

CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSES OF THE SAINTS

Nepesina seu Herbipolensis

CAUSE OF BEATIFICATION AND CANONIZATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD

MARY FRANCES OF THE CROSS

(in sec.: Amalia Frances Rosa Streitel)
(1844-1911)

FOUNDRESS OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE SISTERS OF THE SORROWFUL MOTHER

DECREE ON THE HEROIC VIRTUES

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all to me” (Jn. 12, 32)

These words of Sacred Scripture have permeated the entire life of the Servant of God Mary Frances of the Cross. From her childhood on she sought to understand the meaning of these words, and until her death she experienced that only through the Cross does one go to the light, that is, to the Risen Jesus. In this way she united herself to the mystery of the Redemption and she nourished herself with an intense Eucharistic life, having as a model Mary, the Mother of Sorrows.

The Servant of God was born in Mellrichstadt, Diocese of Würzburg, in Bavaria, on November 24, 1844. She was baptized on the same day with the name of Amalia Frances Rosa. She was the first of four children of Adam, governor of the district, and Frances Carolina Streitel: a well-to-do family, always ready to aid the poor and the sick. Little Amalia, who often accompanied her mother, learned early on to recognize the sufferings of the poor, of the infirm, and of the children.

She received her First Holy Communion in the parish church of her native town on April 19, 1857, and the Sacrament of Confirmation in the parish church of Gersfeld on the following September 24. After finishing her elementary education, Amalia continued her secondary education in the Institute of the Franciscan Sisters of Maria Stern in Augsburg, earning a diploma of a teacher of the French language and of music. In August of 1862, after completing her studies, she felt called by God to the religious life “in a special manner”.

After four years of prayer and suffering, because of the paternal opposition, she received the permission to enter the Institute in which she had studied. She was vested in the religious habit and was given the name of Sister Mary Angela. After her profession of vows she was sent as an instructor to the schools of the Institute. She distinguished herself always by her piety and prudence, as well as in her successive assignments as superior.

Transferred to Würzburg, in August of 1880 she felt strongly a desire to enter the Carmel of Himmelspforten. There she was admitted on January 25, 1882, after having received the permission from the Bishop. However, after six months, because of an interior experience, she understood that God was calling her to another form of religious life. For that reason, with the permission of her confessor, she left Carmel and returned to her parental home.

After a short time, the invitation of Father J.B. Jordan reached her to come to Rome to collaborate in the foundation of the feminine branch of his Institute, later known as the Society of the Divine Savior. Amalia arrived in Rome on February 16, 1883, and on the

following March 18, she received the habit from the hands of Father Jordan and the name of Mary Frances of the Cross. Many young ladies entered the convent very soon and shared with her her ideals of the active-contemplative life. Shortly thereafter, they welcomed to their convent poor orphans and nursed destitute sick people in their homes in the city.

In the new Institute, the Servant of God collaborated intensely in the work of the apostolate, but the Lord had other designs. In fact, because of the difference of ideals with Father Jordan, the ecclesiastical authority declared the community guided by Mother Frances autonomous. On October 12, 1885, Pope Leo XIII recognized the Institute of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother. Beginning in 1889, the Servant of God opened hospitals and schools in the United States of America, in Austria, in Bohemia and in Italy. Today, the Sisters are present and work also in Germany, in Brazil, in the Caribbean, and in Tanzania.

The spiritual and missionary life of the Servant of God was strongly marked by the Franciscan ideals: piety and love of God, obedience to the Church, fervent devotion for the mystery of the Cross, a spirit of penitence, a deep humility, charity generously exercised to the poor and the sick, a genuine passion for the salvation of souls, and a spirit of reparation of the offences against God and the Church.

Mother Frances practiced the evangelical counsels to a degree that is rare. Truly a disciple of the Poverello of Assisi, she loved evangelical poverty and exhorted the Sisters to do likewise because, she used to say, *“I call poverty the mother of religious virtues”*. Her interior beauty was reflected in her exterior and in her life style.

Trials and humiliations rose equally, even to the point to deprive her of the guidance of the Institute. As a simple sister, in the spirit of total obedience, she accepted the deposition from her office of superior and spent the last years of her earthly existence in the kindergarten of Castel Sant’Elia, Diocese of Nepi, caring for the poorest children and filling the empty spaces of the day and night with prayer.

At about sixty-seven years of age, truly Franciscan, she serenely met “Sister Death”. She breathed her last breath, with her eyes fixed on the crucifix in her room on March 6, 1911. On the same day Pope Pius X approved the Constitutions of the Congregation. From that day on, the Sisters and the people, knowing her virtues, have not ceased to ask for graces and favors through her intercession.

Because of this reputation of holiness, the Diocesan Process was celebrated at Nepi from April 5, 1937, until March 11, 1940, and paralleled the Rogatorial Processes of Würzburg, Paterson and Winona. There followed the Apostolic Processes of Nepi, from August 3 1948, until December 12, 1949, and at the same period in Vienna, Salzburg and Winona. Juridical validity was recognized by the Sacred Congregation of Rites with a Decree on February 3, 1952.

After presenting the *Novissima Positio*, and after the positive opinion of the Commission of the Historical Consultants on February 24, 2004, was discussed, according to the customary procedure, it was determined that the Servant of God had practiced the virtues to an heroic degree. There followed the Special Congress of the Theological Consultants on May 15, 2009, with a positive outcome. The Cardinals and Bishops in their Ordinary Session on January 19, 2010, listening to the relation of the Chairperson of the Cause, the Most Excellent Msgr. Marcello Semeraro, Bishop of Albano, acknowledged that the Servant of God Mary Frances of the Cross practiced the theological, cardinal and annexed virtues to an heroic degree.

Having then presented an accurate account of the phases of the processes to the Highest Pontiff Benedict XVI by the underscribed Archbishop Prefect, the Holy Father, accepting and ratifying the Votes of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, declared on the day indicated below: *“There exist the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love of God as Love of Neighbor, as also the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude and of those annexed, in an heroic degree, of the Servant of God Mary Frances of*

the Cross (in sec. Amalia Frances Rose Streitel), Foundress of the Institute of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother.”

The Holy Father has given the mandate to render public this Decree and to transcribe it in the Acts of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints.

Given at Rome on the 27th day of the month of March in the Year of the Lord 2010

+ ANGELO AMATO, S.D.B.
Titular Archbishop of Sila
Prefect

+ MICHELE DI RUBERTO
Archbishop of Biccari
Secretary