

Homily for October 16, 2019

MARGUERITE d'YOUVILLE, the first native Canadian to be elevated to sainthood, was born October 15, 1701 at Varennes, Quebec.

She married François d'Youville in 1722 and the young couple made their home with his mother who made life miserable for her daughter-in-law. She soon came to realize that her husband had no interest in making a home life. His frequent absences and illegal liquor trading with the the First Nations caused her great suffering. She was pregnant with her sixth child when François became seriously ill. She faithfully cared for him until his death in 1730. By age 29, she had experienced desperate poverty and suffered the loss of her father and husband. Four of her six children had died in infancy.

In all these sufferings Marguerite grew in her belief of God's presence in her life and of his tender love for every human person. She, in turn, wanted to make known his compassionate love to all. She undertook many charitable works with complete trust in God, who she loved as her heavenly Father.

She provided for the education of her two sons, who later became priests, and she welcomed a blind woman into her home. Marguerite was soon joined by three young women who shared her love and concern for the poor. On December 31, 1737, they consecrated themselves to God and promised to serve him in the person of the poor. Marguerite, without even realizing it, had become the foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, "Grey Nuns".

Marguerite always fought for the rights of the poor and broke with the social conventions of her day. It was a daring move that made her the object of ridicule and taunts by her own relatives and neighbors. She persevered in caring for the poor despite many obstacles. She was in weakened health and mourning the death of one of her companions when a fire destroyed their home. This only served to deepen her commitment to the poor. On February 2, 1745, she and her two early companions pledged themselves to put everything in common in order to help a greater number of persons in need. Two years later, this "mother of the poor" as she was called, was asked to become director of the Charon Brothers Hospital in Montreal which was falling into ruin. She and her sisters rebuilt the hospital and cared for those in most desperate human misery. With the help of her sisters and their lay collaborators, Marguerite laid the foundation for service to the poor of a thousand faces.

In 1765 a fire destroyed the hospital, but nothing could destroy Marguerite's faith and courage. She asked her sisters and the poor who lived at the hospital, to recognize the hand of God in this disaster and to offer him praise. At the age of 64 she undertook the reconstruction of this shelter for those in need. Totally exhausted from a lifetime of self-giving, Marguerite died on December 23, 1771 and will always be remembered as a loving mother who served Jesus Christ in the poor.

Pope John XXIII beatified Marguerite on May 3, 1959 and called her "Mother of Universal Charity". The power of Marguerite's intercession before God was clearly evidenced when a young woman stricken with acute myeloblastic leukemia in 1978 was miraculously cured. This

great favor opened for Marguerite the door to the official proclamation of sainthood. She was Canonized in 1990 by Pope St John Paul II.

In our reading from Romans Paul is warning his readers against having hard and critical hearts that judge and condemn. This was a critical spirit directed at Marguerite by her mother-in-law and the one Jesus condemns in today's gospel.

However, such a bitter spirit did not inform how our Saint for today would live. She embodied the kind of soul Paul refers to when writing:

To those who by patiently doing good seek for glory, would and immortality, God will give eternal life.

This was the theme of Marguerite d'Youville's life celebrated in the words of today's Collect where we pray that like her we would embrace the way of the Cross and be emboldened like her to imitate her compassion and have the strength to persevere until the day you call us to share in the joy of the saints.