

CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSE OF SAINTS
ROME

DECREE

on the heroism of the virtues

of the Servant of God

MARY POTTER

Foundress of the Little Company of Mary
(1847 - 1913)

BEYOND DOUBT

If we are assured of the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, both towards God and towards our fellow men, and of the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude and of all that is connected with them in dedicated heroism, then, in the light of this Truth, the present case and its effects may be contemplated.

"The Motherhood of Mary, with which the sponsal soul of "the Handmaid of the Lord" was profoundly imbued, is the first and fundamental reason for that intercession which, in her honour, the Church proclaims and professes and at the same time "recommends to the hearts of the faithful", for in her the Church confides over and above all (see: Lumen Gentium, 62)... Mary has become not only "Mothernourisher" of the Son of man, but also "generous helper", in a most special way, of the Messiah and Redeemer... The Motherhood of Mary endures in the Church without cease as a mediation for intercession, and the Church expresses her faith in this truth by invoking Mary with the names of Advocate, Pleader, Helper, Intercessor". (Ep. Enc. *Redemptoris Mater*, 25 Martii 1987: AAS 79,1987, pp. 413s, nn. 39s).

Among the sons and daughters of the Church who have felt in profundity this maternal function of the Mother of Our Lord and have diffused its spirituality in their lives and writings, following the teachings of St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort (cp. *ibid*, p. 427, No 48), must surely be counted the Servant of God MARY POTTER, foundress of the *Little Company of Mary*, who lived and worked in the second half of the XIX century and in the first decade of the present century.

The Servant of God was born on the 22nd November 1847 in London, daughter of William Potter, Anglican, and Mary Ann Martin, who was received into the Catholic Church shortly before the birth of her last child, a daughter, after having given birth to four sons. The child was baptized on the 12th of the following month of December, in the Catholic Church of the Most Holy Trinity in *Dockhead* and was given the name of Mary, in honour of the Virgin to whom the mother had already entrusted her even before her birth. The father left the family shortly afterwards to emigrate to Australia, virtually leaving the responsibility of the children to the sole care of his wife. Mary was confirmed on the 21st May 1857 by Mgr. Grant, Bishop of Southwark, and on the 8th December of the same year she received her First Communion. In 1865 she went with her mother

to live with her brother Thomas in Portsmouth and there she met the pious young man Godfrey King, to whom she was engaged for some time, deriving ever greater incentive towards Eucharistic and Marian piety. On the advice of Bishop Grant, having for some time looked towards a more perfect way of life and having dissolved her engagement in peace and with kindness, she entered the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy in Brighton on the 7th December 1868. At the end of the first year of her novitiate, reasons of poor health obliged her to return to her family, leaving behind among the sisters a wonderful memory of her zeal.

Her health being somewhat improved, the Servant of God returned with new vigour to piety and to works of mercy towards the needy, soon planning, under the impulse of higher aims and with the assent of her spiritual directors and of the bishop, the creation of a new religious establishment which could devote itself in particular to giving spiritual and material assistance to the dying. This was the beginning of the *Little Company of Mary*, with evident allusion to the pious women united with Our Lady of Sorrows at the feet of Christ dying upon the Cross.

On the 2nd July 1877, after many trials and vicissitudes but uplifted with Christian fortitude and serene perseverance, the Servant of God, together with her early companions, received the religious habit from the Oratorian Bishop of Nottingham, Mgr. Bagshawe, and established the first poor house in the suburb of *Hyson Green*. Tested in many ways, by divine authority, by the bishop himself, she was also affected in her health by a form of cancer which compelled her to undergo two operations during the years 1878 - 1879, with consequences which lasted all her life, without impairing her serenity and strength of mind. As the number of the religious was growing, in 1882 the Servant of God undertook her first journey to Rome to offer her work to the service of the Universal Church, receiving from Pope Leo XIII an invitation to settle in the Eternal City, which was accepted with filial enthusiasm and most lively faith.

During the following years the Servant of God, always in feeble health, undertook long and trying voyages to establish new foundations of the *Little Company of Mary* in various countries, mainly English speaking. In 1893 she obtained from the Congregation De Propaganda Fide the definitive approval of the Constitutions, finally, in 1900, establishing its seat in Rome. The first Chapter of the Congregation had already elected her Superior General, which appointment she held until her death.

During the years 1904 - 1908 she had the Generalate and Mother House built near the Church of 'Santo Stefano Rotondo' on Mount Celio, which included a hospital and the first Italian School for professional nurses. The Church of the Convent was dedicated to the Maternal Heart of Mary. Throughout this entire period she continued her apostolate with numerous writings, mainly Marian in character, of which there were several editions in various languages, while also infusing in the minds of the sisters and of the faithful a particular devotion to the Eucharist and to the Blood of Christ.

But the Servant of God was above all Mother and Mistress for her religious, steadily moulding them in accordance with the spirit of the Institution by her example, her exhortations and her writings so that they might feel and live their vocation to the service of the sick and dying, recognizing in them Christ Himself.

Her work was united to an assiduous life of prayer and mystical practice, based on an unshakeable faith, with total submission to the Church and to the Roman Pontiff, specially venerated in the person of St. Pius X, who held the Servant of God in high esteem. Practising all Christian and religious virtues, she distinguished herself above all in humility, simplicity, sincerity and silence, as affirmed by all witnesses. Her whole life, consecrated to God, in the service of the Institution and of the sick, was a continuous growth of virtues, without rest and without doubts, being also enriched with superior gifts. Worn out by hard work, carried out during so many years with fervent love, and by illness endured with undefeated patience, the Servant of God passed away, supported by the Holy Sacraments, on the 9th April 1913 in Rome, in authentic fame of sanctity.

She was buried firstly in the Verano Cemetery but, in 1917, her body was transferred to the crypt of the Church in the Mother House, surrounded by the ever increasing devotion of the religious and of the faithful.

As the fame of her Sanctity was steadily growing, in the years 1942 -1949 the ordinary Processes were instituted in Rome, with the usual inquests. After examination of her numerous writings two Decrees were issued on the 25th November 1956 and the 8th July 1965. After the issue, on the 23rd June 1977, of the Decree "*De Non Cultu*", preceded on the 11th June of the same year by the Introduction of Cause, with the approval of the Holy Father Paul VI, the Apostolic Processes of Fiesole and of Sydney were held in the years 1978 - 1979, with new testimonies and the collection of numerous documents. The Decree on the validity of all Processes was published on the 14th December 1981 by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

On the 9th October 1987, after the preparation of the prescribed *Positio*, the discussion was started on the theological, cardinal and connected virtues of the Servant of God before the Peculiar Congress of the Theological Advisers with the unanimously favourable consent on the heroism of the virtues. On the 19th January 1988 the ordinary Congregation of Cardinals and Bishops was held in Rome, under the chairmanship of His Eminence the Cardinal Mario Luigi Ciappi, and it was declared that the Servant of God had practised heroically the theological, cardinal and connected virtues.

An accurate report of all these facts was given to His Holiness John Paul II, and the Holy Father, benignly consenting to the wishes of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, ordered that the Decree on the heroic virtues of the Servant of God be drawn up.

This having been done, the Holy Father summoned the undersigned Cardinal Prefect and the Cardinal Proposer of the Cause and also me, Archbishop Secretary, and the others according to use, and before all decreed:

IT HAS BEEN MADE EVIDENT THAT THE SERVANT OF GOD, MARY POTTER, FOUNDESS OF THE LITTLE COMPANY OF MARY, PRACTISED IN A HEROIC DECREE THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES OF FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY TOWARDS GOD AND TOWARDS HER NEIGHBOURS AS WELL AS THE CARDINAL VIRTUES OF PRUDENCE, JUSTICE, TEMPERANCE AND FORTITUDE AND THOSE CONNECTED.

The Holy Father ordered that this Decree be published and included in the Acts of the Congregation for the Cause of Saints.

Given in Rome on the 8th February in the Marian Year 1988.

Petrus card. Palazzini, Praefectus
+ Traianus Crisan, Archiep. tit. Urbinasensis
a secretis