



**BULLETIN OF THE ORDER OF THE FRANCISCAN MINIMS
OF THE PERPETUAL HELP OF MARY
MAY - JUNE 2014**





Homage of Gratitude

*In honor of our Mother Founder
Reverend Mother Mary
of the Nativity of P.H.f.m.
Maria Concepcion Zuñiga Lopez
on the first centennial of her birth.*



Chapter 6

The Invitation

(Continued from the March-April issue)

The Work had to be based on the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi, living in poverty, obedience and chastity. The poverty must be such as to not possess anything but the right to beg for alms. However, it must be a social Work, at the service of the Church to bring souls to Her, especially by way of giving young women moral instruction. “This ideal enthused me so much that I was totally concentrated on it. This is where my Calvary began. My own family would be the first ones to provide my beloved suffering.

Chapter 7

The Decision

I was almost thirteen years old when I said to Our Lord: “I don’t want any other love but Thine”. By then I had changed my way of dressing, but I still liked to dress up and wear my fancy jewelry. So then, in order to please Our Lord I closed up all my jewels in a box and together with my fancy clothes I locked them in my wardrobe and threw the key

away. I abandoned my own bedroom and asked my mother's permission to stay in a room in the back of the patio. I dressed in black without any adornments and hung a medal around my neck.

I longed to go out in the wilderness to do penance and live only on meditation of Christ's Passion. I was filled with zeal for the salvation of souls, to atone to Divine Justice for all sins of mankind. I consulted with my confessor and he began to guide me on the path to God. I was not acquainted with any kind of nuns and believed

they were people who had lived only in the past. However, my confessor told me about religious life, but at that time the Communities did not have permission to receive new members because of the religious persecution and the same religious were hidden in the homes of the laity. I would have to wait, then, in order to be accepted in any Congregation. Whatsoever, considering the situation with my family who obviously would deny me their permission, I had to postpone for some time my petition.

I was certainly meant to be a religious, but before that I had to struggle a lot in the world for my soul's own good and the greater glory of God. It was necessary that I render to God the greatest test of my love for Him. This was the day I entered the convent.



Chapter 8

Vocation

My parents, on seeing that I rejected all worldly things and had certain inclinations that they considered crazy, decided that perhaps I

needed some kind of entertainment. They hired a private teacher to give me English and literature classes at home. She was a Carmelite nun, but I was not interested in any Order but the Franciscan, since I longed to be a daughter of the Poverello of Assisi. I already possessed the inspiration of a new religious Order of Atonement, of the Franciscan Minims of the Perpetual Help of Mary which would observe the Primitive Franciscan Rule. For this reason, I went in search of a Capuchin cloister.

During this epoch I had a dream: I saw myself in a big house in ruins with cloisters whose pillars had fallen to the ground. As I stood in the middle of such rubble there suddenly appeared a woman in black who approached me. She sat down on one of those broken pillars and I knelt down next to her. She took out a book from beneath her veil, opened it and showed me with her finger the following words: "The Prophecies of Mother Matiana". I then remembered the dream I had on the day of my First Holy Communion and wanted to ask her about it, but the mysterious woman stood up and began to walk away. "What am I supposed to do," I asked her, and turning around she pointed out the ruins and said: "Repair the house."

I told my Spiritual Director about my dream but he only said that dreams could be prophetic, but to forget about it, and I obeyed. I had just turned 15 years old and refused to accept a party and a trip to Europe that my father offered to me.

Leaving home is such a hard separation that a supernatural fortitude is necessary to do so. It was God's will that my separation cost me a great sacrifice.

Father Moran, my Spiritual Director, was aware of the first inspirations I had regarding the Work of Atonement. I was so young and inexperienced in everything, and more so in religious matters, that it seemed impossible that I would be of any use for such a Project. However, Father assured me that it was of God and he approved my searching for a convent where I could be admitted without my parent's permission, since it would be a risk to try to obtain it.

I had an aunt who was a very pious woman and I was able to confide to her my desires. By way of Father and her they tried to obtain my admittance with the Capuchin nuns in Guadalajara, but it was very difficult for them to receive me, because they were afraid of my father.

In 1929 the religious persecution was about over and the convents were opening again. Surprisingly enough one day at Mass when I knelt

down at the communion rail, a neighbor lady, who undoubtedly knew of my desires to be a nun, whispered in my ear so that my mother who was behind me would not hear: “Conchita, if you want to be a nun, come to my house today a noon, I have a surprise for you”.

It seemed that it would be impossible because I was never left alone, not even inside my own house! However, God manifested His will on this occasion: when we returned home from church, my father told my mother that he was going to take her that same day to Mexico City to spend Christmas there. With my father’s permission I was making the Christmas novena with some neighbor children and in this way I was able to be excused from going with them. So then, at the hour that the neighbor lady had told me to be at her house, I was alone with my sister. I obtained her permission to go to church, but after a short visit there, I went to the mysterious appointment.

I was introduced to the Auxiliar Bishop of Mexico City, His Excellency Maximino Ruiz y Flores. I was able to consult with him and he totally approved my vocation. He offered to request my admittance in a certain Capuchin community in Mexico City, with the condition that my parents did not know it. The plan was that when he notified the neighbor lady that I was accepted in the Community, I must leave home and hide in hers until he gave orders for me to take a train to the Capitol where someone would be waiting for me to take me to the convent.



His Excellency Maximino Ruiz y Flores

The Bishop commended to my confessor, Father Bernard Parga, to give me his blessing and provide those persons who would accompany me to Mexico City.

Chapter 9

Leaving home

On the day chosen for Conchita's departure from home her parents were away and she was alone with her sister who at that moment was attending her father's store. Our Reverend Mother writes:

It was Saturday, February 2, 1930. I left the house at noon, and in order to not be noticed by anyone I didn't take absolutely anything with me. I reached the house of Carmelita Ramirez, the neighbor lady who was the only one who knew I was hidden there.

When Conchita entered the house, she knelt down before an image of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and offered a prayer to Our Lord:



Behold me here, my Jesus, in Thy arms,
prepared for what Thou asketh of me.

I have broken at last the chains
that kept me from flying to Thee.

For thirteen days my hiding place was a wardrobe in the sewing room. I remained inside of it all day long, from five o'clock in the morning until midnight when Carmelita would let me out and lock me in the living room where I would sleep until the following morning. It's easy to say, but not to do! I received news that my father had detectives searching for me inside and outside of the town. Carmelita notified the Bishop of the situation and they took great precaution in my case. At last, on February 14th, very early in the morning, dressed in servant's clothing, I left my hometown. I was taken to a nearby town where I was hidden for another two days, after which I was taken to the train where I would travel directly to Mexico City.

The next morning, on arriving at my destiny, Sister Teresa and her brother, Friar Seraphim, both Capuchins but dressed in civilian clothing, picked me up at the train and took me to the convent of the Good Shepherd Sisters. I was meant to stay there a week at the most, since the Capuchins were still preparing the convent to receive postulants.

Everything was so strange to me. I was accustomed to be continuously under my parents' vigilance without any liberty whatsoever, and now I was totally alone in a religious community among strangers. That way of life was totally opposed to what I desired, since the Good Shepherd Institution was dedicated to educate girls of all social classes and categories. In order to remain hidden from my father I was called Miss Catherine.

Chapter 10

The Cloister

It wasn't until May 5th that by indication of the Archbishop of Mexico, Pascual Díaz Barreto, I was admitted into the postulancy of the Sacramental Capuchins of Tlalpan. My entrance into this Community brought great joy and peace to my soul. After so many trials, I experienced two years of inexplicable happiness inside the cloister I had so longed for. When I entered that humble abode of my beloved Capuchins on that memorable afternoon, I felt at home. There where it seemed that everything was lacking: unpainted walls, beds without mattresses, the austere refectory and the Sisters dressed in poor attire, I was immensely happy!

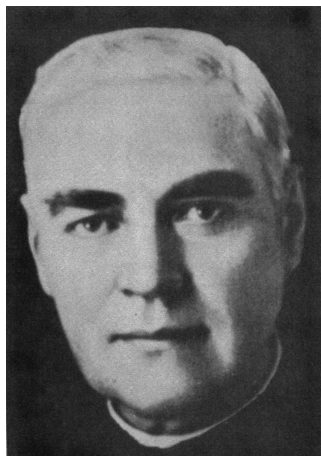
I will never forget the charity reception of all the Sisters and the Reverend Mother Superior, Mercedes Vazquez Castillon, an elderly



Our Mother Conchita with the Capuchins nuns

woman and as humble as the earth. God had called me there, because that was precisely the path I was meant to follow in order to fulfill the Work He inspired me: the Work of Atonement of the Franciscan Minims of the Perpetual Help of Mary.

It was there in the Capuchin convent where God prepared me for His Work, one of crucifixion and redemption. I had to be the first to try to become a worthy member: a crucified soul. First of all I had to learn the Holy Franciscan Rule and at the same time was put into contact with important Ecclesiastical Superiors: Rev. Father Felix of Jesus Rougier, Founder of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Director of our Community and Rev. Father Joseph Quijada of the same Congregation, both in charge of examining the inspirations of God in my soul.



Rev, Father Felix Rougier

In March 1931 my Superiors submitted me to trials, some of which were very difficult for me. At that time I was also in charge of the kitchen and some sewing projects that took up a lot of my time during the day and part of the night. My health began to fail, and by May I was bedridden. Any attempt to eat would cause vomit and strong stomach aches.

My Reverend Mother took me to see several doctors, but all in vain; there was no cure. In June, exactly on the feast of the

Sacred Heart, Rev. Father Quijada gave me Extreme Unction because it seemed as if I would die at any minute.

When Father told me to declare my last will, I said to him the only thing that came to my mind: “Father, I commend to you the Work of Atonement to which God inspired me.” Father expressed his concern and said to me: “No my child, you will not die; I want you to live for God’s Work”. He gave me the Holy Viaticum and I was left alone until later when my Reverend Mother came to see me, and said to me with tears in her eyes: “My dear child, Reverend Father has told me that perhaps you will be cured soon in order to carry out the Work that God has commended to you.”

On Sunday morning, when I woke up at the first bell, I felt no ailing at all. I was able to get out of bed, get dressed and go to the chapel. However, I remained in the back because at that moment the priest was preaching the homily, explaining the Gospel for that Mass. When he reached to words: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God...” I was filled with zeal for the glory of God.

In that same month of June I made the first steps for the foundation at the Metropolitan Chancery Office. His Excellency Bishop Pascual Diaz Barreto, Primate of Mexico City, proved to be very interested in the Project and granted me long interviews. He sent a petition to the Holy See, requesting that my Reverend Mother with several other Sisters be the founders of the Work, thus separating from the Community with permission for an unlimited period of time. I would be the first Postulant. His Excellency was so kind with me that during six months he would grant me now and then audiences to talk over the project of the foundation, of whose ideals he totally approved.

After such a long period of trials, with the approbation and under the obedience of all my Superiors, I wrote the Constitutions of the Work of Atonement. However, in God’s plan, there was much more sacrifice involved that I could ever have imagined...



**His Excellency
Bishop Pascual Diaz Barreto**

Chapter 11

The Trial

Everything was prepared for the foundation: my Reverend Mother Superior, Mary of the Holy Spirit, would be the founders and I was going to be the first postulant. By September of that year, with my Superior's permission, I was living with my aunt and uncle. My parents did not know where I was and my Superiors had asked my aunt to swear not to tell them. However, she betrayed the secret.



Conchita's mother

My mother had written to my aunt telling her how much she had cried since I had left home and since then did not know of my whereabouts, even though I had left my family a letter asking their forgiveness and saying that I was going to a cloister because that was my vocation. My compassionate aunt wrote back to my mother telling her that I was fine, that I was living with them because I was arranging certain business at the Chancery Office. As soon as the letter arrived, my father and sister traveled immediately to Mexico City and went to see Bishop Diaz. They demanded him to turn me over since I was not of age, and threatened that if he did not do so, he must suffer

the consequences. There was no way out for His Excellency, and I had to acknowledge the will of God.

When my father and sister showed up at the house with the intention to take me home that same day, I said to them: "I will go when my legitimate Superiors tell me to." My sister wanted to hit me, but my father didn't let her, saying: "Leave her alone; you have no authority over her as I do; however, I won't put a hand on her because I would kill her on the spot!"

It was November 2nd, the day of the Faithful Departed; my heart suffered pains of death. This sacrifice was one of the greatest in my life,

since the Work of Atonement was already approved and at the point of its foundation. The poem I wrote then reflects the state of my soul:

A Dream

I dreamt I was in Thy sanctuary
It was a dream that passed away
And in my dream in adoration
Before Thy altar I wished to stay.

I am unworthy to be Thy Spouse
Or live with Thee, it's true indeed
Tell me why, my dearest Jesus
Can't your love this sorrow impede?

If this be Thy will and pleasure
As absurd as it must seem
I will render and acknowledge
That my joy was just a dream.



I wrote a letter to my father asking permission to remain in Mexico City for a few more weeks and he answered affirmatively as long as I was home as soon as possible. With my Superior's permission I made a retreat in which I began to write the Constitutions of the Order, I was in great need of concentrating at the foot of the tabernacle. When I had finished my retreat, I returned to my aunt's home until the December festivities were over, in which she would accompany me to my home in Ocotlan.

Chapter 12

Return Home

At last, on December 27th our departure was planned by train from Mexico City to Guadalajara. Even though my father had promised to the Bishop that he only wanted to convince himself of my vocation in order to leave me at liberty, I knew it wasn't true. I knew my father perfectly: his bad character, his zeal and loving but arbitrary attachment to his daughters. I could foresee my calvary, which was indeed necessary to me. After all, hadn't I had offered myself to God as a victim soul for his conversion and salvation?

At about 7:00 a.m. on December 28th the train attendant announced that we had arrived at OCOTLAN. My heart took a leap and felt as if led to the executioners platform. We got off the train and no one was waiting for us except a chauffeur who was in charge of driving us home.

When we reached the house everything seemed so strange to me! Even among my own family I had never felt so alone! The reception was extremely wierd. My mother hugged me crying but without saying a word.



**Our Mother Conchita
with her sister Esther**

The look on her face was one of joy and reproach at the same time. The same with my father. My sister only held out her hand to me and said in a bossy way: "Come and change your clothes; you look like a beggar. I have arranged all your clothes according to the fashions, just as you like." My sister had always been arrogant, so that didn't surprise me. My aunt witnessed the scene with tears in her eyes.

My father finally broke the ice and giving me a big hug said in a joyful manner: "Now is time to live with your parents, silly girl, and forget about your devotions. Go change and come to the table with your family."

I wanted to cry out loud and take off running to some far off mountain, but I had to give in, to smile and obey, changing my clothes but only from my suitcase. After the meal, my mother and sister took me to see the whole house and would say: "Look, everything is in exactly the same place as you left it: your books, your jewels, your images and your prayers." I wanted to throw everything out the window, but I just thanked them.

After lunch my mother started commenting that they had tickets to go to the opera that same night and that everyone was going. That meant that I would have to wear the appropriate clothing with a low-necked dress, jewelry, etc. I did everything in my power to obtain permission to stay at home, but to no avail. The only permission I obtained was to wear my ordinary clothes and not the indecent ones.

During the entire opera, which lasted nearly three hours, I sat with my eyes lowered and my arms crossed. The people nearby tried to talk to me and even though my mother would pinch me to get me to talk, I didn't move the whole time. That was tremendous!

When we finally got outside my mother threatened to spank me when we got home, but my father intervened, saying: Be careful not to scold her any longer! We wanted her home? She is here now and we must respect her ways which are not evil. Nor will we force her to dress or to live at our pleasure; it is sufficient that she be submissive living at home."

"What are you saying?" my mother exclaimed. It has always been

our custom to go out together. How are we going to leave her alone at home?" My father, with his authority as head of the family, replied in a way I would never have imagined, saying: "From now on, we are not going anywhere except out to the country. Since we wanted our daughter here, we must share our family life with her, and to do so it is not necessary to go anywhere, but stay at home."

My poor mother almost had a heart attack on hearing her husband say such



Zuñiga Family

things in my favor. I couldn't resist and I ran to hug and kiss my father. From then on, for almost twelve years, our family never went again to theatres or parties.

My captivity lasted from December 1931 until January 1942.



Chapter 13

The Miracle

My father's conversion came about due to divine grace. He was an excellent husband and father, but had a very violent character. One day, when I had distributed little crosses of blessed palms throughout the house, he became furious and threw to the ground and trampled on the ones I had placed in his bedroom, harshly scolding me. This happened in the morning. That same day at about three o'clock in the afternoon when the whole family was at lunch in the dining room, a lightening bolt hit the roof of the house, exactly over

my father's bed! If he had been taking his ordinary afternoon nap at that time, he would have been killed by the rubble that fell from the roof and covered his bed.

When my father went upstairs to see what had happened and did not return, we went in his search, calling him in a loud voice. Since he did not answer, I peeked through the door of my little oratory and saw my father kneeling with his arms extended in front of the image of the Blessed Virgin.

Shortly afterwards my sister became seriously ill with a dangerous infection which demanded surgery immediately. My father was very worried about her whom he loved dearly. We took her to Guadalajara and my father offered the doctors any quantity of money they wanted in order to deliver my sister from the surgery. "It is not a manner of money," the doctors replied; "only a miracle can impede the operation or death if the infection reaches her brain during the night."

All night long my father was silent. I prayed interiorly as we both kept watch over my sister who hadn't been able to sleep for almost a

week. At three o'clock in the morning she fell asleep and the next morning the doctors had to come and wake her up to take her to the operating room, but she was perfectly cured and the infection had disappeared.

From that day on my father was mysteriously quiet which was a sign of an interior battle. He was content that his daughter was well, but seemed to be suffering something that he did not intend to reveal. A few weeks after my sister's miraculous cure he called over the parish priest, Fr. Norbert Rodriguez, my confessor. He talked alone with him for several hours and when the visit was over, he called us in and in front of the priest he hugged us all, saying: "I have made my confession; from tomorrow on I will receive Communion daily because I have a compromise with God since my daughter's cure. I believe in God!" With tears in his eyes he confessed that it was happiest day of his life. On November 22 1938,



the Blessed Eucharist entered my home and the whole family received Communion with all solemnity on the feast of St. Cecilia, the sponsor of my father's communion with God.

After my father's confession he would say to me: "I know that I should let you go to save souls and serve God, but I am a cowardly man: I love my daughters in such a way that my heart has me tied, and I long to die in order that you may be free."

(To be continued)



June 24th
72nd Anniversary
of the Work of Atonement.