

**Mother Teresa Casini,
Foundress of the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus**



Frascati is a pleasant and historic town in the Alban Hills near Rome. On the 29th of October, 1864, its quiet streets were unusually filled with animated groups of the village poor, gathering in from all sides and proceeding toward a special destination. They were in a joyful mood, with blessings and good wishes on their lips as they passed along. It was a festive occasion for Mr. Thomas Casini and his wife, Melania Rayner, who belonged to the aristocracy of the town. Their first born daughter, Teresa, only two days old, was being carried to the baptismal font. The little one, whose eyes so recently opened, were as blue as the distant sky, passed through the streets, accompanied by the warbling sound of the fountain and followed by the poor in humble procession. Invited by Mr. Casini, their distinguished benefactor, their simple and humble prayers invoked God's blessing on his little daughter.

Young Teresa Casini

As a young student, Teresa went to Rome to continue her studies at St. Rufina, a boarding school for girls conducted by the Madams of the Sacred Heart. Here her spirit would enjoy a tranquility which was unknown to her while she was in the midst of a worldly society. Teresa realized that her soul could find rest only in God. This clarified in her mind the idea of entering religious life. She received her First Communion in the school chapel on May 7, 1878. This first union with Christ in the Holy Eucharist sealed her resolve to belong completely to God. However, due to ill health, Teresa had to leave school and return homewhere she found herself again in the whirl of the social life.

These were difficult years in which, though remaining faithful to the grace of her Baptism, she was unable to resist the attraction of the world and still the world did not make her happy.

At 18 years of age and with a bright future that could be seen awaiting her, Teresa understood that the Lord wanted something else of her. Furthermore, unforeseen circumstances showed her the instability of earthly joys and thus she consecrated herself to God simply and irrevocably.

In time Teresa met Father Arsenio Pellegrini, the Abbot of the Basilian Monks of Grottaferrata, a man of faith and learning. He became her guide and spiritual director. Under his strong and wise direction, harmonizing with her enthusiastic and exuberant temperament, Teresa entered upon a new phase of her life which prepared her for divine favors.

She began to pass long hours in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Her soul grew constantly in the love of God and she discovered the unfathomable riches of that love.

The altar speaks of God made man, who perpetuates the miracle of His Presence among us through the ministry of His priest. The solitude which surrounded her while she was speaking to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist enlightened her to realize how much Jesus is left alone and forgotten, and that He is treated with coldness even by souls most dear to him. Like St. Margaret Mary she felt the lament of the heart of Jesus penetrating her own heart: "Behold the Heart which loves so dearly... and in return I receive from the majority of humanity only ingratitude shown by the contempt, the irreverence and the coldness shown toward Me in the Sacrament of My Love. But what displeases Me most is that hearts consecrated to Me treat Me thus." This mystery surprised her, troubled her and gave her a sense of her own nothingness.

Each morning at the Offertory, when she saw the small white hosts presented to the priest together with the large host of the Holy Sacrifice, Teresa's gaze unconsciously rested on them for some time. She began to be aware that she had to immolate herself with Christ; to console Him in His sorrow and to sacrifice herself without reserve for the Priesthood. Teresa realized that from then on her place was to be near the altar. Though she was aware that no religious institute existed which fully corresponded to her aspiration, she entered a strictly cloistered convent in obedience to her spiritual director. As she was about to cross its threshold a voice within her whispered "You have come here to learn but not to stay." After less than a year in the cloister, ill health made it necessary for her to return to the world. A second attempt at religious life, likewise came to an end with the death of the foundress after which the institute ceased to exist.

Teresa returned to Grottaferrata with a dream in her heart which she developed with timid anxiety. She did not dream of founding an institute. In her humility she was waiting for the Lord to raise up a priest who would be aware of the pleading of His Sacred Heart for the sanctification of the clergy. Meanwhile, she wanted only to gather together some generous souls in whose hearts the Lord might put "His suffering love." The lament of Jesus kept re-echoing in her soul: "That which displeases Me most is that hearts consecrated to Me treat Me thus."

Without realizing it, however, the institute was taking shape in her generous heart. The white hosts she had envisioned so many times at the offertory in an indefinable manner were already gathered around her to be immolated with Jesus; hosts with living hearts filled with love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and for the Priesthood, ready to give their lives with Him and ready to be offered with Him to the Heavenly Father.

They would pray for those who do not pray; give thanks for those who do not give thanks; ask blessings for those who do not ask; atone for those who do not know how to atone or do not wish to do so.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus has a special love for those whom He has chosen to carry on His work of salvation. If they fail, it causes Him special sorrow. "I consecrate myself for them." Teresa repeated with Christ, and the little "hosts" spoke the same words and joined with her in

offering themselves for the great ideal. The new religious family of the Oblates of the Sacred Heart of Jesus took its place in the Church. Its identity was unmistakable: Oblates, meaning hosts to be consecrated, lives to be offered up.

Jesus made this request to Teresa: "Give me holy priests." He did not promise her joy, success or even the satisfaction of seeing her dreams realized in favor of the Priesthood. It was His will that her life be spent in an offering which was to be a vivid and fearsome sharing in the mystery of Golgotha. Her call was to be suffering and total immolation. Teresa understood and answered, "Thy will be done."



On February 2, 1894, the Institute was born in the most rigid of cloisters and in the direst poverty with no human means of support, but there could be no limit to the gift of those whose hearts were moved by the lament of Jesus and who were aware of the agony of Gethsemane and wished to share it.

The special character of the institute came to light when Cardinal Satolli asked the Oblates to take up special apostolic work, for the benefit of those who were to be future "other Christs." Schools for "The Little Friends of Jesus" came into being for the purpose of providing pre-seminary institutions for the training of those who might have within them the beginnings of a vocation.

In 1938, when the first priest who had been one of the Little Friends of Jesus was ordained, Teresa was no longer here on earth. "I am peaceful. I feel that God is near me," she had said in a gentle voice as she was dying on April 3, 1937. These words contain her last act of offering, like Jesus, as she abandoned herself into the hands of her Heavenly Father saying: "CONSUMATUM EST."

Mother Teresa Casini rests close to her daughters in the white sarcophagus situated in the Chapel of the Oblate Sisters in Rome. She asked nothing for herself. She only invites souls **to love God more intensely, to console the Heart of Jesus, and to joyfully give all for His Priests.**

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