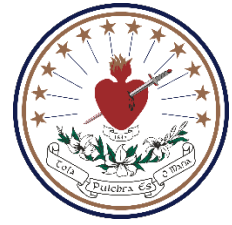


Mission Moment
VMA - September 21, 2022
Mother Theresa – The Homecoming



Last year in anticipation of our new Mother Theresa Maxis Student Union building, we spent some time looking at Mother Theresa Maxis's life and her experiences as Pilgrim, Foundress and a woman in Crisis and Exile. Unfortunately, I could not be present at the May meeting when I wanted to talk about Mother Theresa's Homecoming to West Chester after 18 years in exile, so I will do that tonight.

We have heard of some of the crisis situations Mother Theresa Maxis experienced. As a consequence of friction, disruption and dispute, largely from outside the Congregation, Theresa spent 18 years in exile with the Grey Nuns in Ottawa where she kept firm in her faith and love for her IHM sisters.

Mother Theresa agonized over the thought of leaving her beloved IHM sisters. She had met the Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart while she was superior in Monroe and had written to their superior about the possible transfer of one of her IHM sisters. The superior in Ottawa responded favorably to the request and added, "For you, dear Mother, I shall be happy to invite you to come join her, provided that can be done without failing in your rules." Mother Theresa prayed ardently to know God's will. Five months passed before Mother Theresa believed that the will of God had become clear. S. Celestine, Therese Renault of the first foundation, had agreed to join Mother Theresa in moving to Ottawa.

Mother Theresa explained her motivation for leaving Pennsylvania. She believed that by leaving she could clear the way for a peaceful reunification of the IHMs in the east and the west.

In January of 1867 Mother Theresa and S. Celestine left Susquehanna and arrived at the Grey Nuns convent in Ottawa on February 2. Mother Theresa was 57 years old and had been a religious for almost 38 years.

During her years in Ottawa Mother Theresa always considered herself a guest; for many years she taught in their academy, but her goal remained to someday return to the IHM Congregation!

Meeting continued rejections to this wish, Mother Theresa kept in mind Bishop Neuman's words, "Be humble and patient and persevere in prayer." God did provide! Having written to Mother Mary Gonzaga, IHM Mother General in West Chester, Mother Theresa was invited to return to the IHMs at the West Chester motherhouse. On January 21, 1885, Mother Theresa was welcomed back to Villa Maria, West Chester by Mother Gonzaga and the sisters. Her companion from the Oblate congregation and from the original Monroe foundation, Sister Ann Schaaf, was among the sisters welcoming her on her return. Greetings and gifts of welcome arrived from the various missions of the West Chester and Scranton foundations. Mother Theresa experienced a long-delayed contentment which she described in a letter to her faithful correspondent, Sister Genevieve:

"Words are inadequate to express my joy and grateful feelings to our dear Lord for His great mercies to me in restoring me again to my own. I am so happy in being in the Institution, so dear to me and which I never left in heart, indeed, we have been in jubilation ever since my return."

Mother Theresa lived 7 peaceful years after her return from Ottawa. In January 1892, she developed pneumonia and died on January 14th. She was 81 years old and had been in religious life for 62 years.

Originally Mother Theresa was buried in the IHM section of St. Agnes Cemetery in West Chester. In September of 1965 her body was moved to our Camilla cemetery and placed in the Mother Generals' circle.

Theresa is a living legacy of grace. We stand on her shoulders; her journey illuminates the spiritual strength and moral courage of women in the face of challenge and adversity. "She signals to us the direction we ought to be taking as followers of the poor Christ." (Margaret Gannon, IHM) In the Alphonsian spirit, she was constantly "on the edges" and her choices were at times uncomfortable to others. Her journey of spirited daring and her deeds of hope lead us into the future where she inspires us to embrace the Alphonsian invitation to serve the poor and most abandoned. These are the qualities we want to instill in our Villa Maria young women as we prepare them for leadership and service in the world.

Let us pray that this woman of courage, hope, perseverance and trust in Divine Providence will intercede for all of us and for our Villa Maria Academy community!