

SAINT MARY MAZZARELLO

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Mary Dominica Mazzarello, the eldest of the seven children of Joseph Mazzarello and Mary Calcagno, was born at Mornese, a small town in Piedmont, Italy, on May 9, 1837, and she was baptized in the parish church on the same day. Little is known of her first six years, but the Mazzarello family was ruled on sound Christian principles, and it is certain that Mary received a truly Christian upbringing from her infancy. It is interesting to note that this child who was destined to become the co-foundress of the daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, was born in the month of May, Our Lady's month, that she died in the month of May 44 years later, and that she spent her first years under the shadow of a shrine which was vowed by the inhabitants of Mornese to Mary, Help of Christians, for protection during the cholera epidemic in 1836, and was blessed in 1845.

There were no schools in many Italian towns and villages in the early nineteenth century, and Mary had to rely on her parents for any instruction she received. She was given none of the book-learning common in our own schools, but her parents more than made up for this by thoroughly grounding their daughter in the Christian virtues which she was later to practise so heroically. Her mother and father concentrated on providing their daughter with a deep religious spirit, with a generous heart and with a strong character. They succeeded to such an extent that Mary became the model of all the girls in the district. Her father took care to shield his daughter from many worldly sights and amusements, which he considered detrimental to her Christian formation, and it was only with deep reluctance that he took her with him on rare occasions to the village fairs. This is all the more important when it is considered that a spirit of impiety was prevalent in Mornese and the surrounding district at the time, and it was quite easy for young people to be led astray; in fact it was difficult for them to remain good.

On her mother's knee Mary learnt of the goodness of God and of His holy Mother, and lisped her first prayers; by means of the wonderful things of creation surrounding them, Mrs. Mazzarello also taught her to love and respect the great virtue of purity. It is indeed a pity that not all children are given such a truly Christian education in the home. The number of ruined lives that would be saved is incalculable.

FIRST COMMUNION AND CONFIRMATION

Mary was admitted to her first Communion at the age of ten, quite early in those days, and in one of her early Communions she made a vow of virginity which she did not reveal to anyone until many years later.

Certainly her mother's instructions in the matter of purity were bearing fruit. Mary was confirmed two years later on September 30, 1849.

In 1849 a new curate came to Mornese —Father Dominic Pestarino. A young man of thirty-two, he was a native of Mornese and he immediately set himself to root out evil influences and bring his lukewarm flock to a fervent state. Mary attended his catechism classes in the parish church and Father Pestarino, a zealous and holy man, was destined by God to shape the whole fabric of her life. Although she could barely read and write, Mary possessed a most retentive memory, and with intense application she soon reached the top of the class, so that Father Pestarino could uphold her as an example to his other pupils. "I don't want to be second to anyone," Mary would say, "I'm not afraid of the boys and I'm going to beat them all." And she did! But in it all Father Pestarino detected the seeds of self-love, which he set himself to root out before they became too strong. Mary showed herself rather stubborn by nature, but aided by prayer and grace and the wholesome advice of Father Pestarino in her weekly confession she was able to overcome these faults. Mary was already treading the way of perfection. Father Pestarino allowed her to go to Communion daily, another rare occurrence in those days, and with the fervent reception of the Sacraments as its basis her life became one Intense striving after perfection.

Mary's time was now spent between the church and her home, where she worked in the fields and vineyards with her father and assisted her mother with the many household tasks and the education of her younger brothers and sisters. In the fields she worked harder than her father's hired labourers, and as they did not like being beaten by a girl, it was at times difficult for her father to obtain labour. "That girl is made of iron; it's all we can do to keep up with

her," they would complain.

It took an hour to walk from the Mazzarello homestead to the church, and her parents often tried to dissuade her from going to daily Mass, particularly in the winter time when roads were muddy and colds were rife, as the long walk without breaking her fast, coupled with the hard work in the fields, threatened to undermine her strength, but Mary pointed to her extremely robust body and won her point. One morning her father was awakened by a noise at 2 a.m., and on investigating found that Mary and a younger sister were preparing to go to Mass. She had no clock, and fearing to miss Mass had got out of bed. "But it is only two o'clock," remonstrated her father. "Good!" answered Mary, "We shall have more time to pray before Mass begins," and off to Church went the two girls. If Mary arrived before the doors were open, she would kneel in prayer on the steps or, if others came early also, she would begin talking of religious things to prevent distractions.

On another occasion Mary was considerably delayed at church at a time when there was extra work to be done at home. Her mother chided her on her return, and suggested that on such occasions it might be better to stay away from Mass, so that the work could be done. "Do not worry, mother," replied Mary, "I shall work twice as hard and the work will be completed by evening." And she did set herself to work twice as hard as usual, and the work was completed before nightfall.

Growing up in an atmosphere of intense piety and hard work, Mary learnt to become mistress of herself. She mortified herself in eating and drinking, she controlled her curiosity, she checked moments of impatience, she practised prompt obedience, she observed modesty in dress and speech and she sacrificed all vanity, to which she was strongly subject. She was impelled and strengthened in all these things by a great spirit of prayer, by the continual thought of the presence of God and by her well-performed practices of piety. She had a great natural dislike for confession, but she overcame her repugnances and was most candid with her confessor, with the result that she drew great strength from this Sacrament.

CHILD OF MARY

When Mary was eighteen, in 1855 to be precise, Father Pestarino, at the request of some of the girls of the parish and after mature consideration with learned theologians set up the Pious Union of the Children of Mary in his parish, and so started a movement that was soon to spread throughout Italy. As may be expected, Mary was one of the first to join this union. Father Pestarino admitted only the best girls of the parish, and they made such strides in the spiritual life that two years later the Bishop of the diocese gave his approval to the union, and himself came to Mornese to invest the members with the Medal of Mary Immaculate in a public ceremony. Mary now advanced at even greater pace along the road of perfection. The members of the union lived with their families, but they met daily, if possible, for Mass, for spiritual readings, for visits to the Blessed Sacrament and for other pious practices. A public confession of faults formed part of their weekly meeting, and it was at one of these meetings that Mary accused herself of the enormous crime of allowing a whole fifteen minutes to pass without thinking of God. But Mary was soon to need all her virtue, for a great trial was about to test her.

THE NURSE BECOMES ILL

In 1860 a typhus epidemic broke out around Mornese, and the whole family of one of Mary's uncles was stricken with the disease. Father Pestarino realized that only Mary could nurse the family back to health.

He obtained the reluctant consent of her family to send her to nurse them, and she humbly obeyed, even though she protested that she was sure that she would catch the dreaded disease. In a few weeks the family had recovered, and Mary was at death's door. It was some weeks before she was out of danger and months of convalescence followed. It was a sadly weakened Mary who returned home and her father refused to allow her to work in the fields. Mary was disheartened for she could not bear to be idle, and she determined to turn to needlework, as this was an occupation which would not require great physical strength. Mary thought that if she could learn needlework herself, she could later teach the girls of the township to sew; but there was also at the back of her mind that she might thereby be able to teach them their Christian religion, and so lead them with her along the paths of virtue. Her vocation was being shaped.

One day as she was walking in the fields at the highest point in the district, she was startled to see before her a very large building which she was certain did not exist. She rubbed her eyes; she was certain that she was not dreaming; yet there it was.

She informed Father. Pestarino of the occurrence and, wise man of God that he was, he told her to forget about such day dreams and not to be so foolish as to speak any more about them. Yet later she recognized the building that she then saw as the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.

TEACHER OF NEEDLEWORK

With Petronilla, another member of the Pious Union, Mary spent six months working with the tailor of the town, and then another six months with the town's only seamstress. So proficient did the girls become that on the departure of the seamstress to another town they were able to take over her business. Soon there were a number of young apprentices wishing to learn dress-making, and the girls had some difficulty in renting quarters large enough to accommodate them all. Work came in quite fast, and it is interesting to note that Mary would not make garments that she did not consider sufficiently modest. What would she say then of many of the fashions of today? The two sewing mistresses undertook to shelter two little girls whose mother had died, and whose father was the counterpart of our modern commercial traveller. Petronilla began to live on the premises and look after them, but Mary continued to go home each evening, despite the fact that she would very much like to have remained and led a common life with the others. The humble beginnings of a great work were thus being laid, when the great apostle of Turin, the father of thousands of homeless boys, appeared on the scene.

DON BOSCO MEETS FATHER PESTARINO

For some time Don Bosco had been urged to organize some institution which would do for girls what his Salesians were doing for boys. In one of his dreams he had seen a town square full of girls appealing to him for help, and a majestic lady had asked him to look after them for they were her daughters. Whilst this problem was on his mind he had the good fortune to meet Don Pestarino at a meeting of priests. They walked part of the way home together, and made themselves known to each other. Don Pestarino had a small group of girls seeking to perfect their lives and to help others, whilst Don Bosco was seeking to establish an order of nuns to work for girls. Both priests felt that their meeting was not a chance one but that it had been arranged by God. Some more meetings followed at Turin, and Father Pestarino became so infatuated with Don Bosco and his work that he sought to become a Salesian; Don Bosco was willing to accept him and told him that his obedience would be to remain at Mornese and look after the girls of the Pious Union of Mary Immaculate. In bidding him farewell, Don Bosco gave Father Pestarino a medal each for Mary and Petronilla, and a card for Mary; on the card was written: "Keep on praying hard; but do as much good as you can for young girls; do everything possible to prevent sin, even if it is only one venial sin."

Don Bosco's message inflamed Mary and her companion with new zeal. Hitherto they had concentrated on prayer and practices of piety; now they turned more directly to the Salesian preventive system, the prevention of sin by keeping the girls fully occupied and shielding them from occasions of sin. All the girls were urged to attend Mass daily if possible. Work began soon after Mass. Mary encouraged the girls to add "May Jesus Christ be praised" to the greeting they gave each other every morning. For the first half-hour work was done in complete silence and then there was a short meditation or some spiritual reading. The Hail Mary was recited as each hour struck. Talking was allowed after the first half-hour, but Mary forbade the girls to talk of frivolous things or to talk in whispers. At ten o'clock all returned home for dinner, it being customary at Mornese to dine as early as that, and work was resumed at noon. During the afternoon the Rosary was said by all, and at afternoon-tea time the girls were permitted to go to the church for a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, after which work was continued until dark. Mary continually urged the girls to remember the presence of God, and she exhorted them to make every stitch an act of the love of God.

Later Mary and Petronilla used to gather the girls on Sundays in the courtyard of the house where they rented their rooms and there they instructed them in the Catechism or engaged them in honest, healthy recreation. They also organized walks into the neighbouring countryside, and took the girls in a group to Church services. Without realizing it they were engaging themselves in the Festiva Oratory work of Don Bosco.

DON BOSCO COMES TO MORNESE

In the late summer of 1864 Don Bosco himself came to Mornese, bringing with him some of his boys and the band of the Oratory at Turin. The town turned out in force to give the party a royal welcome, and the townspeople all helped to lodge and feed the party during its stay at Mornese. Don Bosco spoke to the Children of Mary, and expressed surprise at finding in those simple countryfolk such detachment from worldly things and such enthusiasm for heavenly things. He left after a stay of four days, but not before he had promised to send his Salesians to conduct a boys' school which was to be built at Mornese. Father Pestarino blessed the foundation stone of this school, in the presence of all the inhabitants of the town in 1865, and Don Bosco sent a special representative from Turin for the ceremony.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Shortly afterwards Father Pestarino determined to make available to the girls of the Union of Mary Immaculate, a house which he had built for himself near the church. Some of the girls of the Union decided to leave their families and live there; others decided to remain with their families. Mary's parents were quite firm in their intention not to let her join the community, but Father Pestarino brought all his influence to bear on Mr. Mazzarello and the ageing gentleman who had a great respect and affection for the priest, capitulated. He then persuaded his wife, and Mary was free to go.

"But what will you do?" her mother asked Mary as she was leaving, "You will die of hunger."

"If I am in need I shall return," answered Mary, "and I am sure that you will not shut the door in my face."

And so with three other girls Mary took up residence in Father Pestarino's house near the church. "You will live here on trial," Father Pestarino had told them, "Continue as you have been doing in the workshop and we shall see what the future will bring; but remember quite well that if anyone wishes to return home she is quite free to do so."

The life of poverty, work and prayer attracted other girls to join the community, but not all of these persevered. At first the girls lived most poorly; they had to work hard to support themselves, and often there was not enough to eat. But Mary was not to be discouraged by such hardships; she encouraged the others to persevere, and the blessing of Almighty God was evidently upon the little community. People who had earlier forecast an early end to the venture, began to help the girls when they saw the exemplary lives they led. As the numbers grew, the girls themselves asked for a superior. Father Pestarino told them to choose one for themselves, and Mary was the unanimous choice.

In December, 1867, Don Bosco again came to Mornese, this time for the blessing of the chapel of the new college. Such was the attraction he had for the people of Mornese that, although he arrived at 1 a.m., a large number of the inhabitants greeted him in the streets. Later in the day Don Bosco gave a conference to the members of the young community, and he felt sure that here was his projected congregation of nuns in embryo.

In the ensuing years Don Bosco and Father Pestarino met very often to confer about the sisters, and eventually in 1871, Don Bosco with his Chapter in Turin decided upon the foundation of his order of nuns. A convent was necessary for them and the proposed school was selected. Father Pestarino was taken aback at this decision, as the people of the town had set their hearts upon a boys' school, and he feared that they would not welcome Don Bosco's decision; in fact he feared reprisals. Don Bosco informed Pope Pius IX of his designs; the Pope not only consented to the plans, but actually encouraged Don Bosco. He told him to draw up the constitutions of the Congregation and give them a trial, stating that the sisters would depend on the Salesians in the same way as the Daughters of Charity depended on the Vincentians.

Don Bosco drafted the rules and gave them to Father Pestarino, instructing him that in selecting applicants he should accept only those who were obedient even in the smallest things, who were not offended when corrected and who showed a spirit of mortification. On January 29, 1872, Father Pestarino gathered the sisters together for the election of a chapter, and Mary was chosen as superior. In her humility she wished to resign the office immediately, but she was persuaded to accept it with the title of Vicar until Don Bosco would send a superior. Don Bosco had been unable to attend the ceremony as he was at the time seriously ill in Turin.

It was at this time also that the Municipal Council of Mornese, of which Father Pestarino was a member, decided to pull down the old dilapidated presbytery and build a new one. In seeking a residence for Father Pestarino the Council

chose the sisters' house, and transferred the sisters for the time being to the partly finished school. Perhaps it was a ruse to save face for Father Pestarino, but it caused an uproar in the town and the sisters were unpopular for many years to come.

One of the many trials and tribulations the sisters had to suffer was the poor food. Breakfast consisted only of dry bread. They seldom saw milk, eggs, cheese and fish; they never ate meat. Yet Sister Mazzarello was so mortified that she did not appease her hunger even on feast days. None of the sisters complained; they deemed it a great privilege to be chosen by God to undergo such sufferings. Sufficient time was given to prayer and spiritual exercises, but by far the greater part of the day was devoted to hard work, and even during their recreations the sisters carried materials for the workmen who were finishing the college building. Washing clothes at the public washing place of Mornese was one of their most frequent tasks, and Mary, although Superior, always gave the lead, choosing the hardest and dirtiest tasks for herself.

As yet the sisters wore no special habit, and Don Bosco, when asked what they would wear, would reply: "For the time being let them be satisfied with the habit of virtue; later on we shall see." Eventually a brown habit with a blue veil was chosen; professed sisters wore a crucifix and the novices a medal of Mary Immaculate. And all this time Sister Mazzarello kept asking for the Superior, Don Bosco was going to send, but Don Bosco had no intention of changing her. He planned instead to give the Congregation a more definite shape, and arranged for a retreat to begin on July 31, 1872, and to be followed by the first professions of those who were ready for this step, and by the clothing of new novices. At last the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians was a reality.

FIRST VOWS

The Bishop of the diocese was at Mornese at the end of July, and he himself wished to preside personally at the retreat. When Don Bosco was informed of the presence of his Lordship, he declined to go to Mornese out of respect for the bishop, although he had promised to be present at the ceremony. The bishop thereupon sent his secretary to bring Don Bosco at any cost, and the man of God humbly acquiesced to the bishop's wishes. As, however, Don Bosco could not afford to remain long at Mornese, the ceremony of profession and clothing was advanced from the 8th of August to the 5th, the feast of Our Lady of the Snow, and the retreat was finished as scheduled. The bishop himself presided at the ceremony, at which eleven sisters, including Sister Mazzarello, took the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience for three years, and fifteen novices were clothed in the religious habit. The bishop then motioned to Don Bosco to speak, and although the latter endeavoured to withdraw, he obeyed and spoke to the sisters from the very depths of his heart. "You will suffer," Don Bosco told them, "and I see with my own eyes that people will persecute you, will deride you; even your very relatives will turn their backs on you. But do not be surprised at all this. If you keep yourselves humble and mortified, you will become holy and in time you will do much good to many others. The world is full of snares; but if you live according to your rule you will do great good to your own souls and to those of your neighbours." Sister Mazzarello was appointed Superior, but given the title of Vicar, "because," said Don Bosco, "the real superior is Our Lady herself."

A religious institute is blessed if it is governed well from its very inception, and in the choice of superior, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, was singularly fortunate. Sister Mazzarello despite her lack of learning possessed definite ability for governing her community, as may be seen from what Pope Pius XI said of her in 1936: "This small, simple, poor country girl, whose education had been most rudimentary, showed quite early that she possessed a talent, one of the greatest of talents—the talent for governing. Her choice by St. John Bosco was proved not only in the firm, secure foundation of the new family of Mary, Help of Christians, but also in the marvellous and rapid growth and spread of the flourishing institute."

SISTER MAZZARELLO, THE WOMAN

Sister Mazzarello was a little above average height, well built and possessed of very sharp features. She had a high forehead, a regular nose, and penetrating, lively chestnut eyes. She had a medium sized, regular mouth, and her cheekbones, upper lip and chin were all slightly raised. Her complexion was pale and slightly brown, and she coloured up quite quickly whenever she did violence to herself.

Spiritually Sister Mazzarello was inclined to piety. She received the Sacraments frequently, was most devoted to Mary, Help of Christians and showed herself obedient even in the smallest things. She shunned ease and luxury, and if obedience had not checked her she would have worn herself out with mortifications and penances. In matters of purity she was beyond all reproach. She was ready to check evil where- ever it broke out, and in her work for God and souls she was not affected by human respect in the least degree. Although she could hardly read or write, she spoke well and clearly, and it often seemed that she was inspired by the Holy Ghost. She was always ready to receive advice from her superiors, and asked her companions to advise her when she failed. She walked erect with her head slightly inclined forward, and her actions were determined, but dignified and simple. When speaking of heavenly things she often became radiant and her face took on a heavenly look. Everything about her helped to infuse some of her zeal and love for God into others. Walking or talking she was accustomed to hold her crucifix in her left hand. She was extremely active but performed every action calmly and recollectedly. She was full of charity towards everyone she met, and quickly gained a stranger's confidence. She studied how to lead souls to be virtuous and always spoke well of her neighbour, preferring to change or break off conversation rather than say or hear anything uncharitable.

Mother Mazzarello, as the sisters now began to call her, was the only one who thought that she was unfitted to be the superior of the growing community, and she continually besought Don Bosco to change her. One of the sisters, who had been fortunate in receiving a good education, began instructing the other sisters so that they could in their turn teach girls in the future schools of the Institute, and in simple humility the superior, Mother Mazzarello, took her place in the benches with the other sisters, and showed herself a most attentive pupil. It was not long before the Institute was able to boast several teachers with diplomas, and a school was established for the girls of the district.

Don Bosco often sent women with likely vocations to Mornese, and if they were well educated Mother Mazzarello welcomed them most warmly as her future successors, but Don Bosco had sent them to learn obedience, not to govern. The real family spirit which existed in the growing community of professed nuns, novices, postulants and students was in a large measure due to the influence of the Mother Superior herself. Don Bosco had obtained the services of two of the Sisters of St. Anne, an experienced congregation working in Turin, to advise the community at Mornese for some months, but after some time there the sisters declared, "Let us go back to Turin, this superior needs no direction in virtue."

By the spring of 1874 there were in the community, 14 professed members, 8 novices, 8 postulants and 17 school girls, and Father Pestarino was able to write to Don Bosco: "What consoles me most is the real union and spirit of charity, the harmony and the holy joy which reigns among all. They are edifying in their piety, are really detached from the world and don't utter the least complaint in their work." Don Bosco later declared to Father Cagliero, a future Salesian missionary and Cardinal, "Mother Mazzarello has special gifts from God. There are virtues in abundance to make up for her scanty learning. She is prudent, has wonderful insight into things, and a gift for governing, based on kindness, charity and unshaken faith in God."

DEATH OF FATHER PESTARINO

The sisters were successfully overcoming the opposition of the inhabitants of Mornese when a fresh trial assailed the community. On May 15, 1874, Father Pestarino was taken suddenly ill. Mother Mazzarello was informed immediately and hastened to his bedside.

"Where are the sisters and the girls?" asked Father Pestarino.

"In church praying for you."

"Good . . . good . . . courage, my children. Have confidence in God."

Shortly after saying this Father Pestarino was dead. The whole district was heartbroken at the loss of this good, kind and pious pastor. As for the sisters, many thought that they would not be able to carry on, but they placed all their confidence in God and the help of Don Bosco.

"Don Bosco! He is in Turin and has too many boys to maintain, and too much to do to look after you."

But Don Bosco did look after the sisters. Father John Cagliero arrived the following morning for the funeral of Father Pestarino, and shortly afterwards his cousin was appointed spiritual director of the sisters. On his death in September of the same year, Father James Costamagna was appointed to the office.

Don Bosco came in person to visit the sisters on June 14, and on the following day received the first vows of eight novices, and clothed fifteen postulants. Then he gathered the sisters together for the election of a superior general and chapter, both essential if the Congregation was to expand as he planned. As expected, Mother Mazzarello was unanimously elected Superior General, and realizing this time that it certainly was the will of God, she did not try to excuse herself.

SUPERIOR GENERAL

Mother Mazzarello now devoted her whole time and attention to the direction of the institute. "Oh, my companions," she told the sisters, "What a joy it is for us poor country folk of Mornese to become the spouses of Jesus Christ and the daughters of Don Bosco and Mary, Help of Christians. O my dear Lord, what a grace! What a great grace! We thank you for it." "She practised the most profound humility at all times especially when reproved," Father Costamagna tells us, "Sometimes I purposely tested her rather severely; she kept silent and complained to no one; she even suffered her humiliation joyfully as if the most natural thing in the world had happened. Her obedience was perfect. A word from Don Bosco or the local superior was law for her, and immediately the order was made known, she herself obeyed and made the others obey if necessary—blindly, cheerfully, promptly."

One day Mother Mazzarello and some of the sisters were out walking, when they came across a poorly-clad, hungry little girl of five or six, who touched their hearts, and the good mother immediately gave the little waif her portion of food for the journey. Then she sought out the sister with the best cloak, and forthwith proceeded to cut it up for a garment for the girl. The pieces were distributed among the sisters to sew together, whilst she herself gave the little girl a lesson in catechism and prayer. When the garment was finished she put it on the girl, and then gave her the odd pieces of material, telling her to take them to her mother so that the garment could be repaired when it began to wear. This incident shows not only the charity of Mother Mazzarello, but also her great care not to waste the least thing.

At Mornese Mother Mazzarello was accustomed to ask the time of the different members of her community whenever she met them during the day. The inexperienced would answer that they did not know or they would run to look at a clock, but she herself would answer with a smile: "It is time to love Jesus; let us love Him with all our heart." Among other favourite sayings of hers to her community may be cited the following: "At the hour of death you will be very happy to have made this sacrifice;" "What have you done for Jesus today?"; "What are you thinking of at this very moment?"; "What resolution have you made at meditation this morning?" All this was not intended to reprove her subjects, but to make them remember the presence of God and the great reward that awaited them if they remained faithful to their vocations.

Learning that Don Bosco had a practice of giving his boys a "good-night" sermonette, before they retired to rest, Mother Mazzarello imitated him also in this, and spoke briefly but fervently to her sisters before they retired, even though she always experienced great difficulty in public speaking.

And here is recalled another delightful little practice of hers which shows the simple confidence that this humble soul placed in the Mother of God. At night after everybody had retired to rest, she would lock the doors and place the key at the foot of the statue of Mary, Help of Christians, whom she looked upon as the real Superior of the Institute. Although she suffered from very severe headaches she took little food, worked hard, rose before four in the morning and mortified herself continually during the day, but she sedulously looked after the welfare of the other sisters, especially when they were ill.

Mother Mazzarello showed remarkable insight in accepting or rejecting those who wished to join the Congregation. Catherine Daghero became a postulant with the best of dispositions, but she soon began to fear that she could not live the life of the sisters, and did not wish to carry on. "You must remain here," Mother Mazzarello told her, "the more you suffer now the happier you will be later on and the more good you will do. When you have received the habit all these things will disappear." The day before her clothing Catherine was most upset, but Mother Mazzarello was adamant and insisted that she should receive the habit. Catherine obeyed and at the moment the habit was put on her all her worries disappeared. She became a most fervent sister and made such progress in the spiritual life that six years later she succeeded Mother Mazzarello as Superior General of the Congregation.

PERPETUAL VOWS

On August 28, 1875, the first perpetual professions were made, Mother Mazzarello being among the number of those who vowed themselves to God for life. After the ceremony Don Bosco spoke of rapid development in the near future, and fired the sisters with enthusiasm for the missions at a time when he himself was preparing to send his first missionaries abroad. The promised development took place and within the space of two years the sisters had ten foundations. Writing to Father Cagliero who was in South America with the first band of Salesian missionaries, Mother Mazzarello described the new foundations, and then naively added: "I forgot to tell you of the house which we have in Heaven; it is always open and the Rector of this House makes decisions without having recourse to either Superiors or Chapters. He just takes anyone He wants, and has already taken seven sisters."

MISSIONARY EXPEDITIONS

In September, 1877, the first expedition of sisters set sail for South America. Don Bosco sent them first to Rome where he arranged an audience with the Pope. Mother Mazzarello accompanied them to the eternal city although she greatly feared that such an ignorant Superior General would give his Holiness a very bad impression of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. As may be well imagined, the Pope was most impressed with her virtues, particularly with her great humility. Mary later accompanied the sisters to the boat at Genoa, and with true maternal solicitude inspected all their cabins carefully before bidding them farewell.

Because of the toll the climate of Mornese was having on the health of the sisters —several had died, and others had been seriously ill—Don Bosco decided to change the mother house to a more healthy locality. Nizza Montferrato was selected, so a convent evacuated by the Capuchins in 1855 was acquired there, and the changeover, begun in 1878 was completed early in the following year. The school at Mornese was sold; perhaps it was a punishment from God for the continued hostility and indifference towards the sisters during the early years of the Congregation.

Ten more missionary sisters sailed for South America on January 1, 1880. One of the sisters, Emilia Borgna, was very delicate and the leader of the expedition was not in favour of taking her to America, but to all her remonstrances Mother Mazzarello replied: "Take her, for you will find that she will do more work than you think she can do, and she will succeed very well indeed." Sister Emilia went and spent more than fifty years in South America working for the poor and abandoned girls of that continent.

In August, 1880, the sisters held their first general chapter. Although Mother Mazzarello had hoped to be relieved of the burden of office, she was re-elected Superior General. It would appear that she already had a presentiment of her approaching death for she said to one of the sisters who had insisted that she should be again elected as Superior General, "No, because half way through next year you will suffer inconvenience at having to put someone in my place."

Early in 1881 she farewelled yet another group of missionaries. This time the sisters proceeded to Turin for a solemn farewell in the Basilica of Mary, Help of Christians on January 18. On the night of January 24, Mother Mazzarello who was accompanying the missionaries as far as Marseilles, woke up the sister who slept in the room with her, and told her that Sister Arecco had died. The sister had been ill in bed when the missionaries left Nizza Montferrato. In the morning all the sisters were asked to pray for the soul of the departed sister, and the announcement was confirmed with a telegram later in the morning. But that is not all. Sister Arecco had an intense desire to speak with Mother Mazzarello before she died, and the latter was away from Nizza Montferrato. However, Sister Arecco suddenly sat up and said that she saw her beloved Superior. The sisters present at her bedside saw nothing, but Sister Arecco, having seen Mother Mazzarello, was happy to die. Perhaps it was a case of bilocation!

Some days later Mother Mazzarello spoke to the missionary sisters and told them that one night as she was going to sleep, Sister Arecco had appeared to her.

"But you are dead," stammered Mother Mazzarello, "How is it that you are here? Perhaps you are in Purgatory, tell me what you want, but do not frighten me. Have you saved your soul?"

"Yes, by the mercy of God, but I am in Purgatory."

"And will you be there long?"

"Only until Easter, thanks to the prayers of the community; but if you will pray for me I shall go to Heaven earlier."

The Lord has allowed me to come to tell you this."

"I shall do that willingly. Now tell me my defects so that I can correct them. Go on, tell me what there is in me that displeases God."

"And she told me before she disappeared," concluded Mother Mazzarello. The great humility of their superior in her simple exposition of what had happened made a great impression on the sisters.

Although Mother Mazzarello was far from well she saw the sisters off at Marseilles on February 6, and then on her return to the convent in Marseilles, she had to go immediately to bed. The doctor diagnosed her case as advanced pleurisy, and it was not until March 17 that she was able to appear amongst the community again. She expressed a desire to end her days at the Mother House at Nizza Montferrato, and accordingly on March 19 she set out for Italy via Nice, where she met Don Bosco and asked him bluntly whether she would be cured.

Don Bosco in reply told her a story.

One day Death came and knocked at the door of a convent. The porteress opened the door.

"Come with me," said Death. But the porteress replied that she could not go for there was no one to take her place. Then Death went into the convent and invited all those he met to go with him; sisters, teachers, postulants, students, even the cook. But all answered that they could not accept the invitation, because they had too much to do. And so Death went to the Superior, and said: "Come with me." Even the Superior put forward her excuse, but this time Death insisted: "The Superior must give good example to all the others, even on the road to eternity; come, for I cannot possibly accept your excuses."

What could she do? The Superior bowed her head and followed.

Mother Mazzarello listened attentively to the story and understood it perfectly, but so as not to alarm the sisters present with her she made pretence to treat it as a joke.

DEATH OF MOTHER MAZZARELLO

On March 28 Mother Mazzarello reached Nizza Montferrato to the great joy of the whole community. She was apparently well, but on April 15 she was again confined to her bed. Although her strength was gradually failing she continued to take an active part in the direction of the Congregation. On April 27 she received Extreme Unction and the end appeared near, but she lingered on, and by May 5 there were signs of improvement. "I shall die willingly," she said, "but the Lord would please me very much if he would leave me in the world until Monday (May 9) . . . my birthday . . . I shall be 44 . . . then there is still much to suffer before dying."

During these last days she turned instinctively to the Crucifix and the sufferings of her Divine Lord. "Yes, Lord, send me great sufferings, but also give me patience and strength to bear them. Oh my Jesus, I want to love you now and forever." Father Cagliero arrived on May 10 with strict injunctions to summon Don Bosco when he saw that the end was near, but as Mother Mazzarello appeared to rally, Father Caghero decided to return to Turin. On May 14 he was preparing to say Mass at 4 a.m., before departing, when at 3.45 he was summoned to the bedside of the dying nun. He administered the last rites, and then she said to those around her: "I am not sorry to die; in fact I die willingly." Father Caghero began the prayers for the departing soul, Mother Mazzarello asked one of the sisters to help her, then waved her hand and with a smile on her lips whispered, "Goodbye, goodbye, I shall see you in Heaven." She fixed her eyes on the Crucifix. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I recommend my soul to you . . . Jesus, Mary . . . Joseph . . ."

Mother Mazzarello was dead. GLORIFICATION

At the death of their foundress the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians numbered 230 working in 28 houses, of which six were in South America. By 1950 the number had grown to 12,000 sisters with nearly 1000 houses, and the sisters were working in all five continents except Australia. The heroicity of the virtues of Mother Mary Mazzarello was proclaimed by Pope Pius XI in 1936. On November 20, 1938, the same Pontiff beatified her, and on June 24, 1951, his Holiness Pope Pius XII, gloriously reigning, solemnly canonized Mother Mary Mazzarello, and she became the second member of the Salesian family to be enrolled among the canonized Saints of the Church. A humble peasant girl who possessed little learning and shunned the world and its maxims, has achieved greater and more lasting fame than the millions of worldly men who sought only to obtain worldly honour and to have their names and deeds written boldly in the pages of history. She will be remembered when they are long forgotten. Characteristic of the humble life

of St. Mary Dominica Mazzarello were the last words she directed to her spiritual children: "Love one another, practice true charity, humility and obedience. Teach the girls to be frank and sincere."

Nihil obstat:

W. M. COLLINS, Censor Dioc.

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