

SAINT MARY JOSEPH ROSSELLO

Benedetta Rossello was born on May 27, 1811, in a typical house in Albisola, (Savona). She was baptized on the same day.

Her mother and father provided a loving environment in which Benedetta spent a happy childhood.

Even though she loved to have fun, many times she would stop her play to pray with her friends or review with them the catechism lesson.

Benedetta, even as a child, wanted to give of herself, to put a smile on the face of those who were suffering; her joy was great when she was able to give some bread to the poor who came knocking at the door of her house.

Benedetta's youth was spent in prayer and work at home as well as in the Monleone house where she assisted Mr. & Mrs. Monleone with loving care and patience. At the age of 19 she told her friends, "I have only one desire: to avoid sin, to help my neighbors and to become a saint."

Benedetta was very generous and was eager to dedicate her whole life to God and to the most needy of God's people.

But how could she do this?

The call of God came to her through the Bishop of Savona, Augustine M. De Mari. One evening the bishop went out for a walk and came upon a group of uncouth girls playing on the street. The concerned

bishop tried to reprimand them; they laughed at him. Deeply saddened, he said, "Oh, how I wish I could find a pious and generous soul who, empathetic to these neglected daughters of the street, would gather them, instruct them, educate them in religion and virtue and teach them a skill!"

The words of Bishop De Mari were a call for Benedetta: a great light went on in her heart and filled with confidence she went to her bishop. The bishop questioned her and was touched by her zealous charity, admired her fervor, resolution and deep faith. He accepted her offer and invited her to find some co-workers.

On August 10, 1837, in an old house, the Commenda of the Knights of Malta, Benedetta and three companions came together and began the Institute of the Daughters of Our Lady of Mercy. On October 22, 1837 the young women received the new habit. A new name was also given to them: Benedetta was called Sister Mary Joseph.

Other young women came to share in their life. They began by opening a school for girls, in particular for the most neglected.

On August 2, 1839, Sister Mary Joseph and her six companions made their religious profession: they consecrated themselves to God by vowing chastity, poverty and obedience.

The small seed was growing and was beginning to bring forth fruit.

In 1842 the Daughters of Our Lady of Mercy were called to serve the sick in the hospital of Varazze (Savona). From then on almost every year the Sisters undertook new works. Mother Rossello, who became the Superior General, sent her daughters wherever there was suffering to be alleviated. "Oh, if only I could have arms long enough to embrace the whole world and do good to all!" she was heard exclaim.

The poor orphan girls and the young "repentant" women were the center of her attention; she gave the best of herself to them. "Any sacrifice is too little to give these neglected daughters a secure place to live and a Christian education. We would be happy to eat bread and soup as long as we are able to do good for them." Many times these daughters witnessed the miracles of her faith in St. Joseph, the patron of the Institute.

Mother Rossello collaborated with Fr. Nicolò Olivieri, and later with Fr. Biagio Verri, in the Work of Ransom of the African girls that were rescued from the slave markets of Egypt. She welcomed with open arms those that were not accepted by others because they were sick, blind, handicapped. How many did she ransom? Every time she was asked, she answered, "I do not know, I never counted them; I know there were many. The Lord will count them."

Mother Rossello's great love for the Church moved her to found the "Little House of Seminarians," for the formation of holy priests for the people of God. She followed the formation of each of these young

men, who were so dear to her heart, with loving attention and solicitude.

Her concern to bring Christ to all souls was fulfilled in 1875 when she sent sisters to Argentina to begin the missionary activities of the Institute. Today the sisters are also present in Brazil, Burundi, Cameroun, Central Africa, Chile, Chad, Congo, England, Germany, Haiti, India, Jamaica, Peru, Rwanda, United States and Uruguay.

Underlying all her ministry was Mother Rossello's deep spirit of charity, "A little love of God has more value than all our talents."

The rich life of Sister Mary Joseph came to an end on December 7, 1880: her whole life was consumed by zeal for her ministries and by hard work which at times led to her being the object of persecutions.

The incorrupt body of Mother Rossello rests in a glass urn in the chapel of the Generalate House in Savona. The Church proclaimed her a Saint on June 12, 1949.

HER MESSAGE

The person who seeks the face of God, tastes the peace that he always gives to his friends.

Work done in union with Jesus is prayer.

When we are filled with love, we are ready to accept others as they are, to excuse them and always to speak well of them.

"Heart to God, Hands to work".

Let us be like the bees: let us discover the virtues in others as a hidden treasure.

God, our good Father, loves us and guards us as the apple of his eye; he arranges everything for our good.

Let us have a great and generous heart for the Lord and for our brothers and sisters.

If only I had arms long enough to embrace the whole world and do good to all!

May contemplation of the wonders of nature bring us to contemplate God, the splendor of eternal beauty, who created everything to reveal to us his love.

May faith be the daily food of our souls, as bread is food for our body.

PRAYER

O Saint Mary Joseph Rossello, who during your life on earth opened your heart to all the needs of your brothers and sisters and were for them a visible sign of the merciful love of God, obtain for me, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy and of St. Joseph, the grace to trust always in the goodness of the Lord and to be sensitive and generous to the needs of our neighbor. Amen.

DAUGHTERS OF OUR LADY OF MERCY

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1811- Savona -1880