**Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati**

**Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati is a saint for the modern world, and especially for the young people of our time. Born in 1901 in Turin, Italy, his time on earth was short-only 24 years-but he filled it passionately with holy living. He was described by friends as "an explosion of joy." As Pier Giorgio's sister, Luciana, says of her brother in her biography of him, "He represented the finest in Christian youth: pure, happy, enthusiastic about everything that is good and beautiful."**

**From the earliest age, and despite two unreligious parents who misunderstood and disapproved of his piety and intense interest in Catholicism, Pier Giorgio placed Christ first in all that he did. These parental misunderstandings, which were very painful to him, persisted until the day of his sudden death of polio. However, he bore this treatment patiently, silently, and with great love.**

**Pier Giorgio prayed daily, offering, among other prayers, a daily rosary on his knees by his bedside. Often his agnostic father would find him asleep in this position. "He gave his whole self, both in prayer and in action, in service to Christ," Luciana Frassati writes. After Pier Giorgio began to attend Jesuit school as a boy, he received a rare permission in those days to take communion daily. "Sometimes he passed whole nights in Eucharistic adoration." For Pier Giorgio, Christ was the answer. Therefore, all of his action was oriented toward Christ and began first in contemplation of Him. With this interest in the balance of contemplation and action, it is no wonder why Pier Giorgio was drawn in 1922 at the age of 21 to the Fraternities of St. Dominic.**

**Pier Giorgio was handsome, vibrant, and natural. These attractive characteristics drew people to him. He had many good friends and he shared his faith with them with ease and openness. He engaged himself in many different apostolates. Pier Giorgio also loved sports. He was an avid outdoorsman and loved hiking, riding horses, skiing, and mountain climbing.** The mountains were Pier Giorgio's favorite place: "With every passing day, " he wrote to a friend, " I fall madly in love with the mountains; their fascination attracts me." From his youth, he was accustomed to climbing the highest peaks. He was a member of the Italian Alpine Club. He also lived through some critical situations, such as a sleepless night spent in a hole dug in the snow and a descent in a snowstorm.

For him, the mountains represented the pleasure of testing his athletic body, filling his lungs before the strain of a skiing competition or a difficult climb. He experienced the spirit of emulation always tinged with contagious joy. **The mountains for him also meant the joy shared with his companions**: either his dearest friends or perhaps more improvised companions for whom he expressed all his kindheartedness and generosity. He took upon himself the burden of those who were a bit slower or tired. At times, he would say his foot hurt and he needed to stop and rest, so as not to humiliate those who really needed to do so. Or he would go back and forth between the mountains and the plain in order to lighten the backpacks of those who were a little weaker. He did all this with a good spirit that nothing could destroy, not even fatigue. With a rather offkey voice he would start singing a song for the group or, in the silence of the camp, he would invite everyone to pray before going to sleep. **He was never one to pass on playing a practical joke, either. He relished laughter and good humor.**

**As Luciana points out, "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 lived his faith, too, through discipline with his school work, which was a tremendous cross for him as he was a poor student. Most notably, however, Pier Giorgio (like the Dominican St. Martin de Porres) lived his faith through his constant, humble, mostly hidden service to the poorest of Turin. Although Pier Giorgio grew up in a privileged environment, he never lorded over anyone the wealth and prestige of his family. Instead, he lived simply and gave away food, money, or anything that anyone asked of him. It is suspected that he contracted from the very people to whom he was ministering in the slums the polio that would kill him.**

**A month before his death at the age of 24, Pier Giorgio Frassati and some of his friends had been climbing in the Val di Lanzo, where some difficult points had to be overcome by climbing or by using a double rope. On the photo which shows him holding onto the rock gazing up toward his goal, he later wrote the words, "Verso l'alto"; in English, "toward the top." It is a short phrase which was the synthesis of his way of life: always seeking what enhances, that which carries us beyond ourselves, toward the best we can be as people, toward the best of ourselves. It is to strive toward perfection of life; in other words, toward sainthood. It means to strive toward the source of life: God.**

**Even as Pier Giorgio lay dying, his final week of rapid physical deterioration was an exercise in heroic virtue. His attention was turned outward toward the needs of others and he never drew attention to his anguish, especially since his own grandmother was dying at the same time he was. Pier Giorgio's heart was surrendered completely to God's will for him. His last concern was for the poor. On the eve of his death, with a paralyzed hand, he scribbled a message to a friend, reminding the friend not to forget the injections for Converso, a poor man Pier Giorgio had been assisting.**

**When news of Pier Giorgio's death on July 4, 1925 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. The poor, the lonely, and those who had been touched by Pier Giorgio's love and faithful example had come to pay homage to this luminous model of Christian living. Pier Giorgio's mortal remains were found incorrupt in 1981 and were transferred from the family tomb in the cemetery of Pollone to the Cathedral of Turin.**

1. It is easy to put the emphasis on us and on our progress rather than “to the top?” How do you fall into this trap? What are some common ways to decrease yourself and increase the Lord?
2. Pier Giorgio loved to play jokes, ski, and spend time outdoors yet simultaneously drew his peers to Christ. What do you do to be more human with your youth?
3. How do you encourage your youth to stand with courage in the face of Catholic social teachings?