, 1945

THE END OF WORLD WAR II

The War in the Pacific went on for three more months after V-E Day. It had been a far longer, fiercer and bloodier campaign than the War in Europe. But the supplies, the personnel, and the morale of the Japanese Army were dwindling quickly. The President and military leaders in the USA believed that only something drastic would finally bring an end to the war.

August 6 - The city of Hiroshima, Japan was virtually destroyed by the world's first atomic bomb.

August 9 - After no response was received from the Japanese Emperor, a second atomic bomb was dropped, this time on the city of Nagasaki.



In the days that followed, the Soviets declared war on Japan, and the Japanese sent a message to the Allied Forces saying that they would consider surrendering, provided that it would not mean the end of the Emperor's reign. The US Secretary of State rejected the demand, stating that the surrender must be "unconditional."

August 14 – Emperor Hirohito recorded a message to the people of Japan, stating that they “must bear the unbearable” and accept defeat.

August 15 – The Emperor's message was broadcasted to the people by radio. It was finally over.



The End of World War II at last!

It came at a cost – millions of lives lost, millions of homes destroyed, millions of families devastated by grief and loss.

Many places in Europe and in the Asian-Pacific islands began the task of rebuilding. It would take time ... and it would take the efforts of people across the globe.

Although people celebrated the end of the war, they knew it would be much longer before they would really feel any peace.

Our Salvatorian publications “*Manna*” and “*The Savior’s Call*” were always printed in advance, so no mention of the war’s end in Europe was made until the July issues, and the final end of the war wasn’t mentioned until the October issues. Even then, the magazines spoke more about prayers for peace, restoration of the places devastated by war, and the humanitarian aid that was taking place around the world. More than anything, it was the time for rebuilding, and the time for healing the world.

Helping to meet the demands of “rebuilding and replenishing” were aspects of our Salvatorian mission in the years that followed the war. The war was over, but the world’s needs were greater than ever. We responded.



The *Chronicles* of the Salvatorian Sisters for 1946 noted the community’s continuing efforts:

“The packing and sending of food and clothing is one of the many occupations of our kind-hearted Superior and Procurator - Sisters Euphemia and Justa. Hundreds of eleven-pound parcels were sent throughout the year to our Sisters all over Europe, to Sisters’ relatives, and to a number of unknown persons who begged for help. On March 8th, special permission was obtained from the President to ship about 1000 pounds of food to our Sisters at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Vienna. Large supplies of canned foods were contributed to the food drives sponsored by the Bishops of our country, which went to needy people in Europe. Ten large parcels of 70 pounds each were sent in November to our Sisters in Berlin.”