

The Late Mother Mary Foundress of the Sisters of Saint Joseph

The death of Mother Mary of the Cross, Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart, will bring tears to the eyes of many in Australia and New Zealand. Her demise leaves a blank — a great irretrievable blank — in the national life of Australasia. What she wrought for the people and for the glory of God, and life's labour stands as the noblest record of an Australian woman.

It is impossible at present to fully comprehend the magnitude of her work on earth, but in passing a eulogy upon her career, and her accomplishments, one may find in the outstanding features of her mission especially proofs of her intense love for mankind, and her sublime conception of the duties of citizenship.

Mother Mary designed the foundation of her Order in a little stable at Penola, South Australia, in the year 1866 — an *Annus Mirabilis* for Australasia. The political institutions of that period were then new, and were not well understood by the people, because the country, in a constitutional sense, was young, and its social development had not clearly manifested the order and direction of its progress. Society was a nebulous mass, undefined and undefinable; hence the legislative machinery could not expand; but out of the confusion democracy was struggling to get free. There were not many then who could perceive the fact; only a few great souls saw the faint streaks of dawn before sunrise; and among those few great souls Mother Mary of the Cross must be classed, because the Order which she established, apart from its sweet religious aspect, is essentially a democratic institution, designed to meet the wants of a rising democratic community. Poverty and education for the masses are the chief characteristics of the Order of the Sisters of St Joseph, and when Mother Mary invested it with the insignia of poverty and educational enterprise she gave pre-eminent proof of her foresight, and showed profound sympathy with the difficulties, the noble ideals, and the remedies which democracy proposed for the elimination of poverty and ignorance.

The central fact again presents itself in the practical work of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Frail humility has many faults and many virtues; and to see the virtuous labour for those in distress is the most beautiful illustration of human sympathy. By the side of the forlorn naked babe and the friendless, unclad child growing into youth, the devoted followers of Mother Mary imitate her and minister to their wants. Their universal sympathy goes out to all in distress — the starving and the weeping. That is the class of people for whom Mother Mary laboured and legislated, and her continuous endeavour was to inspire all such with the golden hopes of temporal and eternal salvation.

It is not a hazardous prophecy to say that Mother Mary's Order will nourish for centuries. The Foundress was an Australian born lady, and therefore her Order will ever appeal to all Australians, and consequently will not languish for the want of devoted women who shall sacrifice their earthly pleasures for the spiritual and temporal welfare of others. As the years fly on their fleeting way, new convents will continue to arise throughout the Commonwealth and New Zealand as so many bright constellations that will rain happiness upon benighted humanity; and every new institution is a new symbol of the saintly renown of Mother Mary.

She worked with enthusiasm and inspired confidence in others but her enthusiasm was controlled by a well-balanced mind illuminated with heavenly wisdom. During her long career her zeal did not fail, and she conquered difficulty with wonderful rapidity and success. The great testimony of her earthly success was visible at her graveside, where great numbers of her devoted Sisters assembled. Her spirit will live and shine through after ages; her image will be engraven in the hearts of her followers. She is not dead, for she still lives in her children even though

"The night wind sings its immemorial hymn,
And sobs above a newly-covered grave."

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