

MARY OF JESUS (Mary López Rivas, 1560-1640)
Venerable (D)

Mary of Jesus was born at Tartanedo (Guadalajara) on Aug. 18, 1560. Her father died when she was very young; she was then entrusted to her paternal grandparents at Molina de Aragon, where she grew up and received her first spiritual formation. Guided by the Jesuit A. de Castro, she decided to enter Carmel.

St. Teresa accepted her for the monastery of Toledo; in sending her there on Aug. 11, 1577, she sent the following recommendation: «I send her to you with a dowry of 5,000 scudos. But I assure you that I would very willingly give as much again to have her. Let her not be considered as the others, because I hope in God that she will be a prodigy.» With such an authoritative presentation, Mary received the habit immediately, on Aug. 12, 1577, and then made her profession on Sept. 8, 1578, notwithstanding her delicate health that made her future dubious.

The intervention of St. Teresa was decisive. She had written to Toledo, where the community was considering dismissal: «Think well about what you are doing, because if you do not admit Sister Mary of Jesus to profession, I shall have her come to Avila; and the monastery that will have her will be the most fortunate of all. On my part, I would like to have her always with me in my monastery, even if she had to stay in bed all her life» (*Lett.*, p. 567).

Notwithstanding the physical and moral suffering that Mary of Jesus had to bear, she reacted marvelously to the Carmelite life and lived for a long time. She was always dear to St. Teresa, who on her visits to Toledo showed signs of special love for her and always expended her maternal care on her — not so much on her physical ills as on the «sickness of love» for God that she experienced. In order to distract her, Teresa wished her to be sacristan and then infirmarian. But even though Mary attended to her duties scrupulously she was continually drawn to and absorbed in God. St. Teresa, during her 1580 stay in Toledo, several times asked the young religious for counsel and light, even on problems of mystical theology; and one time she exclaimed to her: «It must be really as you say, my *letradillo* (little theologian).» The appellation *letradillo* passed into history and became the name by which Mary of Jesus was and is commonly called.

In 1583, when Mary was twenty-three years old, she was named mistress of novices, an office that she filled for six months at Cuerva as well, and then repeatedly in her own monastery until well into her old age. She was chosen sub-prioress several times (1587-91; 1607-19) and also prioress (1591-95; 1598; 1624-27), guiding her monastery with serenity and sweetness, forming all the novices according to the teaching and the example of St. Teresa.

Accused and calumniated, she was deposed from the office of prioress, and for many years had to undergo the opposition of the provincial, who later became general. Even when treated unjustly, she was always peaceful and respectful towards authority, and was always esteemed by the wiser religious, who, despite her deposition, immediately

wanted her in the more demanding office of mistress of novices. Rich in merits, and well-known for her unique holiness, she died at Toledo on Sept. 13, 1640. Her incorrupt body lies in the church of the Toledo Carmel.

A soul of extraordinary simplicity and candor, Mary of Jesus was dear to the Lord, Who poured out the charisms and graces of contemplation on her. In her writings there is frequent reference to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, from which, in her contemplations, she several times saw torrents of grace flowing. This devotion was intimately linked by her with that of the Most Blessed Sacrament and of the Precious Blood. She also had a special devotion for the Child Jesus, Whom she called «the Doctor of the sickness of love,» and to the Most Blessed Virgin, especially in the mystery of her Assumption.

She was known for her holiness also during her lifetime. Even before 1580, St. Teresa was able to write: «Mary of Jesus not only will be a saint, but she is one already.» And the favorite Benjamin of St. Teresa, Gracian, in his Pilgrimage of Athanasius (Dial. 16), before 1614, spoke of her openly even while she was still alive as a «religious very dear to the holy Mother Teresa, because, besides being a saint from childhood and having great and heroic virtues, on one occasion, when she had asked Our Lord to grant her something that would make her feel His passion even physically, she received a crown of thorns on her head from the Redeemer, Who appeared to her. This produced a pain so great that it never leaves her. It is a mystery that she can live with it and not fail in her duties to the Order. After that, moreover, Our Lord fulfilled her continuous desire to suffer for Christ in memory of His passion and has given her such sharp pains in her feet, her hands, and in her side as to cause wonder. I know this religious well. She is native of Molina (sic!), Mary of Jesus by name, formerly prioress of Toledo, and I could recount many wonderful things of her» (ed. Burgos, 1905, p. 321). This precious testimony does not surprise if, as the great historian, Silverius of St. Teresa says, after St. Teresa herself, no Discalced Carmelite nun in Spain has attained as much popular fame and diffusion as Mary of Jesus.

In the month following her death, by will of the Order, the nuns were obliged to furnish their sworn testimony in regard to her virtues. The true and proper process, however, did not begin until 1914. The cause of beatification was introduced on Dec. 10, 1926 (see AAS, XIX /1927/, pp. 102-5). Taken up again recently, it has followed the historic course, with the preparation of a new deposition (positio), the fruit of long research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: P. de Acosta, *Vida prodigiosa y heroicas virtudes de la ven. M. Maria de Jesus*, Madrid 1643 (a fundamental work because of the intimacy that the author enjoyed with M.); Manuel de S. Jeronimo *Reform de los descalzos*, V, Madrid 1706, capp. 5-11, pp. 754-803 reprinted apart: *Vida de la Madre de Jesus*, Caceres 1924); *Articulas para la causa de la S. de D. Maria de Jesus*, Toledo 1914; Joaquin de la Sgda. *Familia, La Sierva de Dios Maria de Jesus* ibid. 1919; Serafino di S. Teresa, *Breve compendia della vita della M. Maria di Gesu*, Milan 1919; *Positio super introductione causae*, Home 1924; *Evaristo de La Virg. del Carmen, El letradillo de S. Teresa, Biografia de la M. Maria de Jesus*, Toledo 1925; *La ven. Marie de Jésus, par une carmelite, in etudes carmilitaines* XII (1927), pp. 8-48; Silverio. *Historia*, IX, cap. 28,

pp. 779-823 (reprinted apart: La ven. Maria de Jesus Burgos 1949); Jose de S. Teresa - *Damaso de la Presentación, Flores del Carmelo o año cristiano-carmelitano*, III, Madrid 1952, pp. 89-95; (Sacra Rituum Congregatio), *Toletana beatificationis et Canonizationis servae Dei Marie a Jesu...* (1640); *Positio super virtutibus ex officio concinnata*, Rome 1967.

Valentine Macca