

## *The Franciscan Missionaries of Mary*

January 6, 1877, is a landmark in the history of the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. On that date, Pope Pius IX approved its foundation. Chosen by Divine Providence to head this first small troop of Missionaries of Mary was the valiant woman with the warm and tender heart of a mother and the indomitable courage of a man—**MOTHER MARY** of the **PASSION**. Of her, the words of the prophet Isaiah ring true:

I have taken thee from the ends of the earth, and from the remote parts thereof have called thee, and said to thee: thou art my servant, I have chosen thee,...

Indeed, Mother Mary of the Passion was chosen from many to dedicate her life and her Institute to the service of the Vicar of Christ and holy Mother Church. To Mother Mary of the Passion, Pope Pius IX said when she prostrated herself in tears to kiss his feet in a gesture of gratitude for his approval of the Institute's foundation: "Kiss not only my feet, but also my hand." Already the deep and profound union of the Institute with the Holy Father and the Church had blossomed and continues to grow as years go by.

"Do not be discouraged; your Institute will be like an oak, a long time in taking root, but it will become eventually a tree which will see the centuries go by, will extend afar its branches and cover the earth." These prophetic words of an old cure to Mother Mary of the Passion find fulfillment in the rapid growth of her Institute. For how can such an Institute remain static when it is moved and guided by a Rule and Constitutions written by such a dynamic foundress in the historic Roman Coliseum still vibrant with memories of blood-curdling shouts of the pagan Romans as they thrilled to watch the early Christians being devoured by beasts? Here, seated on one of the stones of the amphitheatre and under the protection of so many glorious martyrs and virgins,

Mother Mary of the Passion, in three days time wrote the Rule and Constitutions which were to guide and inspire the future phalanx of missionary virgins.

Twenty-seven years after its foundation, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary had gone up to 3,000. At her deathbed on November 15, 1904, Mother Mary of the Passion's daughters have spread into four continents, working in 86 houses, 43 of which were located in Europe and 43 scattered in mission lands.

Steadily, the growth of the Institute increased even after the death of its Foundress as foundations in Christian and non-Christian lands continued to multiply. Today, like an oak, the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary keeps on extending afar its branches, covering the earth as 11,153 daughters of Mother Mary of the Passion belonging to 63 nationalities unselfishly labor in the vineyard of the Lord, diffusing the Charity of Christ from 433 houses in 65 countries.

Today 632 novices and 184 postulants of different nationalities are receiving in 40 novitiates the missionary training which was left to them as a legacy by their venerated Mother Foundress.

This "heroine of the missionary idea," as Georges Goyau of the Academie Francaise calls Mother Mary of the Passion, knew at her deathbed that her Institute would survive her because "it is God's work," not hers. She had always considered herself only an instrument of Divine Providence in raising up for the Church a missionary Institute that would meet the need of the times — a religious congregation in which the missionary vocation would be the first concern, and whose sole object would be the conversion of pagans by works of charity of every kind adapted to the conditions and needs of different countries.

Such was the ideal conceived by Mother Mary of the Passion of the Institute she founded which she actually brought into being.

### **For the Church and Spread of the Kingdom**

In her mind she and her daughters were to be dedicated wholeheartedly to the service of the Church as humble auxiliaries of Her pastors in the work of spreading the Kingdom of God. She desired of

her daughters to be ready at any time to go, at the call of the Church, even to the most distant and dangerous missions.

Her one consuming passion was service to the Church. She used to say, "God forces me to pray and beg prayers for the Church . . . I feel as if God had created me just for that."

And the Popes who knew her blessed her for this vocation. In 1903, during an audience, Leo XIII, imposing his hands upon her so that she might "do the work of God," told her: "Maintain in your Institute the spirit of devotion to the Church and its Head. Maintain it as a treasure. Take every care that this devotion may never diminish. . . . Every day, a prayer for the Pope."

### **The Spirit of St. Francis of Assisi**

Desiring to protect the members of her Institute from the spirit of the world, Mother Mary of the Passion wanted the spirit of the Gospel, which is the "spirit of charity, poverty and detachment, and simplicity," to permeate the lives of her daughters. Such was the spirit which animated the life of St. Francis of Assisi and all his followers. Hence, in 1882, the then "Missionaries of Mary" became Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

### **A Marian Calling**

"Our Institute," Mother Mary of the Passion repeatedly told her daughters, "is Mary at the foot of the Cross." She consecrated her Institute to the Immaculate Mother of God and made Mary Immaculate as Queen and true Superior of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. To make this Marian aspect of their vocation receive sanction from the Vicar of Christ, the Foundress wrote her directives in her Constitutions: "Mary is our path to lead souls to Jesus; our special vocation is to continue her mission on earth."

### **Threefold Vocation: Adorer, Victim, Missionary**

This Marian vocation takes on a threefold aspect: Adoration, Expiation, and the Apostolate. Every Franciscan Missionary of Mary

is to dedicate herself to adore Christ in the Blessed Sacrament exposed daily in the chapel. Daily she offers herself as a victim zealously desiring to be of service to the Church and the people of God. To spread the Kingdom in missionary activities wherever the Holy See would send her is one of her aspirations.

**ADORER.** It was Mother Mary of the Passion's belief that "Our Lady seems to have raised up the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary for a mission which she can no longer accomplish in this world — the mission to adore Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament."

**VICTIM.** The life of expiation of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary is symbolized by the little sanctuary lamp which consumes itself before the Eucharistic Christ. "Let us steadily burn out for Christ," the Foundress exhorted her daughters, "dying daily for Him, and so have the merit of martyrdom without the glory." Having understood the value of the cross and sufferings, Mother Mary of the Passion used to say: "Our sufferings and those of our sisters are the best, even the necessary, prelude to the growth of faith among the infidels. People must sacrifice themselves before conversions come; and our special vocation is to give ourselves to God," through sacrifices.

**MISSIONARY.** The heart of the great apostles beat in hers and gave her a burning missionary zeal. The very thought of pagans and infidels made her say: "When one thinks how God Incarnate shed His blood for them, how one longs to win them for Him!"

Adorer, victim, missionary these three elements Mother Mary of the Passion blended in a philosophy which stressed prayer and expiation above the active apostolate. Thus, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary were to be missionaries of God's Gospel only after they had first offered themselves as victims for the Church and its apostolic endeavors and adorers of the Eucharistic Christ, the Great Missionary.

### Works of Charity

Assured of vitality in their missionary endeavors Mother Mary of the Passion asked God for a "far-seeing mind which would be concerned with every field of the apostolate to which Divine Providence calls us

to work." She widened her interests to take in all the works of charity, refusing nothing, within reasonable limits, that concerned God's holy Church.

"We can never do enough" was the motto that expressed her eagerness to give service. This is indeed still echoed in the varied thriving works of her Institute today. But that watchword means for each Franciscan Missionary of Mary—as it did for their Foundress—a consecrated life steeped in the spirit of contemplation and self-sacrifice. It stems from their three fold vocation: Victim, Adorer, Missionary; and it relies on three loves: Jesus in the Eucharist, Mary Immaculate, and the Franciscan Rule. Of this is born the profound apostolic spirit that animates all their activities.

### Philippine Foundations and Evangelization

It was on December 10, 1912 that the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, twelve in number, set foot on Philippine soil. Their first foundations were parochial schools and workrooms, which simultaneously became centers of catechetical and social work.

In 1912, St. Agnes' Academy was inaugurated in Lipa, Batangas and on May 31, 1913, Our Lady of the Angel's Academy was founded in Atimonan, Tayabas (now Quezon).

Other schools were opened later: St. Joseph's Academy in Sariaya, Quezon, on June 29, 1921; St. Theresa's Academy, in Bauan, Batangas, on June 6, 1927; St. Helen's Academy, in San Pablo, Laguna, in June, 1928; and the Parochial School of Sampaloc, Manila, also in 1928. In 1935, Our Lady of Loreto Academy was established at Legarda Street in Manila; and in the same year Mindanao welcomed the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary at St. John's Academy in Jimenez, Misamis Occidental. Holy Rosary School (now Stella Maris College) was founded in 1937 in the neighboring town of Oroquieta.

Manila welcomed the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in 1928 with the opening of the Sampaloc Parochial School. The next year, the Convent of Virgo Fidelis at Manrique Street opened the doors of St. Francis' Home for university students from the provinces. Meanwhile,

a rest house had been built in Baguio in 1926. Here the sick and tired Sisters could recuperate.

June 13, 1931, marks the foundation of St. Anthony's Girls Institution, (St. Anthony's Home for Girls), an orphanage, at Legarda Street, Manila. With the Convent of Regina Angelorum at Legarda as center, work among the under-privileged of Manila's poor districts was then undertaken in six free dispensaries which, through the financial aid of charitable people and associations, were built in the districts of Tondo, Balicbalic, Trozo, Pandacan, Santa Cruz, and Sampaloc.

The last work to be undertaken before the outbreak of the Pacific War was the mission among the Moros of Dansalan, Lanao. The dispensary thrived only from 1940 to 1942.

### Post-War Foundations

On November 2, 1949, Our Lady of the Star Convent was founded for the moral and social upliftment of the lepers in the government-owned Tala Sanitarium. To save babies born of Hansenite parents from contagion, the Sisters opened the Nursery on July 10, 1950, in their former refectory. Since then hundreds of babies have been saved from the dreadful diseases. Seven new buildings now shelter over 260 babies from birth till they reach the age of five. Because of the lack of space, the children have to be sent away to non-leper relatives when they reach 5 years old.

The training of Filipino Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, at present, goes on at the scenic site of Tagaytay City where the Immaculate Heart of Mary Novitiate now stands. From this training ground Filipino Franciscan Missionaries of Mary have been sent to mission work in the Philippines and foreign countries like Hongkong, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Ceylon, Burma, Pakistan, Indonesia, Australia, Africa, and the United States.

Quezon City's need for schools was answered by the establishment of Stella Maris College at Cubao, in June, 1955. Cebu's poor received the ministrations of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in January, 1957, with the opening of two dispensaries. To meet the need for more

Catholic schools in this, the oldest city of the Philippines, Stella Maris School of Cebu was founded in June, 1962.

Of the twelve houses founded since 1912, only four survived the destructions of World War II. From the present eight existing houses, the charity of Christ reaches thousands of people through five schools, an orphanage, a nursery for the children of leper parents, eleven dispensaries, catechetical and social work among all classes of people, including the lepers of Tala Sanitarium.

From the city to the slums, from the town to the barrio, from the lowlands to the mountains, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary go to bring Christ to those who do not know Him yet, or only know Him too little. They not only bring Christ to them but they also bring them to Christ. On jeeps, on pedicabs, on bancas, or on foot, the Word of God is ever spread as this mighty army of missionaries march onward in their various apostolic and missionary works.