

Introduction

Something about our interaction with Mother Mary Ignatius has intrigued me for some time now. When the essays between these pages began arriving here in Rome, my thoughts took shape. The articles cover a wide range of topics related to the Foundress and her times. Some are historical and factual, firmly anchored in the often turbulent waters of the period, others are creative and imaginative, presenting an aspect of the truth that equally engages our attention. All are very readable, written, as they are, out of the authors' own experience and reflection. Each has its own merit and brings us further along a passageway leading to a unique clearing that allows us to capture yet another subtle shade of a valiant woman we are finally coming to know.

Here is the question that haunts me. Why has it taken us so long to be captivated and deeply influenced by Mother Mary Ignatius? The question is not a new one. In fact, in the gatherings and sharings in the period leading up to the opening of the centennial year, the range of views put forward on this point ran the gamut. From my own study, reading, and conversations with Sisters I offer a few thoughts to be kept in mind as we carefully unwrap the gift now held in our hands.

Keeping the horizons wide to be fair to ourselves and faithful to those among us who kept the dream alive, I believe that many of us in our perusal of the biographies and *Diary* were uncomfortable with the soul-searching, the painful questionings, the many seemingly false starts, the documented failures, and the ashes of the destructive fire that clouded even her holy death. Although it is hard to admit, perhaps we do indeed value strength, the kind of strength contrary to all Gospel values; we look up to people who get it right; and we are afraid of weakness. Could it be that we failed to see the true greatness of a woman who negotiated some incredibly difficult and dangerous passageways and who held on even when marooned on the craggy rocks of aridity and pain? Alone and at times bewildered, she nevertheless held to her long purpose with extraordinary dignity, keeping faith and love intact. Thankfully, the Book of Ecclesiastes holds out to us that beautiful reading which assures us that in the Divine plan there is a time, a right time for every single thing under the heavens.

I believe that this centennial year has been chosen from all eternity for our very special encounter with Mother Mary Ignatius of Jesus. All that has been written about her has taken on new life and color. The newly established Charism Renewal Program has allowed participants to walk in her footsteps and to drink in the heady wine that sustained her in all her comings and goings. Programs, projects, and celebrations all call us to continue the search. Gems long buried in archives wait to enjoy their Easter Sunday. The *Diary*, especially, speaks to our human experience in a challenging fresh way, as we see ever more clearly that it grew out of the Foundress' own human experience of Jesus. Praying its pages, we feel her awareness of the sinfulness of being ego-centered, we touch the graciousness of God's work in her soul, we hear the whispering of God's call to her to a greater authenticity of life. Faced with the courageous honesty with which she jots down her most secret thoughts and desires at the end of a day, we begin to know more clearly both the integrity and the brokenness of our own motivation, we sense more realistically our duplicity, we become more aware of our goodness, we see more sharply our values and priorities.

Yes, Mother Mary Ignatius, in this year of grace, challenges us to be faithful to the covenant we have made, to our Franciscan charism as expressed in our Rule and Constitutions. Her call to us is to go forward in faith. The moment comes for all of us when we must decide whether God can be trusted, and as we step forward, however tentatively, we discover the

ground in front of us is firm ground. The door from fear to faith is flung wide open. We must step across this passageway. Mother Mary Ignatius is waiting for us. In our search for her, we make the marvelous and surprising discovery that she all along has been searching for us.

I want to thank most sincerely all those who contributed to this publication. For me, reading each article was like unwrapping a gift. I hope you find it so, too.

Sister Helene Byrne

Editor

Rome, Italy

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