

JOACHIMA DE VEDRUNA DE MAS (1783-1854) Saint (D)

Joachima was born at Barcelona on April 16, 1783, and was baptized on the same day in the parish church of St. Mary of the Pine. Her parents were Lawrence De Vedruna and Teresa Vidal, a couple with deeply Christian sentiments and a very upright way of life. Even from her childhood Joachima felt urged to offer to God even the smallest actions. Asked by her mother how she managed to keep herself recollected for such a long time, she replied that everything spoke to her of God: the pins used for pillow lace reminded her of the thorns of the crown of the Crucified, Whom she wished to console by little sacrifices; the thread used for sewing recalled the ropes with which Jesus was bound to the pillar; the useless weeds of the gardens represented her own faults to be rooted out at their inception. At the age of nine she made her First Communion and at twelve she asked to consecrate herself to God among the cloistered Carmelite nuns of Barcelona; but she was not accepted because she was too young.

She was barely sixteen years old when Theodore De Mas asked for her hand in marriage. He too had strongly felt the call to the religious life, but had found an obstacle in the will of his parents, because he was the firstborn and heir to a glorious name. Reassured by her confessor that this was the will of God, Joachima married Theodore on March 24, 1799. The perfect affinity of this couple made their home a kingdom of concord and of peace. Both began the day in church and finished it with the recitation of the Rosary, to which, in the course of the years, was united the silvery choir of nine children. Joachima loved her children with all her heart; she corrected their faults with patience, she encouraged them in the practice of the virtues, and at every moment gave them the lesson of her example.

Napoleon, emboldened by his easy conquest of Portugal, resolved to turn on Spain as well. With his incursion against the freedom of their nation, however, the people rose in arms. Theodore De Mas, a descendant of brave warriors, did not think it right to absent himself; he enlisted as a volunteer in defense of his country. Fortune proved adverse to the patriots; with a small band of brave men, Theodore resisted in a castle near Vich, which the invaders did not succeed in capturing. It is impossible to narrate the sufferings of Joachima during this turbulent period and her anxiety for the life of her husband, her preoccupations for her children, her extreme poverty. It was then that her fortitude and unbounded confidence in Providence shone forth: nothing was able to disturb the serenity of her soul, to weaken her spirit of prayer, or to force a lament from her lips.

Overcome by the privations of the war, Theodore died on March 6, 1816, when Joachima was only thirty-three years old. At the same moment, it seemed to Joachima that the large Crucifix hanging on the wall in front of the bed in which she herself lay sick said to her: «Now that you are losing your earthly spouse, I choose you for My bride.» The young widow remained in Barcelona for some months, in order to defend the interests of her children from the claims of relatives. Then she retired to Vich, to a piece of property left to her by her husband and called Manso Eseorial. Here she would be able

to care better for the education of her children, to dedicate her still fresh energies to the practice of charity, and to look more easily to her own sanctification. Meanwhile three children had died at a tender age, four embraced the religious state, and two became exemplary in their conjugal life.

As she felt herself freed from family responsibilities, Joachima thought that the hour had arrived for her to actualize what she believed was the will of God: to enter a very austere religious Order. But through the direction of Stephen of Olot, a Capuchin of Vich, God disposed differently. The friar assured her that God did not want her in a cloister, but was choosing her to be the foundress of a congregation of religious women for the education of girls and for the care of the sick. Joachima submitted and once again pronounced her Fiat. On Jan. 6, 1826, she made her profession as a Carmelite Sister of Charity, in the episcopal chapel of Vich. The profession was made in the hands of the bishop, Paul of Jesus Corcuera, who had encouraged her work and given its name to the Congregation. Early in the morning of the following Feb. 26, she and nine young aspirants went to the church of the Capuchins, heard Mass and made the Way of the Cross. Then they went to the Manso Eseorial, where their new life was begun in an atmosphere of peace and fervor. Privations and at times difficulties were not lacking; but the virtue and love of the Mother made the difficulties lighter and the trials bearable. The maternal love used by Joachima in the formation of her spiritual daughters was a characteristic transmitted to the Congregation and became a basic factor in the educational method of the Carmelite Sisters of Charity.

Little by little the small plant grew and extended its branches. Persecutions, trials and opposition were not wanting, but in the opinion of the saint these clearly showed that the Congregation «was not her work, but God's». While the foundress was still alive, a numerous series of houses was founded throughout Catalonia. Joachima was struck by her first attack of apoplexy in Sept. of 1849. Other attacks followed, and rendered her useless and insignificant in the eyes of men, as she herself had asked of the Lord. On Aug. 28, 1854, a new attack prostrated her, and some hours later symptoms of the cholera which was decimating the people appeared. Surrounded by the affection of her daughters, she fell asleep peacefully in the Lord. She was beatified on May 19, 1940, and canonized on April 12, 1959.

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