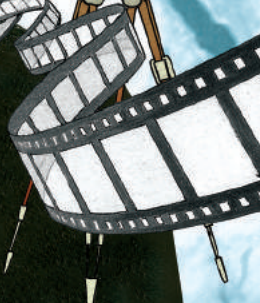
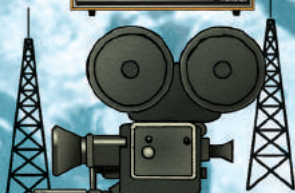
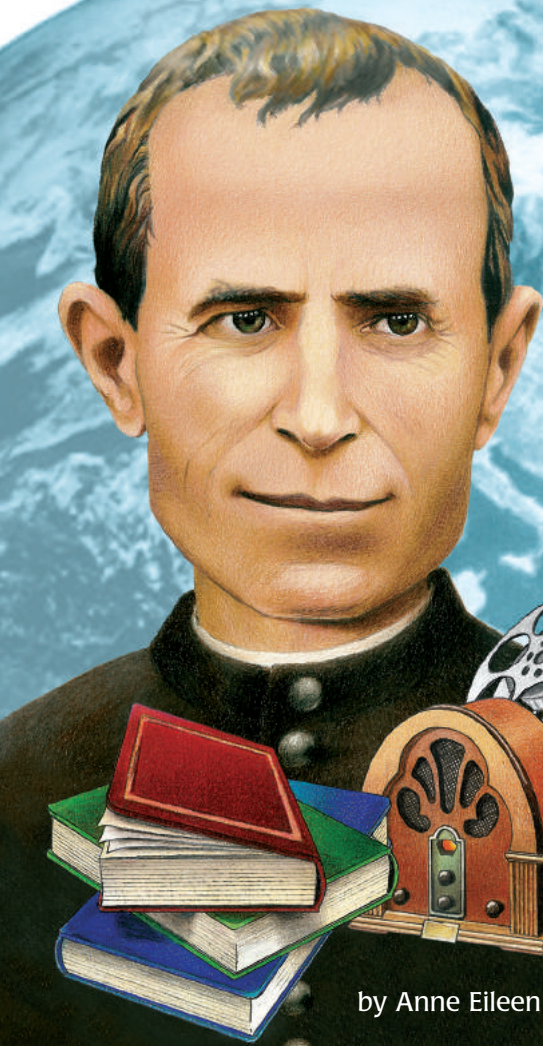


Blessed James Alberione

Media Apostle



by Anne Eileen Heffernan, FSP

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*Dedicated to the young future members
of the Pauline Family*

FARM BOY

It was an early April afternoon in northern Italy, and the air was cool. A middle-aged farmer knocked briskly on the door of his pastor's house.

"Is Father in?" he asked the housekeeper as she opened the door. "I'm Michael Alberione (Al- BARE-ee-OH-nay) from New Ponds Farm."

"Yes, indeed, I'm here," said the priest, coming up behind the housekeeper. "Come in, Michael, come in." He led Mr. Alberione into his parlor. As they sat down, he asked, "Is your family well?"

"Yes, Father," replied the farmer. "Except for our new son, who was born this morning. He's small and very thin. I'm afraid he may not live, and Teresa—my wife—is worried, too. We wondered if we could have him baptized tomorrow."

"I don't see why not," replied the priest. "Are the godparents nearby?"

"The godmother lives nearby. She's Teresa's sister and is at the house now, to

help her. But the godfather, my brother James, lives farther away, and it feels like a storm is coming."

In farming country in 1884 it was hard to send messages quickly. There were no cars yet, and no telephones.

"I could substitute for your brother," offered the priest kindly.

"Thank you very much, Father," replied the farmer. "What time shall we bring our little James?"

"Ten o'clock in the morning will be fine," Father said.

After thanking the priest again, Michael Alberione returned to the farm he was renting.

He and Teresa, with their three sons, had moved to New Ponds Farm only last November. Yet already they felt that this was not the place for them.

The owner of the farm lived far away. He had rented a large room and the stable to the Alberione family. The Alberiones lived in the large room. At night the boys went to the stable to sleep.

Michael Alberione did not find it hard to live in one room and a stable. He had always been poor. What bothered him was the farmland. Even though there were two

ponds, the ground was dry and hard. It was clay soil. The neighbors had told Mr. Alberione that his harvests would be poor. He would get very little profit to share with the farm's owner.

Many evenings Michael had told Teresa, "We need to find land that's better for farming. We're going to have to move our family again."

Baby James was baptized the next morning in the Church of Saint Lawrence. His father and Aunt Anna, his godmother, brought him home. They were happy that he had not caught cold. Anna placed him in his mother's arms. Teresa rejoiced that her youngest son was now a child of God, like his brothers.

At noon the family had a simple meal of celebration in their one large room. James lay in the cradle that each of his brothers had used before him. Papa Michael looked with pride at his new son and the three older boys. Juvenal (JOO-vuh-nuhl) was eight; John, five; and Francis, almost three. Smiling at his wife, Michael said, "We have four sons. Someday they'll be able to help with the farm work."



“Hurry, James, we need your light,” called Mamma Teresa after supper one autumn evening. It was already dark, but James’s parents and brothers were going out to the field to finish the autumn planting. James was no longer a baby. He was old enough to hold the lantern, so the others could see what they were doing. Small for his age, James struggled to keep up with everyone else as they walked toward the field.

One of his brothers joked, “James, that lantern is almost as big as you are!” The other boys laughed, too. James concentrated on keeping up.

When they reached the field, it was easier. Now everyone moved slowly, spread out in a row. James simply had to walk ahead, holding the lantern. His parents and brothers hoed the earth to cover the seed they had planted earlier in the day. The soil was not hard to hoe. The family had moved to a different farm, where the ground was better for growing crops.

James was glad to have his very own job. But he was tired, too. He couldn’t see beyond the bright light of the lantern. He tried not to stumble as he moved ahead.

“James, give us light!” his mother called. Her little son was zigzagging from right to left and back again. He was falling asleep on his feet!

“THAT’S WHO I WANT TO BE!”

“James, keep an eye on your baby brother,” said Mamma Teresa one morning. James was five now. Whenever his mother was busy, it was his job to rock the cradle of baby Thomas. This kept Thomas from crying. Mamma Teresa had brought the wooden cradle into the stable. As she left to take care of her household tasks, James began to rock the cradle gently. One of the cows had been kept inside that day. It watched the cradle-rocking with mild interest.

I’d really like to go outside, James thought. He knew it was too chilly to take the baby out unless he bundled him up. But it was not too cold to go outside himself. How could he get out and still take care of Thomas?

I know! James thought. *I’ll put a rope out the window!* He took a coil of rope from the peg where it hung and tied one end to the cradle. He opened the window slightly and dropped the other end outside. He went out the door, pulled on the rope, and let it go, so



Suddenly there was a loud crash, followed by the cries of a frightened and angry baby.

the cradle would rock. This was a little more work than rocking the cradle by hand but he was happy to be out in the fresh air. He kept it up—pulling and letting go, pulling and letting go. Suddenly there was a loud crash, followed by the cries of a frightened and angry baby.

James and his mother arrived in the stable at the same moment. The five-year-old had been pulling too hard. The cradle had rocked so much that it had moved right behind the cow and turned over. Thomas lay on the floor near the cow, screaming.

Mamma Teresa rescued her little one. She held the wailing baby under one arm and with her free hand helped James turn the cradle right-side up. Together they pulled it away from the dangerous hooves of the cow. James untied the rope. He felt tears coming to his eyes.

“You know you shouldn’t have done that,” said Mamma Teresa, trying not to sound upset.

James nodded. Thomas continued to bawl.

“I won’t do it again,” said James.

Mamma Teresa managed to smile. “I know you won’t,” she said. She knew how

serious James was about everything. He would remember this lesson.



James was beginning to learn about the world around him.

He liked to walk with his mother to a nearby town where there was a shrine to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. It was called Our Lady of the Flowers, and was a very special place for Mamma Teresa. At that shrine, she had placed each of her children under Mary's protection.

Two miles from the farm in another direction was the church of Saint Martin. Each Sunday the Alberione family walked to Saint Martin's to attend Mass. James liked the priest, Father John Montersino (MON-tare-SEE-noh), who was very kind. Near the church was the school that James's brother Francis attended.

When James was six, he began school himself. Right away, he liked his teacher, Miss Cardona. He liked school, too. He worked hard, learning how to read and write Italian. When he came home in the late afternoon, he would spend some time with Mamma Teresa, telling her what he

had learned during the day. This was their special time together.

One day Miss Cardona asked a question that her pupils had to answer one by one: "What would you like to be when you grow up?"

The question took everyone by surprise. There was a moment of silence.

James wondered, *Who do I want to be like?* He thought about his father, who worked so hard in the fields. But he didn't think he wanted to work on the farm all his life.

Maybe Uncle James, he thought. After all, he's my godfather. But a businessman's life didn't seem very exciting to him.

Suddenly James pictured in his mind a tall man dressed in black. It was Father John, the kind pastor of Saint Martin's, who was always eager to listen to the people of the parish and help them.

He imagined how he himself would look all dressed in black. *That's it!* he thought. *That's who I want to be! I want to be Father Alberione!*

Miss Cardona had already called on one of her pupils. Now she fixed her gaze on James.

"What do you want to be, James Alberione?"

“I want to be a priest,” he said clearly.

A murmur of surprise rippled through the classroom. “Can a farm boy become a priest?” one of James’s friends asked in wonder.

“Quiet, children,” said Miss Cardona. “That’s a very worthwhile goal, James.” She called on another boy, asking again, “And what do you want to be?”

James tried to pay attention to the others, but he couldn’t. A wonderful thing had just happened to him. He knew he wanted to be a priest! He could hardly wait to tell his mother. How happy she would be!

Everybody in the family would be happy—wouldn’t they?