

BY DIFFERENT PATHS - Circular letter for the beatification of the Servants of God
(Beatifications of two Discalced Carmelite Nuns: MARIA DEL SAGRARIO OF ST. ALOYSIUS GONZAGA and MARIA MARAVILLAS OF JESUS)

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I. THE PATH TAKEN BY MARIA DEL SAGRARIO OF ST. ALOYSIUS GONZAGA

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Prioress on the eve of the Spanish civil war and martyr for Christ

II. THE PATH OF MOTHER MARIA MARAVILLAS OF JESUS

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III. LOVING OUR PATH AND RESPONDING FAITHFULLY TO GOD

1. On 10th May next, the Holy Father will beatify two of our nuns: Maria del Sagrario of St. Aloysius Gonzaga and Maria Maravillas of Jesus, together with ten other servants of God. Once again the Lord speaks to the Order through this official recognition of the holiness of life of two of its members. This event speaks to everyone of the fecundity of the Teresian charism and invites us to live it in a consistent manner in the Church and in today's world.

2. Although there were resemblances in the paths taken by our next two Blessed to arrive at the fullness of Christian life, there were differences. They were united by the same vocation to the contemplative Teresian Carmelite life in Spain. Both were called to it from the heart of family and social life. As a writer says, neither yesterday, today or tomorrow will anybody travel along the same path that I do. For every single person God has an untrodden journey that is not to be repeated, yet always filled with his mercy and fidelity.

3. If our two servants of God reached the heights of sanctity, it is due to the fact that both, in their own circumstances and with their different temperaments, their qualities and limitations, matured in what is fundamental to Christian life: faith, hope and love. Both were called to realize this ideal in the contemplative Teresian Carmel: Maria del Sagrario through martyrdom, the supreme witness to faith and love; Maria Maravillas through her fidelity to the demands of her Teresian vocation in daily life lived in a way consistent with what was understood as the will of

God. As our Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus says, "God leads souls by many paths and ways" (1). Each one of us will resonate more with one way rather than another taken by the saints. What is important in our personal journey is that we follow the supreme model, Jesus of Nazareth, and that we conform our life to his (2), allowing ourselves to be guided by faith, hope and love.

I. THE PATH TAKEN BY MARIA DEL SAGRARIO OF ST. ALOYSIUS GONZAGA

An educated and strong woman

4. She was born Elvira Moragas Cantarero on 8th January 1881 in the town of Lillo (Toledo). Her father, Ricardo Maragas Ucelay, a pharmacist, was transferred to Madrid before Elvira was four years old. He opened a pharmacy there and became supplier to the Royal Household.

When she was six years old she received the sacrament of Confirmation in the Parish of St. Teresa and St. Elizabeth. She studied in the College of the Mercedarian sisters where she made her first Communion. Right from childhood she had a tenacious and strong character that needed controlling by her parents. On finishing her primary studies she began her secondary schooling in 1894. Five years later, in 1899, she graduated with distinction.

5. At the turn of the last century in Spain there was little opening for women in university studies. It was surprising then that both herself and her parents were receptive to the idea that she follow a university career in a field that was almost exclusively a male one. After six years of study in the University of Madrid, in 1905 she became the first woman to qualify in pharmacy. She was then 24 years old.

6. As a pharmacist she helped her father run his business. In 1909 her father died and two years later, her mother. She was left alone with her younger brother. To him she revealed her desire to consecrate herself to God, but that she would wait until he became established in his career.

In this time of waiting to consecrate her life to God in Carmel, Maria del Sagrario worked on in the pharmacy serving the customers herself. She did not limit herself to administration but related personally with the sick people encouraging and consoling them. While offering them remedies she shared their suffering. As well as per personal work she helped with catechetics in the parish and on Sundays went to the suburbs to give charitable assistance to the poor.

In Carmel

7. In 1915, the Fourth Centenary of the birth of Teresa of Jesus, Maria del Sagrario entered the Carmelite monastery of St. Anne and St. Joseph in Madrid, which had been founded in 1586 by the Venerable Anne of Jesus (Lobera). Her intense professional and apostolic work, united to family suffering, had affected her health. Because of this the Carmelites had asked her to wait a little before admitting her on 21st June 1915. The Mistress of Novices stated that she found her a woman of "strong and energetic character, capable of accomplishing the greatest ideals of

sanctity".

8. On 21st December 1915 she began her noviciate accepting the material and cultural limitations of her community. Her first profession was made on 24th December 1916. Three years later, on 6th January 1920 she made her solemn profession.

Her journey in Carmel was characterised by the exercise of faith, hope and love. Her faith led her to discover in events the Lord's will and adhere to it. She reached maturity in hope by means of the difficulties and the effort to detach herself from everything that was not God. She lived love in self-forgetfulness and in service to her sisters.

Dynamic prioress and efficient formator

9. In April 1927 she was elected Prioress of the community. Thus began a time of commitment and service to her community. She exercised her office as an older sister, open to dialogue with her sisters. She also took care of the material aspect of the monastery, carrying out works and repairs that the convent needed to offer the minimum of humane conditions for life in the cloister.

When her triennium was over she became Mistress of novices. Statements from those guided by her emphasized that she knew how to mix understanding with firmness and that she taught mainly by example. On many occasions she spoke to her novices about her desire to be a martyr.

Prioress on the eve of the Spanish civil war and martyr for Christ

10. On 1st July 1936, Mother Maria del Sagrario was once again elected Prioress of the community. The winds of violence had begun to blow in Spain and on 18th July 1936 the civil war broke out. That same day the windows of the Church and monastery were smashed. In the evening, Mother Maria del Sagrario gathered the community together to tell them how bad things had become and to advise and beseech those who wanted to go to their family. On the 20th the convent was attacked by a violent crowd who sacked and destroyed many things. The Prioress was concerned for each and every one of her daughters and did not rest until she was able to get them to safety. With one of the nuns, she managed to take refuge in the house of the nun's parents where she stayed until taken to prison.

11. Her brother visited her many times, pleading with her to come with him to Pinto, where he lived with his family. However she refused to go with him because she had to watch over all her sisters. She took care of each one of them and managed to send them material and spiritual help where they were, exhorting them to be generous in accepting the will of the Lord "who suffered so much for our love".

12. On 14th August the "soldiers" discovered the place where she was hiding and took her prisoner together with the other nun with her. She was shot by the enemies of the faith on 15th August. Thus her journey came to a close by handing over her life confessing Jesus Christ to whom she had consecrated her life in the Teresian Carmel.

II THE PATH OF MOTHER MARIA MARAVILLAS OF JESUS

From Christian life to life in Carmel

13. God led Mother Maria Maravillas of Jesus along a different yet no less demanding path to the fullness of Christian life.

She was born in Madrid on 4th November 1891, ten years after Maria del Sagrario. Her father was Spanish Ambassador to the Holy See. From her family, particularly her maternal grandmother she received a conscientious human and Christian education. She received the sacrament of Confirmation in 1896 and the Eucharist in 1902. In 1913 she made a private vow of chastity.

14. Guided by her spiritual director she began to take care of the poor, visiting and helping them. At the same time she was faithful to prayer and other pious exercises. In this context her vocation to the consecrated life began to mature. She spoke about it to her father who strongly advised her to consecrate her life to working for the Church within the lay state. Nevertheless she continued thinking that her place lay in religious life.

15. A cousin of hers, who had been a Carmelite nun in the monastery of St. Joseph in Avila, helped her to discover Carmel and the works of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. From this time on she decided she would be a contemplative Carmelite. Overcoming resistance from her mother, she entered the El Escorial monastery in 1919. She made her simple profession in 1921 and her solemn in 1924.

Founder of monasteries, formator and witness to fidelity to vocation

16. She took a principal part in the founding of the monastery of Cero de los Angeles (in the Madrid province), and was appointed Prioress there in 1926. She founded another 9 monasteries and spiritually and materially restored the monasteries of El Escorial and the Incarnation at Avila. Among her foundations was the monastery of Kottayam in India. As a way of uniting the monasteries founded by her and others united to them she founded the "Association of St. Teresa", approved in 1972, and became its president. She appreciated the friars of the Order very much, maintaining communication with them and handing over to them the monastery of Bateucas in 1950 for a Desert.

17. Mother Maravillas was distinguished by her fidelity in fulfilling to the minutest detail the Rule and Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns. She emphasized the aspects of renunciation and mortifications as a way of following Jesus crucified. She was distinguished by her spirit of poverty and detachment which led her to live a life of austerity and sharing with the poor the material goods she received. Her charity was broad and she emphasized its importance in the life of the contemplative Carmel. She was devoted to Carmel's charism and the teachings of our Holy Parents. She was committed radically to Christ in total self-forgetfulness, with great peace

and confidence in him. She supported with patience and a spirit of faith and love the sicknesses and disabilities of old age, conforming her spirit to Jesus crucified. She handed over her soul to the Lord on 11th December 1974.

A theological path in fidelity to God's will

18. What sanctified Mother Maravillas, as all saints, was not the fact of material fidelity to rules and regulations, but rather the spirit with which she lived all this. Above all she knew how to find God present in the human interventions of superiors and loved heroically the obedience they demanded of her. Faith was also her help in times of trial. She lived with charity and love towards her daughters and those with whom she came in contact. She was always delicate and understanding with people and knew how to listen and to console. She pardoned her adversaries and offered her Carmelite life for the salvation of others. With hope she patiently bore difficulties and knew how to accept God's will in everything, which was the supreme rule of her life and her activity.

III LOVING OUR PATH AND RESPONDING FAITHFULLY TO GOD

19. Our Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus taught us with her spiritual realism that "whether we like it or not ... we must all journey toward this fount, even though in different ways" (3). At the same time she made us see the importance of respecting the paths along which God leads others and not to judge them for not travelling along our way: "Another harm derives from this attitude; it is that of judging others. There are those who advance with greater holiness and in order to be of benefit to their neighbour speak with him freely and without constraint; but since they do not journey by your path they at once seem to you to be imperfect" (4).

20. In considering the different journeys of these two sisters of ours who reached sanctity living the same contemplative Teresian Carmelite life we understand what our sister Therese of Lisieux was saying, "how different are the ways through which the Lord leads souls!" In the life of the saints, we find many of them who didn't want to leave anything of themselves behind after their death, not the smallest souvenir, not the least bit of writing. On the contrary, there are others, like our holy Mother St. Teresa, who have enriched the Church with their lofty revelations, having no fears of revealing the secrets of the King in order that they may make Him more loved and known by souls. Which of these two types of saints is more pleasing to God? It seems to me, Mother, they are equally pleasing to Him, since all of them followed the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and since the Lord has said: 'Tell the just man ALL is well'. Yes, all is well when one seeks only the will of Jesus ...(5) .

In thanking the Lord for the life and witness of our sisters Maria del Sagrario of St. Aloysius Gonzaga and Maria Maravillas of Jesus, let us accept the road along which the Lord is leading us in the same charism of Carmel. Let us love this way and try to respond to the Lord as we journey along it and from what it demands of us, not forgetting the way, the truth and the life is Jesus and that those who really love him "walk safely on a broad and royal road" (6) and that the more a person lives in conformity to God's will the more advanced they are on this road (7)

Rome, 2nd February 1998 Fr. Camilo Maccise, OCD Superior General.

1. Life:22.2.
2. Cf. 1 Ascent 13:13
3. Way 21:6
4. ID. 41:6
5. Ms. C 2r. v.
6. Life 35:14
7. Cf. The Interior Castle II.