



Fourth of five children born to Giacomo and Magdalene Cusmano; his father worked as a surveyor, and the family was well-off financially. Giacomo's mother died of cholera when the boy was three. He was a pious child, eager for the religious instruction from his father, and showing concern for the poor; the family had to lock up clothes because he would give away things in the closets to beggars. Educated at Jesuit schools. Physician, graduating from medical school in 1851. Taught at the medical school of the Royal University of Palermo. His father died in 1852, and Giacomo returned home to manage the family business and estate; he still managed to continue his education and become certified as a surgeon.

Feeling a call to religious vocation, he considered becoming a Capuchin friar, but his spiritual director recommended the priesthood. Ordained on 22 December 1860 in the archdiocese of Palermo, Italy. Devoted to penance, he fasted often and would sleep on a cross. Along with about 40 of his parishioners, he founded the Missionary Servants of the Poor on 12 May 1867 and the Sisters Servants of the Poor.