

# Shots fired at car of Mafia-fighting priest in Italy

VATICAN CITY – A southern Italian priest who is outspoken against the Mafia said gunshots fired at his car were likely meant to show him and the public that members of organized crime are still in charge of the area.

“I think it was just a serious warning,” Father Giuseppe Campisano, the pastor of St. Rocco Parish in Gioiosa Ionica, told Vatican Radio Aug. 31.

The shots were fired late Aug. 29, “not in the middle of the night, but at a time when there were still a lot of people around, so I think they wanted to be heard.”

News reports said three or four shots were fired at the car, which was parked outside the rectory. Father Campisano was not in the car at the time.

For years, the priest has received threatening phone calls and letters mailed with bullets in the envelope because of his commitment to fighting the 'Ndrangheta, the organized crime ring of Italy's Calabria region.

Father Campisano told Vatican Radio he thinks the shots were “tied to the feast of St. Rocco, most likely because of the position both I and the bishop took in trying to straighten out the celebration a bit and give it a religious sense because it's always been marked by the most absolute paganism.” This year the feast was celebrated with events Aug. 16-28.

The celebration, he said, is “linked to a form of power and control precisely because of the river of money” it brings in with an enormous fair and dozens of stalls selling all sorts of food and trinkets. Members of the 'Ndrangheta “systematically go to all the stalls for extortion,” the priest said.

During the city's celebration of the feast this year, he said, the church sponsored four evenings of presentations and reflections on the importance of the rule of law.

He said the town is made up of a large “gray zone,” where people put up with organized crime and the criminal mentality, and a small “black zone,” where the real

criminals live and operate openly.

Some parishioners, he said, “are beginning to understand the Gospel message and, sharing it, they are close to me and work with me. I count on a ‘small remnant,’ to use biblical language.”