

St Mariam of Jesus Crucified: Holy Spirit, Inspire me!

St Mariam of Jesus Crucified (1846-1878) was born in Abellin, a small village near Nazareth, in the Holy Land. Her parents were poor working people (her father a powder maker), and extremely devout. Both parents died when she was just 3 years old. She was separated from her brother, Paul, who she never saw again, and went to live with a well-off uncle. She was treated as one of his children. In childhood she was burying some birds someone had given her, which had died as she tried to wash them. She heard a voice say to her, 'All earthly things end this way! If you will give me your heart, I will remain with you for ever!'

At the age of thirteen her uncle told her that she had been offered in marriage to a relative. When she learnt what the duties of marriage entailed, and remembering her childhood encounter with Jesus, she refused, made a vow of perpetual virginity and cut off her plaits to indicate what she thought of the engagement, sending these to her uncle with the golden trinkets that had been given as pledge of the expected union. Her uncle was furious and treated her as a slave, giving her the toughest work of the house. Complaining of her treatment to a Muslim servant, he put her trials down to her Christian faith, and tried to convert her to Islam. She protested that the Catholic faith was the only true faith, whereupon he flew into a rage and slashed her throat with a scimitar. She later recalled that she did die and enter heaven, where she heard the words, 'Her book is not yet finished' and she returned to life. Her body was rescued from an ally where she had been dumped, and she was taken to a grotto and nursed back to health by a religious in a blue habit, whom she believed was the Blessed Virgin Mary. Medical examination of the scar she retained throughout life revealed two missing rings in her trachea, and confirmed her survival was miraculous.

She spent the rest of her teenage years as a domestic, moving from house to house spending herself on her work, giving away her earnings to the poor, and praying. Twice she fasted for an entire year on bread and water. Wrongly accused of theft, once imprisoned, and subject to dangers, she grew in faith and holiness. At the age of 19 she entered the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition. They were however unable to cope with the supernatural phenomenon which were already manifesting themselves. So she followed her Novice Mistress into the Carmel of Pau, where she became a Lay Sister (ie those who did the heavy work). Later she was one of the founding party that set up a new Carmel in Mangalore, India.

She was remarkable in exhibiting all the charisms – ecstasies, prophecy, stigmata, knowledge of hearts, levitation, and bilocation. She experienced extraordinary trials – calumny, sickness, hard work, false accusations, insults, misunderstandings, and a sense of abandonment by God. She was inspired to found the Carmelite Monasteries of Bethlehem and Nazareth, supervising the building works of the former. She died in the land of her Master, at the age of 33, from gangrene and suffocation after a fall whilst carrying buckets of water. She kept working until four days before her death.¹

Prayer

Because most of her prayer life was so extraordinary we will focus simply on three aspects that can be imitated by anyone.

Devotion to the Holy Spirit

She had a tremendous devotion to the Holy Spirit. Her Novice Mistress said:

¹ D. Buzy, SCJ, *Life of the Servant of God Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified*, chapters 1-7.

‘The dear child cannot conceal her extraordinary devotion to the Holy Spirit. When she speaks of Him her words are ardent and all her exterior lights up... She prays to the Holy Spirit in all her necessities with a confidence that could be proposed as a model to all souls’ (in Buzy, p. 118)

She said of the Holy Spirit: ‘It is You who enable us to know Jesus’.

‘I do not ask You for other knowledge or other wisdom but to know how to find Jesus and the wisdom to keep and never lose Him.’ And I felt the fire move and blaze in my heart. The Holy Spirit does not refuse me anything’ (in Buzy, p. 119).

In 1874 she was asked what acts she made at the end of her prayers. She answered as follows:

‘Holy Spirit, enlighten me. What I have to do and how I am to act in order to find Jesus? The disciples were quite ignorant; they were with Jesus and did not understand Jesus... The least thing disturbs and agitates me; I am too sensitive; I am not generous enough to offer sacrifices to Jesus. O Holy Spirit, when You gave them a ray of light, the disciples disappeared they were no longer what they were before; their strength had been renewed; sacrifices have become easy for them; they knew Jesus better than when He was with them. Source of peace and light, come give me light; I am hungry, come feed me; I am thirsty come quench my thirst; I am blind, come give me sight; I am poor, come enrich me’ (in Buzy, p. 119).

In May 1869 she received in an ecstasy the following prayer, which she recited and recommended to others:

Holy Spirit inspire me,
Love of God consume me
Along the true road guide me
Holy Mother Mary, look upon me
With Jesus bless me.
From all evil, all illusion
From all danger preserve me (in Buzy, p. 119).

She received the following locution from Jesus, encouraging her to spread this devotion:

‘If you wish to seek Me, invoke the light of the Holy Spirit, who enlightened my disciples and enlightens all who invoke Him. I say it to you in truth ... whoever will invoke the Holy Spirit will thus seek and find Me. His conscience will be delicate like the flower of the fields. If it is a father or mother of a family, peace will reign in that family, and their hearts will be at peace in this world and the next; they will not die in darkness but in peace. I desire ardently that priests say a monthly Mass in honour of the Holy Spirit; whoever will say it or hear it will be personally favoured by the Holy Spirit; such a one will have light and peace. He will heal the sick; He will wake up those who sleep’ (in Buzy, pp. 120-1).

This request was submitted to Pope Leo XIII, and was probably instrumental in bringing about his Encyclical ‘Divinum Illud Munus’ which led to the Pentecost Novena we recite today.

A Passion for Jesus

She had a passionate love for Jesus. She frequently prayed she might die rather than offend Him in the least way.

She particularly had a devotion to His Name. She once got a swarm of bees to return to their hive by commanding them to do so 'in the name of Jesus'. She often invoked the Holy Name of Jesus, often joined with that of His Mother, Mary: 'Mercy, Jesus! Mercy! Mary!' The One led her to the other: Jesus was the Son of Mary; Mary the Mother of Jesus. She loved the Rosary, and invoked Mary in times of temptation, experiencing her powerful help. On her deathbed the Sisters suggested the invocation 'My Jesus, Mercy', to which St Mariam replied, 'Oh, yes, mercy'. These were her last words (in Buzy, p. 287).

Gratitude and Praise

She was full of gratitude. Once when she fell and dropped water everywhere, the most natural expression to come to her lips was 'My God I thank Thee!' She thanked the doctor for the painful cauterisations she had to endure. She prized humiliations, and prayed for the Sister who calumniated her, offering herself to suffer in her place in order to rescue this Sister's vocation. The Sister in question persevered in religious life (Buzy, p. 278). She often broke into canticles of praise. She said:

'Mother, all the world is asleep and no one is thinking of God, so full of goodness, so great, so worthy of all praise! See how nature praises Him; the heavens, the stars, the trees, the plants, they are all praising Him, and man, who has knowledge of His goodness, who ought to be praising Him, he sleeps! Let us go and wake up the universe.' And she left her cell, still repeating 'let us go and praise God, sing His praises. Everything sleeps, all the world is asleep; let us go and wake them up. Jesus is not known, Jesus is not loved. He, so full of goodness who has done so much for man' (in Buzy, p. 141).

The Virtue of Work

One might think that St Mariam was forever prostrate in ecstasy, but nothing could be further from the truth. She absolutely poured herself out in work. The Holy Spirit inspired her to serve, to spend herself for others. Work was the proof of the authenticity of her prayer. She would often get up early and be in the laundry until 4 pm. She 'did the work of four'. She volunteered for the most difficult jobs. In her broken French she would offer, 'Me do it because me have time'. She kept at her duties even when she was sick. When there was a flu epidemic, she remained virtually the only one on her feet, serving her invalid Sisters (Buzy, p. 149). The Sisters to save their consciences might have conjectured that she preferred it this way, but it was not so. It was pure generosity – by nature she would have preferred, she once admitted, to sit and enjoy nature, and give God praise. On the Feast of St Martha it was customary for the Choir-sisters to replace the Lay Sisters in the kitchen. Sr Mariam was entitled to a well-needed rest, but she sacrificed this to help the Choir-Sisters get the job done (Buzy, p. 222). The devil tempted her that she would kill herself with all this work. 'Alright!' She retorted, 'Here goes!' (Buzy, p. 177) There are countless examples of such generosity. One might say she was 'prayer with legs on'!

Obedience

She was a model of obedience. Even her ecstasies stopped and started at the command of obedience. 'Jesus dwells in the obedient soul', she said. She was truly a living example of this.

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