



Blessed Mary of the Passion

Foundress of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary

*"A life is a path enlightened by a face .
Many feel it and live it, but do not dare to think it."*

Jacques de Bourbon Busset (French writer and diplomat)



The face that enlightened the path of Mary of the Passion - Foundress of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary - has always been that of God. From her tenderest years until the end of her life, Mary of the Passion - a profoundly intuitive woman - let herself be led by the Spirit, ever increasingly aware and in wonderment at his presence in her and around her.

Who was she ?

How did she let herself be led ?

Born on 21st May 1839 - Tuesday of Pentecost - in Nantes, France, into a noble Christian family, H el ene Marie Philippine de Chappotin de Neuville, in religion Mary of the Passion, showed from childhood eminent natural gifts and a deep faith, although marked by the rigidity and pessimism of an education with jansenistic tendencies. She sought to know the reason for all around her, and



questioning herself, she discovered within her the hidden presence of God. This knowledge would be a path leading her from the Spirit within her to the Spirit present in all and in the whole world, an opening towards more light. It would also be for her a path of conversion which, with the help of her mother in particular, would help her, little by little, to place her proud, independent

and passionate nature at the service of her innate opening out to others, especially to the poor. The successive deaths of a much beloved girl cousin and of her two sisters marked her very painfully.

In April 1856, during a retreat, she first experienced a call from God who revealed Himself in her, during the Eucharistic benediction: ***"I will always love you more than you will love me"*** and call her to a life of total consecration. The unforeseen death of her mother delayed its realisation. In December 1860, with the consent of the Bishop of Nantes, she entered the Poor Clares whose ideal of the simplicity and poverty of Saint Francis of Assisi attracted her.



On 23rd January 1861, while still a postulant, she had another profound experience of God who invited her to offer herself as "a victim" for the Church and the Pope, according to the expression of the time. This experience marked her for life. A short time after, having become seriously ill, she had to leave the monastery. When she was well again, her confessor directed her towards the Society of Marie Réparatrice. She entered with them in 1864 and on the following 15th August, in Toulouse, she received the religious habit with the name of Mary of the Passion.

In March 1865, while still a novice, she was sent to India, to the Apostolic Vicariate of Madurai, confided to the Society of Jesus. The Réparatrice sisters there had the task of formation of sisters of an autochthonous congregation as well as being involved in other apostolic activities. It was there, that she pronounced her temporary vows on 3rd May 1866.

Because of her gifts and virtues, she was nominated local superior and then, in July 1867, she was named provincial superior of the three convents of the Réparatrice. Under her direction the works of the apostolate developed, peace - troubled by former tensions - was re-established in the communities where fervour and regularity flourished again.

But, as Francis of Assisi found his path through illness and prison, Mary of the Passion would find hers by means of passing through trials coming from what she cherished: the congregation to which she belonged and, later the Church, in its leaders.

God continues to act in her ...

In 1874, a new house was founded in Ootacamund in the Vicariate of Coimbatore, confided to the Paris Foreign Mission Society. However in Madurai the dissensions became exacerbated to some extent that, in 1876 such an extent that, in 1876 some religious, among them Mary of the Passion, were driven to leave the Society of Marie Réparatrice, reuniting, at Ootacamund under the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic of Coimbatore, Monsignor Joseph Bardou MEP.



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« Where are you leading me? »

Mary of the Passion in 1903



*Felt responsible for her sisters,
but not knowing towards what God was
leading her, let herself be guided.
So she opened out to the unforeseen of God which
jostled, upset, surprised, deinstalled. Without having
desired it, Mary of the Passion became a foundress.*

« I founded the Institute like a donkey that is whipped along... »

In November 1876, Mary of the Passion went to Rome to regularize the situation of the twenty separated sisters and, on 6th January 1877, obtained the authorization from Pius IX to found a new Institute, specifically destined for Universal Mission, and was to be called the **Missionaries of Mary**.

Following a suggestion of the Roman Congregation for the missions (formerly Propaganda Fide), Mary of the Passion opened a novitiate in Saint-Brieuc in France, where very soon numerous vocations came along. In April 1880, and in June 1882, the Servant of God went to Rome to resolve the difficulties coming from oppositions which persisted and which were threatening to hinder the stability and growth of the young Institute. This latter journey, on June 1882, marked an important stage in her life: in fact she was authorized to open a house in Rome and, through providential circumstances, found again, through Father Raphaël Delarbre, who would become her spiritual director and her adviser, the Franciscan orientation that God had indicated to her twenty-two years earlier. She then entered into relationship with the servant of God, Father Bernardin de Portogruaro, minister general of the Order of Friars Minor who later on would support her in her trials, with a fatherly solicitude. On 4th October 1882, In the Church of the Aracoeli, she was received into the Third Order of Saint Francis of Assisi and on 15th August 1885, her young religious family would become officially the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. Her constitutions would be definitively approved eleven years later, on 11th May 1896.



From one event to another, God led her and supported her...

*And her way of looking at the History of nations
and of the Church changed:*

It gave her the world as a horizon

In March 1883, due to latent opposition, Mary of the Passion was deposed from her office of Superior of the Institute, because of strong oppositions coming from the exterior. However, after an inquiry ordered by Leo XIII, her innocence was fully acknowledged and at the Chapter of July 1884

she was re-elected. It was then that her spirituality, matured in suffering, would be ready to inspire and support the expansion of the mission of the Institute in the Church. During the 27 years that she guided the Institute in the Church, Mary of the Passion founded 88 communities, in 24 countries, in 4 continents in the most distant and dangerous lands, where the Gospel would be both “good news” and “human promotion.”

Experience and the vicissitudes of life, in the light of the Spirit and with the help of her Franciscan advisers, purified, little by little, her gifts of leadership and natural pride. The Foundress was an open woman who was interested in everything and spread around her the life and charm flowing from her heart of a mother: with deep intelligence, quick understanding, a firm will, creativity, daring, prudence and energy. Her missionary zeal knew no limitations in order to respond to the calls of the poor and the abandoned. She was particularly interested in the promotion of women and the social question: with intelligence and discretion she offered collaboration to the pioneers who were working in these spheres, which they appreciated very much.

Her intense activity drew its dynamism from contemplation of the great mysteries of faith. For Mary of the Passion, all led back to the Unity-Trinity of God Truth-Love, who communicates Himself to us through the paschal mystery of Christ. It was in union with these mysteries that, in an ecclesial and missionary dimension, she lived her vocation of offering. Jesus in the Eucharist was for her, “the great missionary of the Institute” and Mary, in the disponibility of her “Ecce” and “Fiat”, traced the path of the donation without reserve to the work of God. This mysticism - which contemplated the “Most High” who dwells where the “Lowest” - opened her Institute to the horizons of universal mission, accomplished in Francis of Assisi's evangelical spirit of simplicity, poverty and charity.

She took great care, not only of the external organization of the works, but above all of the spiritual formation of the religious. Gifted with an extraordinary capacity for work and of collaboration, she found time to compose numerous writings on formation, whilst by frequent correspondence she followed her missionaries dispersed throughout the world, relentlessly calling them to a life of holiness and of fraternal union beyond all frontiers.

In 1900 her Institute received the seal of blood through the martyrdom of seven Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, who were beatified in 1946 and canonised during the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. To be the spiritual mother of these missionaries who had known how to live to the shedding of their blood, the ideal proposed by her, was for Mary of the Passion, both a great sorrow, a great joy and a time of great emotion.

Three weeks before her death, Mary of the Passion invited the sisters to live in this thought: “***I am consecrated to God, my end is Love***”. This declaration reveals the basic orientation of her life, but also the source from which she drew, identified herself and belonged.

« ***Leave me alone with the good God...*** »

Mary of the Passion

Serenely, on 15th November 1904, in Sanremo (Italy), after a short illness, Mary of the Passion went to meet this God of Love, whom she had sought, contemplated and loved during her whole life. Her mortal remains repose in a private oratory of the Generalate House in Rome.



« You will go to Heaven...»

Pope Leo XIII, 19 December 1902,

(imposing his hands on Mary of the Passion)



After a long process, the cure of a religious stricken with «Pulmonary and vertebral Tuberculoses and Pott's disease » was recognised on 5th March 2002 as being a miracle granted by God through the intercession of Mary of the Passion and on 20th October 2002 – World Day of Missions – she was finally beatified by Pope Jean Paul II, in Rome, in Saint Peter's Square.