

*"I would
do the
same things
over again."*

**Wisdom for the Spiritual Life
according to
Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors**



"GAVE EACH NOVICE A NEW NAME"

4 August 1841

The *Annals of the Congregation of the Marianite Sisters of Holy Cross* recount a simple ceremony that took place in the chapel of the Good Shepherd Monastery in Le Mans, France, on Wednesday, 4 August 1841.

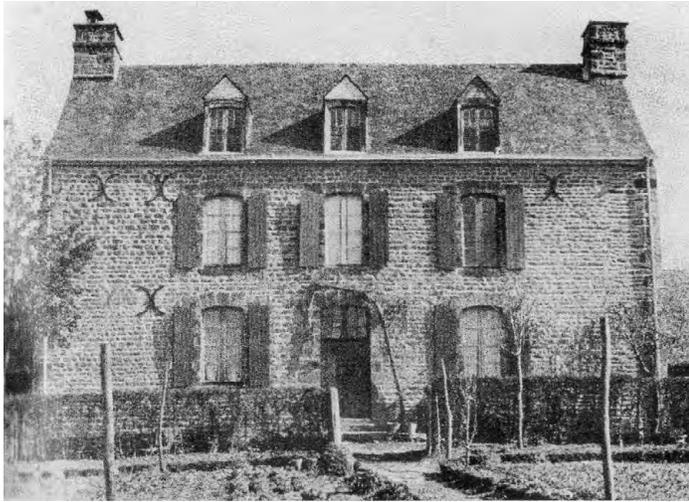
"The investiture was preceded by a three-day retreat given by Father Founder to the entire community. The morning of the ceremony he celebrated Holy Mass at which the Fathers, Brothers and Sisters assisted. The future novices, dressed in white, were conducted to the grating by Mother Prioress and her Assistant, while the religious of Holy Cross sang the Ave Maria Stella. The Good Shepherd ritual was closely followed. Reverend Father Founder blessed the veils and the silver hearts, and gave each novice a new name: Mademoiselle Léocadie Gascoin received that of Sister Mary of the Seven Dolors; Marie Robineau, that of Sister Mary of Calvary; Renée Boutellier, that of Sister Mary of the Compassion; and Leonie Chapin, that of Sister Mary of Holy Cross. The ceremony ended with the kiss of peace and the chant of the Te Deum; the new novices then returned to the novitiate."

The giving of a new name signals the beginning of a new way of life, a new direction, a new commitment. For the four young women in this scene, taking on a new name was precisely that. And yet, it was so much more. They were pioneers. Their generous response to God's call fulfilled the dream that Basile Moreau had of founding a religious family that would commit itself to "preparing the world for better times." They would be a substantial part of the "work of resurrection" that Moreau wanted to see Holy Cross accomplish through all its ministries.

The founder situated these first Marianites of Holy Cross, as he did with the brothers and priests, next to Mary at the foot of the cross. From that place, the Marianites would go far beyond the borders of France to serve people in many contexts and cultures around the world. As they evolved, there eventually emerged two other religious communities to enlarge and enrich the Family of Holy Cross – the "Sisters of the Holy Cross" and the "Sisters of Holy Cross."

With Father Moreau, Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors had a significant part in shaping the life of the first Marianites. Her leadership and her influence were rooted in the living example of dedication and commitment that she gave to the Sisters. The following reflections explore that example so it may continue to be for us an inspiration and a challenge.

TIME LINE OF MOTHER MARY OF THE SEVEN DOLORS' LIFE



March 1, 1818 – Léocadie Romaine Gascoin is born to Jean Michel Gascoin, her father, and Rosalie Renée Chardon, her mother, in Montenay, France, in the house named L'Osier (The Wicker).

1827-1833 – Léocadie is sent to the Catholic school in Montenay and is taught by the Sisters of Notre Dame of Evron.

1833-37 – Léocadie attends boarding school in Laval.

1840 – Léocadie attends a Lenten Mission in a neighboring village of Larchamp, given by one of Father Moreau's Auxiliary Priests, Father Victor Drouelle.

June 23, 1841 – Léocadie, accompanied by her father, arrived in Le Mans. She met Basil Moreau on the next day and began a retreat that same evening to discern her vocation.



July 2, 1841 – Father Moreau gave his decision to this young woman and from that day on she worked at becoming a Holy Cross Sister. Moreau told her,

“You are for Holy Cross...you will go to Holy Cross.”

1841 – Léocadie underwent three months of intense preparation at the Good Shepherd Monastery in Le Mans, founded by Father Moreau, and received the name of Sister Mary of the Seven Dolors. While at Good Shepherd, she was under the direction of Mother Mary of St. Dositheus, Prioress.

1841 – Sister Mary of Seven Dolors, known as the Assistant, continues to train new postulants and to work at Institution de Sainte Croix, the boarding school of the Congregation. She also helps to complete preparations for those leaving on missions to Algeria, the United States, Canada, India, Rome, and Poland.

September 15, 1844 – Sister Mary professes vows as a religious of Holy Cross and responds to the call for a deeper union with God.

1845 – Father Moreau appoints her as superior of the Sisters.

1849 – She is called to leave her family, culture and country, to serve in a much needed capacity in Canada where she ministers for fourteen years.

1857 – While on his visit to Canada, Father Moreau names her Superior General of the Sisters.

1860 – Prior to general chapter in Le Mans, she visits Indiana. She returns to Le Mans, for the chapter only, then returns to Canada.

1863 – She leaves Canada.

1867 – The general chapter elects Sister Mary of Egypt Vermond as superior general; Mother Mary serves as her assistant.

1869 – Mother Mary of Egypt resigns as superior general; Mother Mary is appointed to that position. At the general chapter she is elected as superior general.

1869 – Enormous difficulties confront Mother Mary:

First, the financial collapse of the Congregation presented serious concerns about its viability for

the future. The buildings and goods of Institution de Sainte-Croix were auctioned and the collaboration of Holy Cross in Le Mans was broken.

Second, there was the challenge and obligation to find shelter for the whole community, and the

need to develop some kind of ministry for the community to assure its subsistence so the sisters could continue living and serving in the mission according to the newly approved Constitutions and Rules.

Third, there was the secession of the Sisters in Indiana.

1870 – Mother Mary visits the Sisters in North America.

1873 – Father Moreau dies on January 20.

1873 – The general chapter reelects Mother Mary as superior general.



1874, 1879 and **1886** – Mother Mary visits the United States and Canada.

1879 – The general chapter reelects Mother Mary as superior general

1883 – The secession of the Sisters in Canada.

1886 – The general chapter elects Sister Mary of the Immaculate Conception Prévert as superior general; she completes her term in 1892. Mother Mary serves as her assistant.

1892 – The general chapter elects Sister Mary of St. Alphonsus Liguori Chrétien as superior general. Mother Mary serves as her assistant. Mother Mary of St. Alphonsus dies after only ten months in office and is replaced by Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors.

1894 – Mother Mary celebrates her Golden Jubilee of religious profession with special ceremonies in Le Mans.

1895 – The general chapter reelects Mother Mary as superior general.

January 29, 1900 – At the age of 82, Mother Mary dies after becoming ill during the first month of the new century. Sister Agatha, her Assistant, asks her to not forget her community in heaven. She responded:

“I prayed too much for this intention on earth to forget it up there...my children, since it is the will of God, let me go.”

"I WOULD DO THE SAME THINGS OVER AGAIN"

*Wisdom for the
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"The same things over again"

In 1894, on September 15, in addition to celebrating the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, the Marianite Sisters commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of religious profession of Mother Mary of the Seven Dolours. During the festivities there was time to recall all that had transpired during her half-century of life in Holy Cross. At one point she was asked,

"If the Congregation were to be founded again what would you do?" Without hesitation she affirmed, "I would do the same things over again." (from a Marianite's Recollections)

No regrets, no sentiments of wanting to change the ways in which God's will had unfolded for her. She expressed only the determination to begin again if that would be what God asked. Father Moreau, at a very dark moment in his life, made the same affirmation. In 1865, one year before he resigned as superior general, he writes,

"I shall have no fears for the Congregation, and even if all of you had abandoned me on hearing of our catastrophes, I should have begun all over again as soon as I could, so convinced am I that what I have undertaken is the will of God." (Circular Letter 179)

In terms of faith, he and Mother Mary were kindred spirits.

The focus of these reflections is not to review all the "things" that Mother Mary did. Over her 82 years of life, she was involved in many activities that shaped, not only the Marianites of Holy Cross, but the entire Family of Holy Cross. Our focus will be the virtues, the qualities of life, the realities that guided Mother Mary throughout her life, realities that she encouraged within others as supports for their spiritual life. The qualities that guided Mother Mary are not limited to nineteenth-century France, they can be a support for us also in our spiritual journey.

Before Father Moreau's death, Mother Mary, in writing to her Sisters in Holy Cross, focused primarily on informing them of the life and virtues of those who had died. After Moreau's death, she continued to inform the Sisters of deaths in the community but she also encouraged them to fidelity in their religious life and their spiritual life. In her writings and in her activities, she reveals the virtues that shaped her own life. Several virtues emerge consistently. There are surely others, but those on which we will focus seem to shine with particular brilliance in her life and works.

"Requirements for spiritual progress"

As a framework for these reflections, we will use a statement from Father Moreau. In his sermon on meditation, Moreau identifies what he calls the "requirements for spiritual progress." He says,

"The requirements for spiritual progress:

to reform what has been deformed by sin;

to conform our lives thus reformed to that of Jesus Christ;

to confirm ourselves in that conformity;

to transform ourselves into the divine Model."

Reform, conform, confirm, transform. There is a progression here that gradually moves us toward transformation into the living likeness of Jesus Christ. For Father Moreau, that transformation is at the very heart of his spirituality.

There is no doubt that Mother Mary knew and was influenced by this text. Because Moreau uses this text also in at least one edition of his book, *Christian Meditations*, it is more than likely that Mother Mary would have been familiar with it. Also, since he wrote versions for each of the three societies, she would have been familiar with it from the Sisters'

version. And, more than likely, he used this text in his conferences to the religious.

"Reform what has been deformed by sin"

By "reform," Father Moreau meant a redirection of our life to be consistent with the principles and priorities of the gospel. Sin, in any form, disrupts that consistency. There are three points within Mother Mary's spirituality that nurture and guide us in this reform.

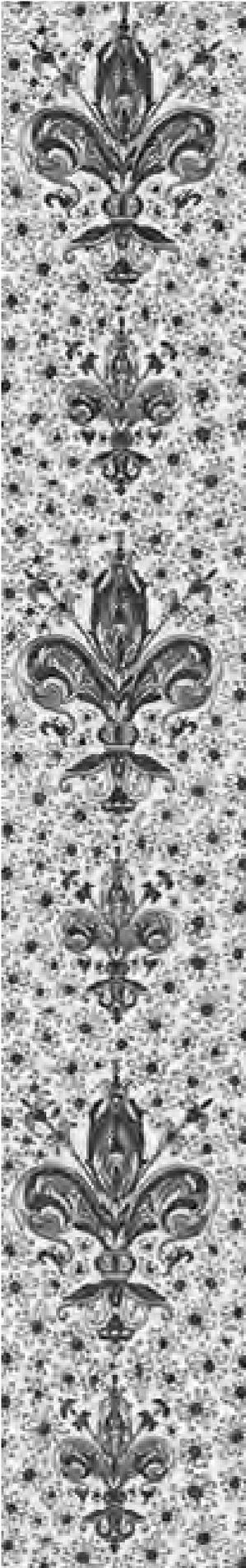
First, fidelity. Mother Mary was a woman of fidelity. She recognized that she had been called by God to Holy Cross. God was at work in the events that led her to meet Basile Moreau and become a part of Holy Cross. Her life was a continuous response to God's call. She was passionate about completing God's will in everything; this was true during times of blessings and during times that brought only difficulties and crosses. Her passion for God's will gave her a constancy to which she challenged others. She writes,

"Put all your confidence in the good God and do not worry. God only demands of us our good will and asks that we do our best. This good Master does the rest. You know that God wants us to count solely on grace." (Personal Letter, 1859)

For Mother Mary, fidelity was a simple reality. It involves doing what we committed ourselves to do, to live what God and the community asks of us. As she says,

"We must will what God wants and submit to it generously. Let us not lose the time which is given to us for our sanctification." (Personal Letter, 1863)

For the Sisters, this meant fidelity to the Constitutions in particular. However, her words are applicable to



everyone. The challenge is to remain faithful to what we are called to do in our daily life and to trust that God is at work in us. She is very clear about the principal blessing of fidelity; she writes,

“When you have done your best, be quite sure that your duty is fulfilled as God asks it of you.” (Personal Letter)

She echoes this when she speaks and writes about the importance of fidelity to the Constitutions.

This fidelity will be especially evident in our attentiveness to little things. The Annals of the Marianites note that

“Nothing was so close to the heart of the very respected Mother Foundress than little observances” (Annals). Regularly, she would help with preparing food and cleaning tables and mopping floors and doing laundry. She herself writes, “Well, in sewing, washing, cooking, ironing, caring for the sick, you are working at the building up of our Congregation.” (Personal Letter 1862)

Of course, all this reflected her sense of service which developed as she was growing up in Montenay; but she also learned that these simple everyday activities were a means to do God’s will.

From Mother Mary’s perspective, fidelity is a graced determination to do what she had promised to do through her commitment to Holy Cross. Just as Jesus says that he came to do God’s will, Mother Mary could say the same. She writes,

“You know well that happiness is found only in the accomplishment of duty. Give ardent thanks to the Lord for having chosen you among so many others to be part of the favored number. I was but God’s instrument. It is to God that you owe everything.” (Personal Letter, 1861)

She echoes exactly Father Moreau’s sentiments as he reflected on the development of Holy Cross. In 1841, he wrote,

“Far from me be the thought of attributing to myself the merit of the truly providential works which have just arisen under my direction. After God, who is alone the author of all good, it is to the devotedness of my fellow-priests and to your own spirit of cooperation that we owe the astounding work of Holy Cross as it exists today. I have been but a simple tool which the Lord will soon break that he may substitute for it others more worthy.” (Circular Letter 14)

Mother Mary was especially faithful to Father Moreau, even when that would cost her a great deal because of the difficulties he encountered in his continuing relationship with the men of Holy Cross. Father Moreau wrote to her,

“I shall remain, until my last sigh, in the same sentiments that you inspired in me for so many years.” (1870)

After Father Moreau’s death, when the men were less attentive to his teaching and even to his position as founder, she called the Sisters to remain faithful to him. And, as we know, it is through the Marianites and the Annals of the Marianites, that we have preserved for the Family of Holy Cross so much information about Moreau, particularly from the period between his resignation and his death.

Her fidelity shines also as she dealt with various crises in France, Canada, and the United States. Her example was the primary means by which she called the Sisters to fidelity. She became for them a model of fidelity to religious life in Holy Cross, a mirror into which they could look and gauge their own fidelity.

Mother Mary challenges us to fidelity. She states bluntly,

“Bear this in mind with me: We must belong entirely to God or we are God’s enemy. No one can serve two masters; Jesus has said so. Could you then hesitate in your choice? Would you want to be shipwrecked so close to the port? No, no, my friends, this can not be the case.” (Letter to Community, 1865)

“Could you then hesitate in your choice?” The same question is asked of us. What in our life holds the potential to be a source of hesitation for us? What are the “masters” in our life that compete with the priority that we want Jesus to have? In which ways to do we find fidelity to be particularly challenging?

Second, prayer. Mother Mary was a woman of prayer. This was a primary means for her to sustain her fidelity. She was well formed in prayer. She grew up in a family for which prayer and church services were a regular part of their daily routine. Once she entered Holy Cross, her spiritual formation

continued at Good Shepherd Monastery in Le Mans. Father Moreau himself taught her to pray the chaplet of the 7 Sorrows of Mary as part of the spiritual practices associated with Holy Cross.

Mother Mary was more than a woman who practiced prayer at various times throughout the day; she was a prayerful woman. This prayerfulness made her sensitive to God’s presence and activity and enabled her to remain faithful and constant regardless of the situations that confronted her. This was important because many of the situations she confronted in her life in Holy Cross, in her leadership of the community, and in her support of Father Moreau’s vision held the potential to be quite discouraging because of the way some people responded to all of that. Though she acknowledges the difficulties that she encounters, she never communicates discouragement or any regret that her life has unfolded as it did. It is not surprising to hear her say,

“When we do think of praying in difficult situations, what courage we would find and how happy we would be in suffering, if we saw things with the eyes of faith! We would see then the merciful designs of our good Master who, through these trials, wants to give us a beautiful reward in eternity.” (Letter to Community, 1856)

Again she writes, “We never pray so well as in times of trial.” (Personal Letter, 1862).

The sources nurturing her prayer were simple and accessible. She prayed with scripture, the Constitutions of the community, the conferences and writings of Father Moreau, and the book *The Imitation of Christ* which was frequently recommended by Moreau to the women and men of Holy Cross. Like Moreau, she encouraged her Sisters to pray. She wrote to one Sister,

“How much good it does us to pray. How God loves to answer prayer.” (Personal Letter, 1857)

Prayer, in any form, always runs the risk of being reduced to mechanics, to a ritual performance that, over time, can lose any real meaning. Mother Mary, like Father Moreau, placed a high priority on developing an interior life. As she writes,

“Let us strengthen ourselves by prayer, always, always, always!” (Letter to Community, 1869)

The priority is that we be strengthened by our prayer, precisely so it will have a lasting impact on our life.

It is especially intriguing that Mother Mary believed one prayer to be more effective than all the others. For her, that prayer is

“renunciation of our passions, the spirit of sacrifice, and the correction of one’s faults.” (Letter to Community, 1865)

This is good evidence that prayer for her was to be, primarily, a way of life that moves in the direction of likeness to Jesus Christ. Father Moreau speaks of prayer as a gravitation toward God. Mother Mary’s sense of prayer was very incarnational. If it was not evident in the person’s daily life, then it simply was not real. She tells the Sisters,

“The Congregation does not need a multitude of members, but members who want to become saints.” (Letter to Community, 1869)

And, for Mother Mary, becoming a saint requires a vibrant relationship with God through prayer.

Mother Mary’s challenge to us echoes the gospel. We are called to be holy as God in heaven is holy. Jesus has shown us the way to do that. The question stands, Do we want to become saints? Do we believe it is possible? If yes, what do we have to do in our life to make that a reality? What role and priority have we assigned to prayer in our spiritual journey?

Third, church. Mother Mary was a woman of the

church. Father Moreau wanted Holy Cross to be, as he said, “planted in the fertile soil of the church.” (Circular Letter 35)

Moreau believed this would give the community an international perspective, especially since the French bishops of the time were much more interested in having religious communities remain within the confines of their own dioceses. We know this was particularly true for the bishop of Le Mans, Jean-Baptiste Bouvier; only upon his death in 1854 did the way open for an initial papal approval of Holy Cross. Mother Mary shared Moreau’s perspective. She supported the growing internationality of the community because it reflected the work of the church around the world.

She understood the contribution that Holy Cross could make to the church through education, health care services and other pastoral activities. Like Moreau, she believed that the work of Holy Cross would shape the future of France as well as of the other countries in which the Sisters were ministering. Her own experience of ministry in Canada gave her a broader world view than was usual among European religious who did not serve in other cultures. She believed that the community’s fidelity to the church would be a binding force for the Congregation in its various and diverse locations and a solid rock upon which its future could be built. That binding proved to be more difficult to maintain in the United States and later in Canada, where strong nationalistic tendencies among the bishops shaped the destinies for several religious communities, including the Sisters’ society in Holy Cross.

Mother Mary did not always agree with the decisions made by local bishops nor even by the Vatican department overseeing the development of Holy Cross; that is, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (today, it is called the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples). Nevertheless, she regularly informed church authorities about the developments within the community. In her relationships with church officials, she wanted to be as transparent as possible. She listened to their directives and recommendations. Still, she was not

afraid to suggest alternatives if she felt that what was being proposed would not work well for the Marianite Sisters. In her responses to church authorities, she was always attentive to respecting the officials, to maintaining the integrity of the community, and to safeguarding the privacy of the Sisters.

For Mother Mary the will of God was meditated through the church. The clearest evidence of that for her was the approval of the constitutions in 1867. This was a confirmation of all that she and Father Moreau had worked for in the development of the community. This is why she insists so strongly on fidelity to the constitutions. She writes to a Sister,

“It is useless merely to have the Constitutions in one’s possession; I am sure they are not read enough to be thoroughly known and followed to their fullest extent. We can understand them truly only by studying them perseveringly.” (Personal Letter)

They are, very simply, God’s will for Holy Cross and the surest way to holiness. This fidelity also includes fidelity to the church. It led her down the painful paths of seeing the separation of the Sisters in Indiana and the Sisters in Canada. Such is the cost of fidelity. However mysterious or difficult she perceived the decisions of higher authorities to be, she knew they had to be obeyed. She writes,

“My God, whom will we obey, if we do not obey the Holy See?” (Personal Letter, 1876)

As a woman of the church, Mother Mary realized that Holy Cross could not progress merely by self-generated energy. If it was to make a contribution to the church, then it had to move in rhythm with the church. The church could provide the larger world perspective that would enable Holy Cross to be effective in its various ministries.

In our own lives, what role does the church have? What of the times when our perspectives differ from those of the church? How do we assure that we do not collapse into our own little world? What keeps us in touch with the larger reality of

the faith community around the world, and even the larger reality of Holy Cross?

The first step in spiritual progress from Basile Moreau’s perspective is “to reform what has been deformed by sin.” Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors offers to us three realities that are foundational to this personal reformation.

Fidelity makes us attentive to the commitment in Holy Cross that we have made in response to God’s call and to the specific responsibilities we have from that commitment.

Prayer sensitizes us to God’s constant presence and loving activity in our lives and in our world, supporting us in our efforts to live the teachings and example of Jesus.

The **church** is the arena in which we live our commitment to God, to Holy Cross, and to the people through our service.

With these three realities as the basis for a genuine reformation, our spiritual life progresses.

“Conform our lives thus reformed to that of Jesus Christ”

Conformity to Jesus Christ is at the very heart of Moreau spirituality; it constitutes the direction in which we want our life to move. Mother Mary’s teaching and the example of her life offer three points that can assist us in nurturing that conformity.

First, integrity. Mother Mary was a woman of integrity. Her living example, the quality of her everyday life, was the primary tool with which she taught and guided the Sisters. One biographer says of her,

“It was above all by her example that she stimulated piety in others.” (Bergeron)

More than from any office she held, her true authority within the community was grounded in her integrity of life. Her decisions were not always popular and the directions in which she wanted to move the community were not universally accepted. Nevertheless, throughout her religious life, her integrity in living Holy Cross was never questioned.

Mother Mary's integrity seemed to shine most brilliantly during times of trials. From the very beginning of the Marianites, the local bishop was opposed to the development of the Sisters as Father Moreau envisioned it. Mother Mary did what needed to be done with dignity and graciousness. She is not among the first group of Marianites to profess vows; she accepted that as part of the way that God was at work in Holy Cross. Again, when tensions emerged between the community in France and the community in Indiana, her integrity remained unwavering. She proceeded in the directions that she believed God and Father Moreau had indicated.

From Mother Mary's perspective, integrity was rooted in doing God's will. She writes,

“I want to satisfy my conscience by carrying out the will of God in everything demanded by my difficult office. God grant that I may faithfully do this for the account which the Divine Master will ask of me will be severe.”
(Annals of the Marianites)

Further, she provides us with some insight into the practices that she believed were associated with integrity.

“It is by recalling the dignity of our origins that we will hold our minds and hearts more elevated toward God, more detached from lesser things, above all from the self-love that disfigures and pitifully shrinks the nobility of the religious state.” (Letter to Community, 1895)

Though what she writes is for the Sisters, it is applicable to any way of life. First, to recall the dignity of our origins. Mother Mary is writing

about Holy Cross and the graces accompanying its foundation; nevertheless, her statement is equally true in terms of our creation in God's image and likeness.

Second, this recollection will enable us to focus our life on God, directing our minds and hearts to God, reminding ourselves of God's presence and activity in our life and in Holy Cross.

Third, detachment, which is to value God above all else, especially ourselves. To the degree that we focus only on ourselves, to that degree we diminish our awareness of our origins in God.

Without recalling our origins and the work of God in them, we can compromise our integrity since we will not see that all this is rooted in God.

These reflections opened with the story from the occasion of Mother Mary's fiftieth anniversary of religious profession of vows when she was asked, “If the Congregation were to be founded again, what would you do?” She replied directly and simply, “I would do the same things over again” (from a Marianite's Recollections). She could say this with confidence and conviction precisely because she had done all things with integrity. Father Moreau himself considered Mother Mary to be a model for all Holy Cross religious.

It is no surprise that, after Mother Mary's death, her assistant, Sister Mary of Saint Agatha, wrote to the community,

“Let us firmly resolve, my dear Sisters, to follow in the footsteps of our venerated foundress and to remain faithful to the holy examples she has given us during more than a half century. They are our spiritual treasures, which we must use to reproduce in our own lives the humility, charity and perfect obedience of which our Mother was such a perfect model.” (1900)

There is the challenge that Mother Mary's integrity presents to us: to live the virtues, that is, to live

the gospel always, throughout life. What do we want people to say of us when they look back upon our presence and activity among them? What do we hope will be the legacy of our presence and example? Which experiences in life have challenged our integrity?

Second, obedience. Mother Mary was a woman of obedience. Her life is marked by her search for God's will and by her desire to complete that will in every aspect of her life. Even before learning about Holy Cross she had discerned that she was called to religious life. Initially, she does not know how or where the result of that discernment would become a reality. A Holy Cross priest recommends that she visit Father Moreau who suggests that she make a retreat. After that retreat, Moreau tells her, "you will go to Sainte Croix" (2 July 1841). She was attracted to the way of life that she witnessed and experienced in the Good Shepherd Monastery while on retreat. Still, she accepts Moreau's word as an indication of God's will for her. Her acceptance of that will at this point is very much a journey into the unknown since Holy Cross is a new community and there is no established and developed branch for women.

Mother Mary wrote to the community in Canada,

"The will of the good God is always lovable."
(Letter, 1867)

Though Mother Mary believed this truth, she did not have a romantic notion that completing God's will would be always easy or pleasant. She learned this by experience. Her assignment to Canada; the difficulties inside and outside the community; seeing the way Father Moreau was unjustly treated; the challenges associated with her work as an administrator – all these realities and others provided occasions for her to practice obedience to God's will. Throughout her life, she learned to seek and do God's will. She says,

"The will of the good God is always lovable, even when it imposes upon us the most difficult sacrifices." (ibid.)

Mother Mary realized that just because something is God's will does not mean that we will always appreciate it or even like what is being asked of us. Courage is necessary for genuine obedience. Such is the example that Jesus and his Mother give to us. Mother Mary writes to a Sister who is overwhelmed by the importance and extent of the tasks she has been asked to fulfill,

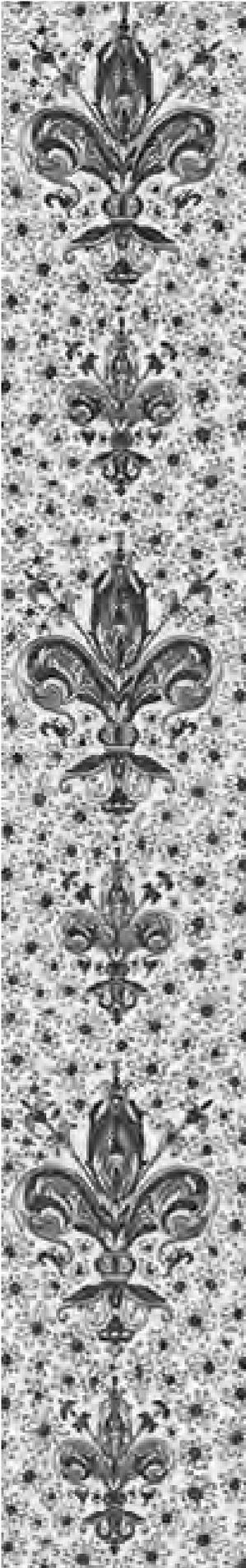
"Take courage, you are performing the will of God wherever you are, and would you want it to be otherwise when the angels in heaven put all their happiness in carrying out this divine and adorable will? Keep that in mind when nature wants to have its own way, and you will soon succeed in silencing it." (Personal Letter, 1854)

There can surely be tension between what God asks of us and what we would prefer to do. Courage enables us to choose God's will. She writes to another Sister,

"Our Lord, in giving this obedience to you, asks nothing more than your correspondence to the graces that he gives you to fulfill it. This is the time, now or never, to abandon yourself with unlimited confidence to God's holy will. The less you depend on yourself, the more will this Divine Master give you his light and his grace to direct his work." (Personal Letter)

We must trust that the grace we need to do God's will is accessible and available to us. We may not understand why God is calling us to move in a particular direction and we may not feel that we are capable of responding. Nevertheless, God's grace will be there. Mother Mary teaches us,

"Our Sovereign Master has impenetrable designs. In the Lord's merciful conduct in our regard he has resources which are still unknown to us, but which will sooner or later be manifested to us and will make us bless his fatherly hand." (Personal Letter, 1865)



It is no wonder that she also tells us,

“Obedience performs miracles.” (Personal Letter, 1886)

Even with all this, obedience is not magic. We must cooperate actively with whatever God is asking of us. Obedience resides within our hearts and is expressed by our choices and actions. Without that cooperation, God’s will is not accomplished. Our commitment, then, must be complete. As Mother Mary instructs us,

“We must not put any conditions on our obedience.” (Personal Letter, 1867)

This is the challenge that Mother Mary’s understanding of obedience places before us: to identify any conditions that we place on our obedience and to do whatever is necessary to remove those conditions so we might be completely open to God. What influence do our individual preferences have in terms of our readiness to do whatever God asks of us? In our experience, when has obedience felt like a real challenge to the truth that God’s will is always good and lovable?

Third, cross. Mother Mary was woman of the cross. Her understanding of the cross paralleled Basile Moreau’s understanding. In 1899, on the 100th anniversary of Moreau’s birth, Mother Mary wrote about this aspect of his spirituality.

“The cross is a sign of salvation; therefore, it must not be feared too much, nor should we complain about its weight, because it is a forerunner of the eternal glory we await. Here below, let us suffer, since suffering is the way traced by Jesus Christ himself who was the first to pass this way; we have but to follow him. This path is sufficiently beaten down now – the saints have walked this way after Jesus.” (Letter to Community, 1899)

Mother Mary does not speak about desiring suffering; rather, she recognizes that suffering will be part of our life. The challenge before us is to see what blessings the cross brings to our life. She tells us,

“I know well that the cross can not be spared us here below. Consequently, I would like to help you accept it and to carry it with submission and courage, and by that fact make it lighter and more meritorious!” (Letter to Community, 1873)

She identifies several blessings that come to us through our experiences of the cross; those experiences:

- encourage us to pray;
- direct us toward hope;
- purify our heart of all that is not God;

- remind us that Holy Cross is God's work;
- strengthen us in our relationship with God;
- prove God's love for us.

For Mother Mary, it is a simple truth. She tells us,

“Where the cross is, there is Jesus.” (Personal Letter, 1867)

Mother Mary had an abundance of crosses in her life; through those crosses she learned that these very blessings came to her. She remained faithful and courageous. In fact, fidelity and courage are her usual recommendations to those who are experiencing the cross. She tells one Sister,

“We are daughters of the cross, and we must bear this title bravely” (Personal Letter, 1856). To another she writes, “This is not the time to run away or to get soft” (Personal Letter, 1873). And to the Sisters in general she says, “Let us not retreat, but let us always advance. The cross must be borne whether we like it or not. It is much heavier for cowardly souls than for those who are fervent and generous.” (Letter to Community, 1870)

Mother Mary was particularly empathetic to those who were experiencing crosses of any kind. Like Father Moreau, she was very blunt and practical about the nature of the cross. Her most profound thinking about the cross is found in her personal letters; there she supports others and helps them to understand and respond to whatever cross they may be experiencing. She writes to a Sister,

“The greatest mark that God can give us of his love and of his predilection is to cause us to suffer and to carry our cross. This is the seal with which he marks his elect. This Divine Master keeps to himself the choice of these crosses and these sufferings. Hence he demands of us great submission to his divine will. He wants us to accept our sufferings, sacrifices, and trials, no matter what they may be, with resignation and abandonment,

in such a way that we may be able to exclaim: My God, may your will be done and not mine. Never, never I say, let yourselves be discouraged and never lose heart because of sadness. May the sight of the crucifix arouse your courage when it is on the point of failing.” (Personal Letter, 1860)

Her wisdom and teaching truly echo Moreau's thinking. We can draw some important truths about the cross from this text.

A. The cross is a mark of God's love and choice. Mother Mary is not speaking experientially, but theologically. The cross does not “feel” as if God loves us and has chosen us. Feelings can not diminish the truth of that, but they can dull our awareness of that truth.

B. God decides our crosses. Another way of saying this is that self-chosen or self-created crosses will be of no benefit to us. Only God is a source of grace for our experiences of the cross. Self-made crosses are little more than pride.

C. The cross attunes us to God's will. The second principal effect of the cross is to align our will with God's own. The first effect is to align our entire life with the life and example of Jesus Christ. Our life, like Jesus' own, must proclaim “God, not my will but yours be done.”

D. The cross is a source of courage. Mother Mary was keenly aware that our experiences of the cross could drain our resources, particularly our courage. Jesus' example reminds us that life comes from the cross. We need to focus on that truth in the midst of our crosses, however difficult that may be. That focus will not alter our experience, but it can direct our attention to the truth of the resurrection within the cross.

Our experiences of the cross can give us a sense that our future has been compromised. We can sense that this will be our experience for the rest of our life and that God is far away from us. Mother Mary assures us,

“Everything is not lost even when the cross seems heavier than usual. Our Lord is there, he himself tasted the bitter chalice. He will pour out in abundant measure the balm of his divine consolations, if you know how to turn to good use the trial, the lesson, he gives you, which he assigns you...” (Letter to Community, 1865)

It is intriguing that she speaks of God assigning to us the lesson we are to learn from the cross. The lesson always has to do with our likeness to Jesus. Mother Mary indicates that we must put the lesson to good use precisely so it will have a transforming influence in our life. So, she instructs us:

“Never murmur against sufferings and the Cross! The good God has chosen for you what his heart found most profitable for your soul.” (Personal Letter)

That is the challenge for us. What use do we make of the crosses that come to us in life? Do we believe they are profitable for our soul? Do we try to see the potential blessings within them? Recall a cross in your life that, now, has become a blessing, a gift.

The second step in spiritual progress from Basile Moreau’s perspective is “to conform our lives thus reformed to that of Jesus Christ.” Mother Mary of the Seven Dolours challenges us to move toward this conformity in everything we do in life.

Integrity urges us to live the gospel always as the guide and standard for following Jesus’ example and teaching.

Obedience situates us in relationship with God’s will so we can respond freely and whole-heartedly to whatever is asked of us.

The **Cross** blesses us with a new life that directs our energies toward being like Christ in all things, at all times; and even more, as Father Moreau taught, being Christ among the people.

With these three points directing us toward conformity to Christ, our spiritual life progresses.

“Confirm ourselves in that conformity”

Our conformity to Jesus Christ must be more than a verbal or even an intellectual assent. Our actions and our attitudes must confirm the seriousness of our intention to live that conformity. Mother Mary gives us three ways in which we can confirm our intention.

First, community. Mother Mary was a woman of community. Long before she became part of Holy Cross she was a cohesive element in the life of her own family. After the death of her mother, she became a leader within the family, encouraging, educating, and guiding her siblings. When she enters Holy Cross, she assigns a high priority to community and uses her energies for the good of the Sisters. Frequently, she would instruct the Sisters,

“Let us have but one heart and one soul.”
(Comments at fiftieth anniversary of foundation, 1891)

Though this was natural to her, it was communicated to her and affirmed for her by Father Moreau.

Her approach to building community was relational rather than directive. When she arrived in Canada to oversee the community, which needed greater organization and consistency in its practices, she took the time to know the Sisters. First of all, she sought their good will, respect, and cooperation. Only then did she begin to implement the changes that were needed. And she did that with great sensitivity. Her instructions to the Sisters are simple, but blunt.

“Where charity and union of hearts do not exist, God can not dwell, for God is the prince of peace. Where tumult,

murmuring, criticism, independence, and pride are found, God can not be found.” (Letter to Community, 1865)

For Mother Mary, community was ever a practical reality, each member had to be engaged in building and maintaining it. For her, this was the strength of community, that each Sister would bring her whole self to the community; that each Sister would be willing to share her life with the others. She writes to the Sisters,

“All of you will be happy to pool your qualities, your talents, your strength, your health, your prayers, and even your virtues. I beg of you, be united, have only one heart and one soul, as well as one will.” (Letter to Community, 1864)

Without this quality of commitment, this willingness to participate, this engagement by each individual, community will be neither strong nor lasting for very long.

Mother Mary was aware that she was responsible for an international community. She was equally aware of the divisions, misunderstandings, and even prejudices that could emerge within such a diverse community. In addressing that reality, she writes,

“I implore you to pay no attention to nationality. We are all one in the big family of Christ. We have come together in community voluntarily, to work for the glory of God and to sanctify ourselves and our neighbor. No, no, let there be no division, let all nations be one in the judgment and esteem of each other. ... Let us look at the qualities and reject all ambition, all prejudice. Thus we will keep a family spirit that will produce happiness.” (Letter to Community, 1897)

There is a prophetic wisdom in her words. Our world today is too often divided because of ignorance between nations, an unwillingness to listen and learn from one another, and a lack of

openness to one another.

Father Moreau also challenged the members of Holy Cross to a broader view of the world. In 1864 he wrote,

“Let us not limit our interests to the narrow confines of a particular house, a province, or our own country. This would be egoism and self-seeking. Rather let us be one with all our houses and regard none as a stranger to the one in which we live.” (Circular Letter 174)

Mother Mary is realistic in her understanding that there are differences among nations. Nevertheless, that is no cause for harboring animosity toward other human beings, all of whom are created in God’s image and likeness. Again, she writes on a personal level,

“In my sentiments, as in my devotedness to them, I put together all the nations which find themselves represented in our congregation... To express my mind here very frankly, I know that it is unfortunately true that this or that defect may be more common in one nation than in another, but I also know that it is impossible to find perfection on earth. Our Lord, who came to save all people, showed no partiality. He rejects no one from the church and, on the contrary, he sends his apostles out in search of the most abandoned, the most savage, to bring them together within his fold of the church and then into paradise, without any respect of persons, nations, or feelings.” (Personal Letter, 1868)

Clearly, this is a challenge to each of us; it is call to charity and openness on a global scale. We can imagine the transforming impact that living her words would have upon the world and its future.

All this is possible, not easy. It requires a genuine selflessness. Mother Mary’s teaching is clear and uncompromising.

“Be united in your work; be united everywhere and in everything; have but one heart and one soul and one same will ... No such words as ‘mine’ and ‘yours,’ but always ‘our religious family.’ When we do not seek personal interest, we are happy to place our qualities, talents, strength, health, prayer and even our virtue at the service of others.”
(Letter to Community, 1897)

This selflessness sums up Mother Mary’s entire life and beyond, since she has continued to be a formative influence in the community since her death.

Selflessness is not easy. Community brings many joys into our life, it will also bring many crosses. This is simply the reality of our life together. Mother Mary was quite direct about this and about our response to it. She wrote to a Sister,

“I think that you are too much afraid of suffering for Jesus Christ. Do you sometimes think of all that he suffered for you? Neither did he satisfy everybody, in spite of his wisdom and his kindness. You know how many enemies he had, and how far they carried their hatred and their scorn for his sacred person. Do not be astonished if you can not please all in your house. Imitate our Savior, do your duty; then put up with what you can not prevent. Ask Jesus to accomplish his work himself.”
(Personal Letter)

Community is, in addition to our efforts, primarily God’s work. We must pray for one another and be attentive to the quality of efforts we make to be community. Even though community is God’s work, that work is not done in isolation apart from our contribution.

As Mother Mary approached her death she was asked to remember the community. She responded,

“I have prayed too much for the community on earth to forget it in heaven.” (1900)

We can trust that she still remembers us.

Community is challenging. We are part of the Holy Cross community and the human community. Do we recognize that and respect that? Do we recognize and try to live, as much as possible, the inclusive, interdependent, multi-cultural, and international character of Holy Cross community? When have we experienced aspects of community life that simply had to be put up with because we could not prevent them? What have been our joys and crosses in living Holy Cross community?

Second, affection. Mother Mary was a woman of affection. Her affectionate character finds its roots in a faith-filled and close family life. She was especially close to her father and her sister, Romaine. Though it was difficult for her when she was assigned to Canada and so had to depart France, she does so trusting that this is what God wants of her. About going to Canada, she writes to her father,

“I myself will break this news to Romaine. If Romaine wants to come see me before my departure, please restrain her; it would be too painful both for her and for me.”
(Personal Letter, 1849)

Clearly, her attachment to and feelings for her sister were deep. Also, she never did see her father again; he died in 1854, 9 years before she returned to France.

As a religious of Holy Cross, Mother Mary maintained a genuine affection for her Sisters in community. This affection was expressed in her approach to administration even if the Sisters were not always aware of it. Some examples:

– When she assigned Sisters to particular works or locations, she was especially sensitive to those for whom she knew it would be difficult. This did not prevent her from making the assignment, but she would take extra care to explain her decision so the Sisters could understand the good they would be doing and the contribution they would be making.

– When she had to correct someone, she would accompany the correction with encouragement. She did not want the Sisters to leave her presence with a diminished sense of self. She wanted the Sisters to do what they had to do by choice, not by guilt.

– Even with her many responsibilities and regular travels, the challenging tasks of administration and the many people she encountered, Mother Mary remembered the Sisters’ names and personalities, and even their physical and spiritual needs. When she met new Sisters, even late in her life, she came to know them well.

– It was a great joy for her to see Holy Cross growing and expanding into other countries; nevertheless, she felt keenly the departure of Sisters from the mother house to those distant places.

– She felt deeply the suffering of the sick Sisters. If it was possible, she cared for them herself so she could encourage them and pray with them. When she would learn that a Sister was seriously ill, she would stop her work and visit the Sister, even if that meant traveling to a nearby city or village.

All these examples and others reflect a woman who is fully human, sensitive to others, caring, and truly affectionate. She developed and maintained relationships. When she returned to France, after having lived in Canada for 14 years, she wrote,

“I will need the will of God to keep me here” (Personal Letter, 1863). And she tells the community in Canada, “I have the deepest and most tender memories of you all.” (Letter to Community, 1863)

It is no surprise to hear Sister Mary of Saint John Baptist, a close friend of Mother Mary’s, say about her, “Oh, how I loved her! How kind she was!” (1920’s). The Annals of the Canadian Sisters note, “How many other Sisters are still living and preserve these sentiments of respect!” (1930)

Mother Mary was a woman of affection, she touched

people and influenced them by her love and care for them. That is how she was remembered. Three years before her death, she wrote to the superior in New Orleans, intending her words to be for the whole community.

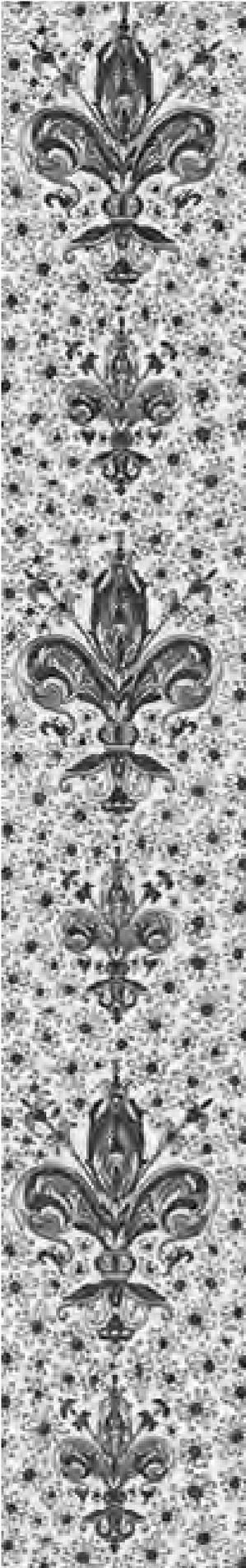
“I do not forget my beloved daughters, no matter where they may be working for the glory of God and the salvation of souls for, no matter what may be the occupation in which they are engaged, either for the children or for the sick, it is for the glory of God.” (Personal Letter, 1897)

Mother Mary’s legacy as a person of affection is clear. In terms of our relationships, what do we hope our legacy will be? How do we hope we will be remembered? What can we learn from Mother Mary of the Seven Dolours regarding how we develop and value and maintain relationships?

Third, joy. Mother Mary was a woman of joy. Her deepest joy was rooted in her relationship with God, her vocation in Holy Cross, and her service to the Sisters. This is not to say that there were no difficulties and challenges associated with all these, there were. But her sense of joy was sustained by a faith that was convinced of God’s loving presence and activity. Among her greatest joys was seeing the Constitutions of the community receive initial approval in 1867 and then definitive approval in 1885. At the same time, there were struggles and setbacks leading to those approvals. Still, her joy remained firm.

Her sense of joy was very practical; she would say that she wanted no sad faces among the Sisters since that could be a source of discouragement for others, in community and in ministry. She writes to a Sister,

“Our Lord wants to be served in joy; besides, this helps to encourage the world and to make people see that the service of our good Savior is neither sad nor austere.” (Personal Letter, 1863). She wanted all the Sisters to “taste the joy of religious life.” (Personal Letter, 1876)



It was important to her that the Sisters be happy in this way of life since they chose it in response to God's call. For her part, she tried to bring joy wherever she went. A Sister in Canada wrote to another in France,

“How happy our hearts are these days! Our well-beloved Mother is among us!”

This was a common sentiment among the Sisters wherever and whenever Mother Mary visited them.

Mother Mary realized that joy does not displace the reality of the cross. The challenge is to be joyful, to be assured that God is present and active, even in the midst of experiencing the cross. She writes to a Sister who was confronting various difficulties,

“Do not allow yourself to give in to sadness, for this would displease our Lord. We must serve him with joy and carry his cross happily.” (Personal Letter, 1864)

The cross is not incompatible with joy. If we can recognize, by faith, that our crosses are the seeds of our resurrection, then we can acknowledge that they can be a gift for our transformation. That acknowledgment is a joy in itself. Mother Mary writes,

“The more sacrifices we make, the closer we will be to God.” (Personal Letter, 1858)

Mother Mary's joy was no mere contentment about what was going on in her life or in the life of the community. It was not based on pleasant experiences and agreeable circumstances. Rather, her joy reflected nothing less than God's love; a love that remains constant regardless of experiences and circumstances; a love that is faithful despite human weakness and sinfulness. Mother Mary's recommendation is simple and direct:

“If you want to be happy, love work, order, and piety.” (Personal Letter, 1865)

From her perspective, joy is found in fidelity to the ordinary aspects of our commitment as religious.

For Mother Mary, joy was to be found in the familiar and usual tasks and responsibilities of our everyday life: our work, the rhythm of our day, our efforts to sustain our relationship with God. Where do we find our deepest joy? What assures us that God's love is present and active in our life and in our world? How do we bring joy to others?

The third step in spiritual progress according to Basile Moreau is “to confirm ourselves in that conformity” to Jesus Christ. Mother Mary identifies some components of that confirmation.

Community – family – is the primary arena in which we live our conformity to Christ. The quality of our immediate relationships confirms or contradicts that conformity.

Affection is a practical way to express our conformity to Christ. We confirm that conformity by our care for people and our concern about them and our interest in them.

Joy expresses our conviction that we are doing what we believe God has called us to do. We confirm our conformity to Christ by our willingness to rejoice and be grateful regardless of circumstances.

With these three we do confirm our efforts to be Christ in our world, and so our spiritual life progresses.

“Transform ourselves into the divine Model”

Reform, Conform, Confirm – all these blend together and advance so we might be Christ through our daily life and work. This opens us to the grace of transformation with which we must cooperate. Mother Mary’s example and teaching demonstrate for us some qualities of life that are foundational to this transformation.

First, compassion. Mother Mary was a woman of compassion. This quality was rooted in her love for and knowledge of the individual Sisters and of the whole Congregation. Her model was Jesus himself. She knew well those gospel passages in which Jesus encountered individuals and crowds who were in need; their situation urged him to respond with compassion. For Mother Mary, no other model or standard was necessary. And, she strived to live that.

Her compassion was directed regularly to those Sisters who were sick and / or dying. She wanted to be with them and accompany them as much as possible. It is no surprise that her contemporaries recounted how tireless she was in her attentiveness to the elderly and the sick and those approaching death. Father Moreau himself was a beneficiary of Mother Mary’s compassionate kindness and generosity. When he moved out of the mother house and, for all practical purposes, was ignored by the men of Holy Cross, she made sure that he was cared for during the seven years after his resignation until his death.

Compassion was a principle and a means of reconciliation in Mother Mary’s relationships. If she discovered that she had hurt someone, she would be distressed that she was the cause for another person to be sorrowful or discouraged. Besides acknowledging her mistake or fault, and asking for forgiveness, she would find little ways to be helpful, generous, and attentive to that person. She could sense what the person was experiencing and wanted to counteract that through her compassionate and kind actions toward the person.

During the Franco-Prussian War, the students at the school in Montréal took up a collection to aid the French people, and particularly the children, affected by the war. They sent the funds to Mother Mary. She wrote to the students in gratitude,

“How much I appreciate your sympathy for the unhappiness of these people! It fills me with hope for the future. You already understand that among all the Christian virtues, compassion for the afflicted is the dearest to the heart of our Lord.” (Personal Letter, 1871)

There are at least two especially interesting points in this statement.

First, compassion from others communicates hope for the future. Whatever a person’s situation may be, receiving compassion enables the person to believe that the situation, or at least one’s understanding

and experience of it, is not permanent. There can be more to the future than simply a continuation of the present.

Second, compassion is the dearest virtue to Jesus' heart because it reflects the very nature of his heart as love. Mother Mary's teaching in this is consistent with the example of Jesus as he responds to people; frequently, he has compassion for individuals and crowds who look to him for hope. Mother Mary's teaching echoes Father Moreau's understanding of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; an understanding that he passed on to the women and men of Holy Cross. In his Sermon on the Sacred Heart, Moreau tells us,

“One of the principal goals of this devotion is to present us a model for imitation. The sight of the Savior's heart should say to each of us, as in the past when Moses was given the plan for the Ark of the Covenant and the tabernacle, ‘Look at this example and make a faithful copy.’ (Ex. 25:40)”

Compassion requires a willingness to go beyond self and an openness to know others. Mother Mary nurtured and practiced that willingness and openness in her own life. Therein is her challenge to us. If we see ourselves as part of the Body of Christ, as interdependent with others, then compassion becomes a natural part of our relational life. Do we see ourselves as interdependent with others and so called to compassion? What hindrances do we see in ourselves that could block our willingness to reach out to others with compassion? What prevents us from truly listening to others and knowing something of their experience? What is our experience of receiving compassion?

Second, humility. Mother Mary was a woman of humility. When she was a novice at the Good Shepherd Monastery, the directress of novices would say, “Be humble as dirt,” and “work at holy humility.” For Mother Mary, humility was a simple reality. It involved placing self at the service of others and accepting whatever work was assigned. She writes,

“Happy are those to whom their humble occupations make the virtue of humility easier. Happy are those who, in their assignment or obedience, no matter what it may be, know how to preserve themselves from the humiliating smoke of pride and from the dangers of high offices.” (Letter to Community, 1876)

Though she did hold high offices in the community for most of her life, Mother Mary was content to do everyday simple tasks – laundry, cleaning house, domestic organization, caring for the elderly and the sick. She never lost her ability to enjoy doing those simple tasks.

Mother Mary never said that work was easy or that everyone was equally suited to it. Nevertheless, the immediate work to be done and, in fact, our entire life, provide us with opportunities for humility. As Mother Mary says,

“We should humble ourselves, you and me, before the fact that the divine Master desires to use us, who are so unimportant and pitiable, to work for God's glory. Therefore, we count on God alone and on God's grace to triumph over the obstacles we meet, obstacles which tend to paralyze the work of God.” (Letter to Community, 1897)

There is an important teaching here. Humility enables us to trust God, to rely on grace, and to overcome whatever could compromise the mission to which we have been called. What is our experience of humility in light of that teaching?

Mother Mary wrote to a Sister who felt that her work was unimportant and inconsequential,

“There is nothing so great as those works of charity that seem to be the most lowly.” (Personal Letter, 1874)

Humility is not grounded in the work itself but in its reflection of a life hidden with God through Jesus. The hidden life was a favorite theme for Father Moreau,

and Mother Mary shared that perspective. On the occasion of commemorating the 100th anniversary of his birth, she wrote,

“Let us insistently beg for this hidden life in God with Jesus Christ. It seems to me that our society has special need for this in order to clearly understand the plan of grace and to support it as much as we can.” (Letter to Community, 1899)

As with everything in our life, humility is rooted in our union with Jesus. From Mother Mary’s perspective, humility will be the basis for any greatness we experience. She tells us,

“It is particularly humility and abnegation that our congregation needs in order to set itself up on the only solid foundation of a life hidden in God with Jesus Christ.” (Letter to Community, 1885)

“If our society grows, if the church deigns to busy itself with it by approving it, it is not due, doubtless, to anything but humble prayer, to the modest and obscure life of hidden souls known only to God.” (Letter to Community, 1886)

“If we wish to grow in the church, we have a good means at our disposal, and this is to become the humblest of all congregations.” (Letter to Community, 1882)

Nothing of what Mother Mary says here implies any lack of interest in vocations or possible future ministries. Quite the contrary, her words are a call to accept whatever service we can render, given the limitations of human and financial resources. Humility calls us to do what we can as we can. As Mother Mary says,

“Humility receives worthily, preserves, and transmits the blessings of heaven.” (Letter to Community, 1886)

This is what humility is meant to do. Admittedly,

many of those blessings will be hidden under the guise of the simplest realities. Nevertheless, they are blessings.

An image for Holy Cross that Father Moreau used was that of a mighty tree, always developing and growing so it could support and continue life. Mother Mary knew well that image; she wrote to the Sisters,

“If in imitation of our Divine Founder, we content ourselves to be the grain of wheat or mustard seed that, falling into the ground, dies in order to become the great tree contained in its kernel, then we will have the consolation, in God, of seeing and gathering from it the fruits of our abnegation in the future achievements of our congregation.” (Letter to Community, 1873)

The key to those future achievements, even as it is in the gospel, is our willingness to be the seed that must die so new life can emerge.

Mother Mary entered a religious community that, for all practical purposes, did not exist. As the community developed, some Sisters professed religious vows before her. Still, she serves as superior of the group. In that service she never assumed the worst of a person; rather, she made it a point to look for the good. And, she never assumed that she was better than others. Mother Mary stands as a model of humility for us. She reminds us,

“Pride ruins us. I have pity on a soul which, although it works a good deal, amasses only straw to be burned, because of self-will.” (Personal Letter, 1857)

So she reminds us,

“Humility makes us more distrustful of ourselves, more obedient to the Rule, more attentive to asking advice before acting, more docile to counsels received, and more united in intention and generosity in everything we do for the common good.” (Letter to Community, 1869)

Mother Mary's care for the Sisters and love for Holy Cross enabled her to overcome any self-will within her and so direct her life toward the good of others, the common good.

Free will is a powerful reality in our life. It can lead us toward or away from God; it can guide us to serve others or tempt us to focus only on ourselves. Humility will make the difference, for it is an act of the will. Which life experiences have taught us humility? What have been our greatest challenges to being truly humble? How do we gauge our growth toward union with God?

Third, love. Mother Mary was a woman of love. This quality of her life is simply the natural culmination of all that we have examined thus far. She is a woman of God, a woman of the gospel. Her letters, to individuals and to the whole community, express a genuine concern for the Sisters, born of her love for them. This love was mediated through all those qualities of life above: fidelity, prayer, church, integrity, obedience, cross, community, affection, joy, compassion, and humility. These directed her toward love and formed her by love.

Mother Mary's love for others was rooted in her love for God, her awareness that she had been chosen and called by God, and her commitment to God in Holy Cross. These are the foundations upon which she built her life. These were communicated to others by her teaching and especially by her example.

Her perspective on love reflects the teaching of the gospel. Love is the principal means by which we maintain and strengthen our union with one another. Other bonds among us can and will also be of support, but they may not have the same durability as love. Love must be the premier mark of our apostolic presence among the people. We are capable of bringing much professionalism and many talents into ministry. But if that professionalism and those talents are not informed by love, gradually, they can begin to communicate more about our achievements than about Jesus' presence and God's work.

Over the years of her religious life, Mother Mary was

called to the ministry of authority many times, for long periods of time. No doubt, that work brought with it moments of frustration and disappointment and, of course, moments of accomplishment and blessing. She knew and accepted the fact that, in such a ministry, neither her life nor even her time was truly her own. Everything had to be placed at the disposal of the Sisters, everything was dedicated to the Sisters and the continuing mission of Holy Cross. She did this precisely because she was a woman of love, a woman of God, a woman of the gospel.

Mother Mary writes,

“Just think, we can be gaining merit at every moment as long as charity is the motive of our prayers, our intentions and our works. Without charity, whatever we do to fill our days and years will leave us empty-handed before God who has given us the most certain means of gaining heaven.” (Letter to Community, 1893)

What will we have in our hands at the end of our life? Or, what will we want to have in our hands?

The announcement of Mother Mary's death in the Annals of the Marianites sums up, simply and eloquently, this quality of her life.

“Her exquisite charity, obedience, love of her Congregation, guided all her ways.” (1900)

What do we want to be said of us, regarding what guided all our ways during life? What can we learn from Mother Mary about living the gospel? about living Holy Cross? about being people of love?

The fourth step in spiritual progress according to Basile Moreau is “to transform ourselves into the divine Model.” Mother Mary teaches us the essential elements of that transformation.

Compassion enables us to accompany others in their distress and suffering, to be the presence of Jesus for them and with them.

Humility situates us at the service of others; it is marked by a willingness to accept and to do whatever is required by that service for the good of others.

Love articulates and demonstrates our practical living of the gospel; by this we can be Christ among the people as Moreau instructed us to be.

By these three qualities we set aside self and gradually die to self that Christ may truly live within us and through us. And with that life we can transform the world.

“I would gladly begin my religious life over again”

After 50 years of religious life, Mother Mary told those who were celebrating her anniversary,

“I would do the same things over again.”

Clearly, she was convinced and confident that she had been doing exactly what God wanted her to be doing. Six years later, in January of the new twentieth century, just a few days before her death on the 29th, she says to the community members gathered around her and praying for her,

“If God should restore me to health, I would gladly begin my religious life over again.” Then she amplifies this by adding, “I do not regret a single day of it.”

She could make these statements, after 50 years of religious life and then just before her death, not because she experienced uninterrupted bliss in Holy Cross, with no challenges or frustrations to recount, but because she had lived this way of life passionately and creatively. She lived all those qualities which shaped her character, qualities which remain a significant part of the living legacy that she has passed on to us.

All this was, of course, God’s doing, but it was also Mother Mary’s decision to cooperate with God’s work. In 1887, she wrote a letter to Father Charles

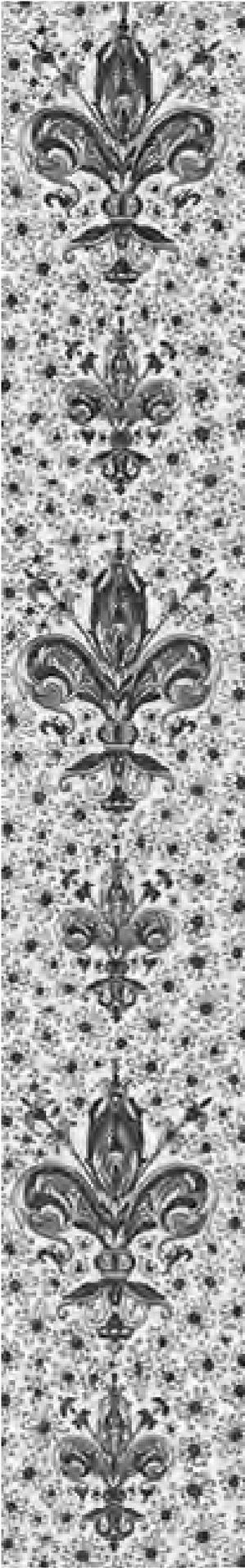
Moreau in which she reflected on the important events of 1841 that guided her to Le Mans and to become a member of Holy Cross. She tells Father Charles,

“For a long time I did not think, at least not seriously, of religious life, since it was only at the age of twenty-two (1840) that I, at last, decided to leave the world.”

This decision is the seed of her passion for religious life and of her creativity in living it. The quality of her life during those 58 years as a religious in the Family of Holy Cross confirm that this decision was truly a moment of grace, whose trajectory set her on a path of consistency and constancy in all her relationships – with God, with her Sisters in community, and with all those she encountered.

These reflections and the qualities we have focused on are not a complete spiritual profile of this remarkable woman. There are other qualities of life that formed who she was and guided what she did. We could mention her **zeal** for religious life, for Holy Cross, for the mission that had been entrusted to her. Her **graciousness** in dealing with people and events reflects the sensitivity of her charity. Never does she compromise her **dignity** as a religious nor the dignity of those whom she governed or worked with in any capacity. She is profoundly **respectful** and **courteous**, even to those who disagreed with her or actively opposed her efforts and decisions. In all this we see the portrait of a woman who believed firmly in the gospel; a woman who lived faithfully and fully the spirit and teaching of Father Moreau; a woman who contributed to the composition of the Family of Holy Cross as we know it today; and a woman who was convinced that Holy Cross could make a qualitative difference in our world, now and for the future.

Two final qualities will sum up Mother Mary’s living example for Holy Cross.



“Have courage, yes, courage”

By personality and by grace, Mother Mary of the Seven Dolours was a woman of **courage**. More than an occasional response to situations, courage is a thread that runs through her life, weaving it into a well-knit fabric of consent to God’s will, fidelity to Holy Cross, love for the Sisters, and service to the people. She needed courage, after the death of her mother, to be a comfort and guide for her siblings and a support for her father. Courage marked her decision to leave her family and set out for Le Mans to enter religious life. Hoping to be accepted by the Good Shepherd Sisters, her plans changed when she is asked to consider becoming part of a community that was not yet completely in existence as a group of women religious. After a few months, she is appointed assistant to Father Moreau and, after a few years, superior of the Sisters. She writes to another superior,

“Have courage, yes, courage in your trials and in the contradictions inseparable from your office as well as from mine.” (Personal Letter, 1847)

A few years later, she is asked to leave her family – and this time France itself – to minister among the people and to be a formative influence for the Sisters in Canada. Fourteen years later she returns to France just at the time when some in the Holy Cross family are betraying, abandoning, and causing a variety of serious difficulties for Father Moreau. After the founder’s resignation and the sale of the Holy Cross properties, Mother Mary must find means of support and a place to live for the Sisters. Courage. In her remaining years, she sought ways for the community, not only to survive, but to flourish. Throughout her life, she set aside personal and ministerial preferences to accept the responsibilities associated with leadership and administration. Her courage rested firmly on her faith that God is ever a part of and always at work in Holy Cross. She writes,

“I want to assure you that I am always in admiration of the providential help which comes to us regularly on the days it is needed.” (Personal Letter, 1871)

The etymology of the word ‘courage’ is ‘heart.’ Mother Mary’s approach to painful or difficult or confusing situations was truly from the heart. Her advice is most wise,

“Courage, then, do not let yourself be shaken by sadness and discouragement when you do not feel the love of God that you would like to feel.” (Letter to Community, 1856)

“Let us hope more than ever”

Mother Mary was a woman of **hope**. This is inseparable from her courage; its roots are in faith and in the following of Jesus. Like courage, hope, too, is a matter of the heart and must be lived from the heart. Even in very trying moments, she could write,

“Let us hope more than ever and against all hope. Have confidence.” (Letter to Community, 1865)

Such hope draws strength from the gospel and God’s faithfulness. She tells us,

“We must hope that the divine Master who is watching over you and over his foundation will bring his greater glory out of this confusion. The suffering endured to carry out God’s divine will will not remain without fruit, and eternity will be long enough for our reward.” (Personal Letter, 1882)

Hope enabled Mother Mary to look toward the future, not with an unrealistic romanticism, but with a profound conviction of God’s faithfulness. She writes to a Sister,

“You must not be worried and alarmed for the future of your province. You must continue to pray much and to perform your duties courageously without ever giving in to discouragement.” (Personal Letter, 1882)

Like Father Moreau, Mother Mary understood the intimate bond between hope and the cross. Together, these two realities would strengthen Holy Cross. During the difficulty and disappointment and pain surrounding Moreau’s resignation she wrote,

“Our society will be grounded on the cross and it will certainly hold firm.” (Letter to Community, 1866)

Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors truly did learn and live *Spes Unica*, the cross became her only hope.

It was never a matter of seeking or wishing for the cross, but of recognizing that God’s loving presence and activity are not altered or diminished by our experiences of the cross.

“Not in vain that you were given the name”

In 1891, as the Sisters were celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of their foundation, Mother Mary recounted the marvelous ways that God had worked and the many graces that had been given over those decades. Then someone in the gathering highlighted Mother Mary’s role in the development of Holy Cross. Very simply she said in response,

“I had nothing at all to do with the foundation. This congregation has no foundress.”

It is true that Father Moreau himself looked above all to God as the founder of Holy Cross; already, in 1850 he wrote,

“Holy Cross is not a human work, but God’s very own.” (Circular Letter 40)

Mother Mary shared that perspective wholeheartedly. Still, it is clear that she had much to do with the formation and continuation of the foundation and its heritage over those years. It is appropriate to honor her as a foundress.

Father Moreau wrote a congratulatory letter to Mother Mary in 1866 on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of her reception of the habit. In that letter he tells her,

“I understand all the sentiments of your heart on this anniversary. It took place in such unusual circumstances and was followed by events which you were then far from suspecting. But grace must win out over nature. And it is really consoling

to recall that it was not in vain that you were given the name as a daughter of Our Lady of the Seven Dolors. As you behold the difficulties unleashed against the foundation we have undertaken, you must not have the slightest doubt that this foundation is destined to turn many people away from evil.”

Truly, her name has not been in vain, for she has lived it to the fullest; and the foundation has been a transforming force in our world. And now we have the privilege of continuing the work of that transformation; God’s own work.

“Do not be religious by half”

Demographic studies of France in the nineteenth century describe the people of Montenay as energetic in life and work, committed to getting done whatever needed to be done. They were courageous, unafraid to take risks for the good of their families and for the sake of their convictions. And they were ready and willing to take up new adventures; they generally had a realistic optimism about the future.

This description most certainly captures the profile of Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors. She was indeed energetic, industrious, courageous, and adventurous. Without her contribution and leadership, Holy Cross might not have evolved as well as it did in France, the United States, Canada, and Bengal (today, Bangladesh). In a personal letter she wrote,

“Do not be religious by half.” And in another letter, “It is better not to be a religious at all than to be one only by half.”

That is the standard she set; it is also the example she gave. It is appropriate for us to follow in her footsteps, wholeheartedly and not by half.

It must have been an honor for Léocadie Gascoin, as a religious, to be named after the patroness of Holy

Cross. The pathways of her life were not unlike the roads that Mary traveled in response to God’s will and the mission of her Son. Mother Mary points to Our Lady as a model for us. In a personal letter she wrote,

“If the patroness of our Congregation, the Mother of Sorrows, had her heart pierced with seven swords, we, through compassion for her, ought to suffer with patience, tranquility, and resignation the trials attached to our name and to our most glorious title, that of daughters of Our Lady of Sorrows. ... Accustom yourself to consider as of small account the little troubles, the renuncements of your own will, your self-love; and later you will be able to bear with courage and resignation the trials that the good Master will arrange for the good of your soul.”

Mother Mary learned well and by experience that trials are good for the soul, precisely because God is present and active within them.

In 1920, Saint André Bessette had an occasion to meet with Mother Mary of Saint Matthew, the superior general of the Marianites. During their conversation, Brother André noted that Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors’ fidelity to Father Moreau paralleled the experience of Mary on Calvary at the foot of the cross. Though his relationship with Saint Joseph was of high priority and witnessed by many people, Brother André would tell his contemporaries that his favorite devotion was the Passion of Christ. He frequently reflected on all the individuals who appear in the scriptural accounts of that event. It is intriguing that, of all the virtues he might have identified in Mother Mary, André highlighted her fidelity and her likeness to Mary of Sorrows.

Through Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors’ intercession and by following her example, may our life be such that the same may be said of us: that we were not religious and Christian by half, that we were faithful, and that we, too, were willing to stand by Mary at the foot of the cross.

"I WOULD DO THE SAME THINGS OVER AGAIN"

Wisdom for the Spiritual Life according to Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors

- 1 "If the Congregation were to be founded again what would you do?" Without hesitation she affirmed, "I would do the same things over again." (from a Marianite's Recollections)
- 2 "I shall have no fears for the Congregation, and even if all of you had abandoned me on hearing of our catastrophes, I should have begun all over again as soon as I could, so convinced am I that what I have undertaken is the will of God." (Moreau - Circular Letter 179)
- 3 "The requirements for spiritual progress: to reform what has been deformed by sin; to conform our lives thus reformed to that of Jesus Christ; to confirm ourselves in that conformity; to transform ourselves into the divine Model." (Moreau, Sermons - "Meditation")
- 4 "Put all your confidence in the good God and do not worry. God only demands of us our good will and asks that we do our best. This good Master does the rest. You know that God wants us to count solely on grace." (Personal Letter, 1859)
- 5 "We must will what God wants and submit to it generously. Let us not lose the time which is given to us for our sanctification." (Personal Letter, 1863)
- 6 "When you have done your best, be quite sure that your duty is fulfilled as God asks it of you." (Personal Letter)
- 7 "Nothing was so close to the heart of the very respected Mother Foundress than little observances" (Annals). Regularly, she would help with preparing food and cleaning tables and mopping floors and doing laundry. She herself writes, "Well, in sewing, washing, cooking, ironing, caring for the sick, you are working at the building up of our Congregation." (Personal Letter 1862)
- 8 "You know well that happiness is found only in the accomplishment of duty. Give ardent thanks to the Lord for having chosen you among so many others to be part of the favored number. I was but God's instrument. It is to God that you owe everything." (Personal Letter, 1861)
- 9 "Far from me be the thought of attributing to myself the merit of the truly providential works which have just arisen under my direction. After God, who is alone the author of all good, it is to the devotedness of my fellow-priests and to your own spirit of cooperation that we owe the astounding work of Holy Cross as it exists today. I have been but a simple tool which the Lord will soon break that he may substitute for it others more worthy." (Moreau - Circular Letter 14)
- 10 "I shall remain, until my last sigh, in the same sentiments that you inspired in me for so many years." (Moreau - 1870)
- 11 "Bear this in mind with me: We must belong entirely to God or we are God's enemy. No one can serve two masters; Jesus has said so. Could you then hesitate in your choice? Would you want to be shipwrecked so close to the port? No, no, my friends, this can not be the case." (Letter to Community, 1865)
- 12 "When we do think of praying in difficult situations, what courage we would find and how happy we would be in suffering, if we saw things with the eyes of faith! We would see then the merciful designs of our good Master who, through these trials, wants to give us a beautiful reward in eternity." (Letter to Community, 1856) Again she writes, "We never pray so well as in times of trial." (Personal Letter, 1862).
- 13 "How much good it does us to pray. How God loves to answer prayer." (Personal Letter, 1857)
- 14 "Let us strengthen ourselves by prayer, always, always, always!" (Letter to Community, 1869)

- 15 “renunciation of our passions, the spirit of sacrifice, and the correction of one’s faults.” (Letter to Community, 1865)
- 16 “The Congregation does not need a multitude of members, but members who want to become saints.” (Letter to Community, 1869)
- 17 Father Moreau wanted Holy Cross to be “planted in the fertile soil of the church.” (Moreau - Circular Letter 35)
- 18 “It is useless merely to have the Constitutions in one’s possession; I am sure they are not read enough to be thoroughly known and followed to their fullest extent. We can understand them truly only by studying them perseveringly.” (Personal Letter)
- 19 “My God, whom will we obey, if we do not obey the Holy See?” (Personal Letter, 1876)
- 20 “It was above all by her example that she stimulated piety in others.” (Bergeron)
- 21 “I want to satisfy my conscience by carrying out the will of God in everything demanded by my difficult office. God grant that I may faithfully do this for the account which the Divine Master will ask of me will be severe.” (Annals of the Marianites)
- 22 “It is by recalling the dignity of our origins that we will hold our minds and hearts more elevated toward God, more detached from lesser things, above all from the self-love that disfigures and pitifully shrinks the nobility of the religious state.” (Letter to Community, 1895)
- 23 “Let us firmly resolve, my dear Sisters, to follow in the footsteps of our venerated foundress and to remain faithful to the holy examples she has given us during more than a half century. They are our spiritual treasures, which we must use to reproduce in our own lives the humility, charity and perfect obedience of which our Mother was such a perfect model.” (1900)
- 24 “The will of the good God is always lovable.” (Letter, 1867)
- 25 “The will of the good God is always lovable, even when it imposes upon us the most difficult sacrifices.” (ibid.)
- 26 “Take courage, you are performing the will of God wherever you are, and would you want it to be otherwise when the angels in heaven put all their happiness in carrying out this divine and adorable will? Keep that in mind when nature wants to have its own way, and you will soon succeed in silencing it.” (Personal Letter, 1854)
- 27 “Our Lord, in giving this obedience to you, asks nothing more than your correspondence to the graces that he gives you to fulfill it. This is the time, now or never, to abandon yourself with unlimited confidence to God’s holy will. The less you depend on yourself, the more will this Divine Master give you his light and his grace to direct his work.” (Personal Letter)
- 28 “Our Sovereign Master has impenetrable designs. In the Lord’s merciful conduct in our regard he has resources which are still unknown to us, but which will sooner or later be manifested to us and will make us bless his fatherly hand.” (Personal Letter, 1865)
- 29 “Obedience performs miracles.” (Personal Letter, 1886)
- 30 “We must not put any conditions on our obedience.” (Personal Letter, 1867)
- 31 “The cross is a sign of salvation; therefore, it must not be feared too much, nor should we complain about its weight, because it is a forerunner of the eternal glory we await. Here below, let us suffer, since suffering is the way traced by Jesus Christ himself who was the first to pass this way; we have but to follow him. This path is sufficiently beaten down now – the saints have walked this way after Jesus.” (Letter to Community, 1899)
- 32 “I know well that the cross can not be spared us here below. Consequently, I would like to help you accept it and to carry it with submission and courage, and by that fact make it lighter and more meritorious!” (Letter to Community, 1873)
- 33 “Where the cross is, there is Jesus.” (Personal Letter, 1867)
- 34 “We are daughters of the cross, and we must bear this title bravely” (Personal Letter, 1856). To another she writes, “This is not the time to run away or to get soft” (Personal Letter, 1873). And to the Sisters in general

- she says, "Let us not retreat, but let us always advance. The cross must be borne whether we like it or not. It is much heavier for cowardly souls than for those who are fervent and generous." (Letter to Community, 1870)
- 35 "The greatest mark that God can give us of his love and of his predilection is to cause us to suffer and to carry our cross. This is the seal with which he marks his elect. This Divine Master keeps to himself the choice of these crosses and these sufferings. Hence he demands of us great submission to his divine will. He wants us to accept our sufferings, sacrifices, and trials, no matter what they may be, with resignation and abandonment, in such a way that we may be able to exclaim: My God, may your will be done and not mine. Never, never I say, let yourselves be discouraged and never lose heart because of sadness. May the sight of the crucifix arouse your courage when it is on the point of failing." (Personal Letter, 1860)
- 36 "Everything is not lost even when the cross seems heavier than usual. Our Lord is there, he himself tasted the bitter chalice. He will pour out in abundant measure the balm of his divine consolations, if you know how to turn to good use the trial, the lesson, he gives you, which he assigns you..." (Letter to Community, 1865)
- 37 "Never murmur against sufferings and the Cross! The good God has chosen for you what his heart found most profitable for your soul." (Personal Letter)
- 38 "Let us have but one heart and one soul." (Comments at fiftieth anniversary of foundation, 1891)
- 39 "Where charity and union of hearts do not exist, God can not dwell, for God is the prince of peace. Where tumult, murmuring, criticism, independence, and pride are found, God can not be found." (Letter to Community, 1865)
- 40 "All of you will be happy to pool your qualities, your talents, your strength, your health, your prayers, and even your virtues. I beg of you, be united, have only one heart and one soul, as well as one will." (Letter to Community, 1864)
- 41 "I implore you to pay no attention to nationality. We are all one in the big family of Christ. We have come together in community voluntarily, to work for the glory of God and to sanctify ourselves and our neighbor. No, no, let there be no division, let all nations be one in the judgment and esteem of each other. ... Let us look at the qualities and reject all ambition, all prejudice. Thus we will keep a family spirit that will produce happiness." (Letter to Community, 1897)
- 42 "Let us not limit our interests to the narrow confines of a particular house, a province, or our own country. This would be egoism and self-seeking. Rather let us be one with all our houses and regard none as a stranger to the one in which we live." (Moreau - Circular Letter 174)
- 43 "In my sentiments, as in my devotedness to them, I put together all the nations which find themselves represented in our congregation... To express my mind here very frankly, I know that it is unfortunately true that this or that defect may be more common in one nation than in another, but I also know that it is impossible to find perfection on earth. Our Lord, who came to save all people, showed no partiality. He rejects no one from the church and, on the contrary, he sends his apostles out in search of the most abandoned, the most savage, to bring them together within his fold of the church and then into paradise, without any respect of persons, nations, or feelings." (Personal Letter, 1868)
- 44 "Be united in your work; be united everywhere and in everything; have but one heart and one soul and one same will ... No such words as 'mine' and 'yours,' but always 'our religious family.' When we do not seek personal interest, we are happy to place our qualities, talents, strength, health, prayer and even our virtue at the service of others." (Letter to Community, 1897)
- 45 "I think that you are too much afraid of suffering for Jesus Christ. Do you sometimes think of all that he suffered for you? Neither did he satisfy everybody, in spite of his wisdom and his kindness. You know how many enemies he had, and how far they carried their hatred and their scorn for his sacred person. Do not be astonished if you can not please all in your house. Imitate our Savior, do your duty; then put up with what you can not prevent. Ask Jesus to accomplish his work himself." (Personal Letter)
- 46 "I have prayed too much for the community on earth to forget it in heaven." (1900)
- 47 "I myself will break this news to Romaine. If Romaine wants to come see me before my departure,

- please restrain her; it would be too painful both for her and for me.” (Personal Letter, 1849)
- 48 “I will need the will of God to keep me here” (Personal Letter, 1863). And she tells the community in Canada, “I have the deepest and most tender memories of you all.” (Letter to Community, 1863)
- 49 It is no surprise to hear Sister Mary of Saint John Baptist, a close friend of Mother Mary’s, say about her, “Oh, how I loved her! How kind she was!” (1920’s) The Annals of the Canadian Sisters note, “How many other Sisters are still living and preserve these sentiments of respect!” (1930)
- 50 “I do not forget my beloved daughters, no matter where they may be working for the glory of God and the salvation of souls for, no matter what may be the occupation in which they are engaged, either for the children or for the sick, it is for the glory of God.” (Personal Letter, 1897)
- 51 “Our Lord wants to be served in joy; besides, this helps to encourage the world and to make people see that the service of our good Savior is neither sad nor austere.” (Personal Letter, 1863). She wanted all the Sisters to “taste the joy of religious life.” (Personal Letter, 1876)
- 52 “How happy our hearts are these days! Our well-beloved Mother is among us!”
- 53 “Do not allow yourself to give in to sadness, for this would displease our Lord. We must serve him with joy and carry his cross happily.” (Personal Letter, 1864)
- 54 “The more sacrifices we make, the closer we will be to God.” (Personal Letter, 1858)
- 55 “If you want to be happy, love work, order, and piety.” (Personal Letter, 1865)
- 56 “How much I appreciate your sympathy for the unhappiness of these people! It fills me with hope for the future. You already understand that among all the Christian virtues, compassion for the afflicted is the dearest to the heart of our Lord.” (Personal Letter, 1871)
- 57 “One of the principal goals of this devotion is to present us a model for imitation. The sight of the Savior’s heart should say to each of us, as in the past when Moses was given the plan for the Ark of the Covenant and the tabernacle, “Look at this example and make a faithful copy. (Ex. 25:40)”
- 58 “Happy are those to whom their humble occupations make the virtue of humility easier. Happy are those who, in their assignment or obedience, no matter what it may be, know how to preserve themselves from the humiliating smoke of pride and from the dangers of high offices.” (Letter to Community, 1876)
- 59 “We should humble ourselves, you and me, before the fact that the divine Master desires to use us, who are so unimportant and pitiable, to work for God’s glory. Therefore, we count on God alone and on God’s grace to triumph over the obstacles we meet, obstacles which tend to paralyze the work of God.” (Letter to Community, 1897)
- 60 “There is nothing so great as those works of charity that seem to be the most lowly.” (Personal Letter, 1874)
- 61 “Let us insistently beg for this hidden life in God with Jesus Christ. It seems to me that our society has special need for this in order to clearly understand the plan of grace and to support it as much as we can.” (Letter to Community, 1899)
- 62 “It is particularly humility and abnegation that our congregation needs in order to set itself up on the only solid foundation of a life hidden in God with Jesus Christ.” (Letter to Community, 1885)
“If our society grows, if the church deigns to busy itself with it by approving it, it is not due, doubtless, to anything but humble prayer, to the modest and obscure life of hidden souls known only to God.” (Letter to Community, 1886)
“If we wish to grow in the church, we have a good means at our disposal, and this is to become the humblest of all congregations.” (Letter to Community, 1882)
- 63 “Humility receives worthily, preserves, and transmits the blessings of heaven.” (Letter to Community, 1886)
- 64 “If in imitation of our divine founder, we content ourselves to be the grain of wheat or mustard seed that, falling into the ground, dies in order to become the great tree contained in its kernel, then we will have the consolation, in God, of seeing and

- gathering from it the fruits of our abnegation in the future achievements of our congregation.” (Letter to Community, 1873)
- 65 “Pride ruins us. I have pity on a soul which, although it works a good deal, amasses only straw to be burned, because of self-will.” (Personal Letter, 1857)
So she reminds us,
“Humility makes us more distrustful of ourselves, more obedient to the Rule, more attentive to asking advice before acting, more docile to counsels received, and more united in intention and generosity in everything we do for the common good.” (Letter to Community, 1869)
- 66 “Just think, we can be gaining merit at every moment as long as charity is the motive of our prayers, our intentions and our works. Without charity, whatever we do to fill our days and years will leave us empty-handed before God who has given us the most certain means of gaining heaven.” (Letter to Community, 1893)
- 67 “Her exquisite charity, obedience, love of her Congregation, guided all her ways.” (1900)
- 68 “I would do the same things over again.” (1894)
- 69 “If God should restore me to health, I would gladly begin my religious life over again.” Then she amplifies this by adding, “I do not regret a single day of it.” (1900)
- 70 “For a long time I did not think, at least not seriously, of religious life, since it was only at the age of twenty-two (1840) that I, at last, decided to leave the world.” (Personal Letter, 1887)
- 71 “Have courage, yes, courage in your trials and in the contradictions inseparable from your office as well as from mine.” (Personal Letter, 1847)
- 72 “I want to assure you that I am always in admiration of the providential help which comes to us regularly on the days it is needed.” (Personal Letter, 1871)
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- 76 “You must not be worried and alarmed for the future of your province. You must continue to pray much and to perform your duties courageously without ever giving in to discouragement.” (Personal Letter, 1882)
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