



St. Marguerite Bourgeoys

Feast Day: January 12

Born: April 17, 1620

Died: January 12, 1700

Beatified by Pope Pius XII November 12, 1950

Canonized by Pope John Paul II October 31, 1982

Marguerite was born the sixth of twelve children to Abraham and Guillemette Bourgeoys in France on Good Friday April 27, 1620. They were Christian and of middle class.

At age 19, Marguerite's mother died. A year later while attending the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary on October 7th, Marguerite was mystically drawn to a sculpture of the Blessed Mother and felt called to consecrate herself in service to God. She joined the Daughters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in France, a group of lay women devoted to acts of charity, especially teaching children in poor districts.

In 1653, Marguerite was asked to volunteer to teach French and Indian children in the Canadian colonies. Together, with Jeanne Mance (a nurse) and Governor Maisonneuve, Marguerite is considered the co-founder of Ville-Marie (now called Montreal). She made it her first task in the colony to restore the Cross on Mount Royal which had been destroyed by hostile Indians. She began the first schoolhouse in a barn.

As the French king sent young women to help colonize Montreal, Marguerite taught them how to survive. She developed workshops to teach the women a skill which would enable them to earn a living. She became a mother to these young girls and became known as the "Mother of the Colony." Some of the women went on to have families and some stayed to help establish the congregation. Usually, women who lived in a congregation were required to be cloistered (having no outside connection) which meant that only women who could be supported by a wealthy parent or benefactor could belong to a congregation. Marguerite petitioned for her congregation to be one of the first uncloistered religious communities. They had to be self-sufficient in order to survive. They were often low on food, but through the multiplication of bread at the prayers of St. Marguerite, there was always just enough to eat until the next shipment of supplies from France.

The community withstood Indian attacks, fires and plagues. Despite much suffering and poverty, St. Marguerite was successful in establishing the Congregation of Notre Dame of Montreal in 1671. At age 69, she walked from Montreal to Quebec to establish a community of sisters there. Marguerite's order grew to include about 40 nuns. At age 78, Marguerite retired. When a young Sister became seriously ill, Marguerite offered herself in sacrifice to God and prayed for the Sister to be healed. Marguerite suffered for 12 days. The health of the young Sister was renewed when Marguerite died on January 21, 1700.

St. Marguerite strived to model the life of the Blessed Mother. She had great enthusiasm for God's work and an unshakeable trust in God despite the impoverished living conditions. Today there are over 2,000 sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Canada, U.S., Japan, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Cameroon and France.

Pope John Paul II canonized St. Marguerite on October 31, 1982 as the first female saint of Canada.

"A time of sickness is a time of grace. It is then that we reap a harvest for an eternity."

~ St. Marguerite Bourgeoys