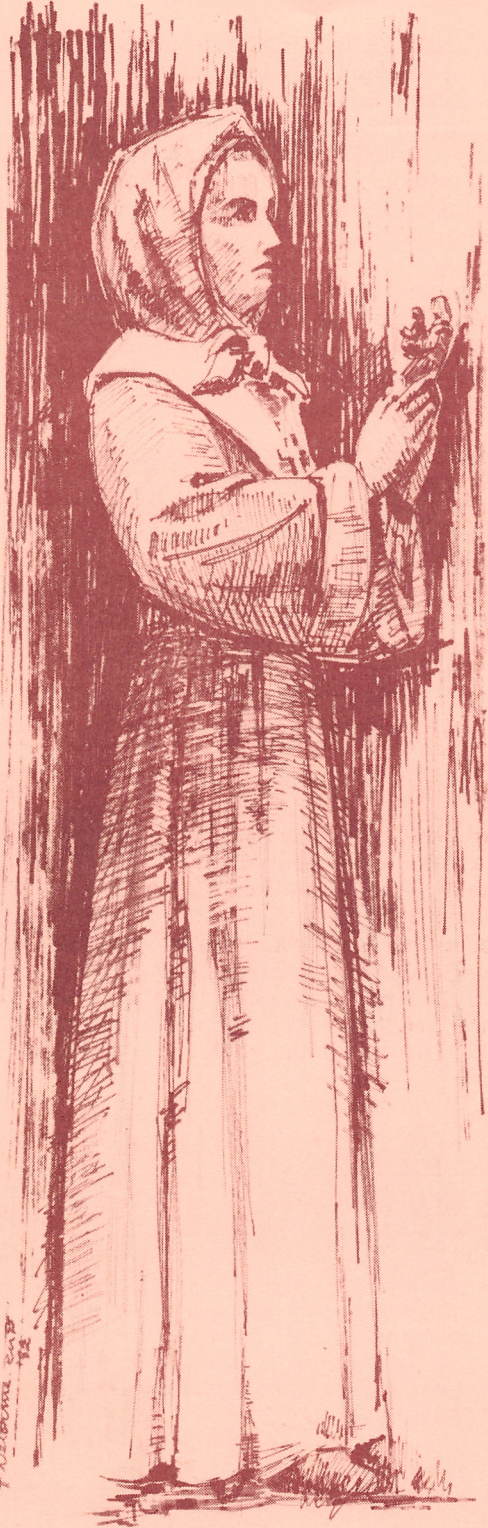


MARGUERITE BOURGEOYS

4 D'Armenie. 2018
182



MARGUERITE BOURGEOYS was born in Troyes, France, on April 17, 1620. She was the daughter of Abraham Bourgeois and Guillemette Garnier. The sixth of their twelve children, she grew up in a truly Christian atmosphere. When Marguerite was nineteen years old, her mother died; she then assumed the care of her younger brothers and sisters.

On October 7, 1640, during a procession in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary, she received a special grace from God which invited her to a deeper spiritual commitment; she referred to this experience as "her conversion."

She became a member of an extern Congregation which gathered young women together for prayer and to prepare them for teaching in the poor areas. The director of this association at the time was the sister of M. de Maisonneuve, who founded Ville Marie (Montreal) in 1642. On his visit to his sister in 1653, he told her that the colony needed a young woman to instruct the children of the colonists and the Indian children. Marguerite was introduced to him and generously responded to his appeal.

HER ARRIVAL IN MONTREAL

Filled with heroic faith, great courage and zeal, and a passionate desire to imitate Mary in her Mystery of the Visitation, Marguerite left France on June 20, 1653. The voyage was long and tedious. The ship was unseaworthy and when a plague broke out, Marguerite acted as nurse. Finally, in mid-November, she arrived in Ville Marie. Until there were children of school age, she kept house for the governor and helped Jeanne Mance.

HER WORKS

The School:— In 1658, M. de Maisonneuve gave Marguerite a stone stable on the site of what is now 50 St. Paul Street West. She had it cleaned and remodelled to serve as a school and a dwelling for herself and her future companions. In this same year, Marguerite organized an extern Congregation similar to the one she had known in Troyes. Her house thus became known as the Congregation.

It was only in 1694 that M. Belmont, S.S. had a fort built with four stone towers, in two of which the Sisters lived and taught. These two towers are still to be seen on the Seminary grounds at 2065 Sherbrooke Street West.

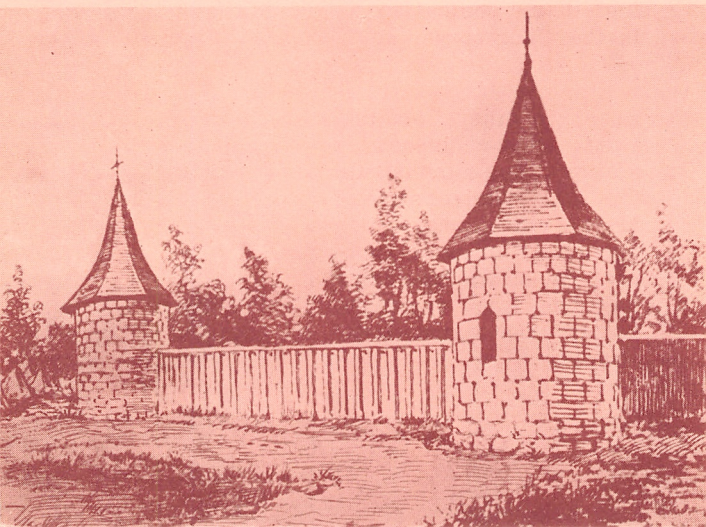
THE FINAL YEARS OF HER LIFE

In 1693 Marguerite resigned from her position as superior and was replaced by a Canadian, Marie Barbier, the first Montrealer to join the Community in 1678, at the age of 15. In the suffering and solitude of the infirmary, she continued her efforts to maintain the characteristics of the Congregation. In this task she had the support of the Sulpician Fathers.

Finally, in 1698 the Religious Rule was adopted and the sisters pronounced their vows in the presence of Bishop de Saint Vallier. Marguerite signed the act as Sister Marguerite of the Blessed Sacrament.

Between October 1697 and June 1698, Marguerite Bourgeoys wrote her autobiography and a kind of spiritual testament. What remains of these texts reveals an exceptional love of God and of her neighbour, the desire to imitate the Blessed Virgin in the Mystery of the Visitation and in her role with the apostles.

On January 12, 1700, having offered her life to save a younger sister, she died peacefully. The following day she was buried in the chapel of the parish of Ville Marie.



VENERATION AND DEVOTION

The day following her death, a priest wrote, "If saints were canonized as in the past by the voice of the people and of the clergy, tomorrow we would be saying the Mass of Saint Marguerite of Canada."

Since 1910, Marguerite Bourgeoys's tomb has been venerated at the Mother House of the Congregation de Notre Dame; her heart is also enshrined in a reliquary. Several testimonials reveal the power of her intercession with God. Two miracles were recognized by the Church before her beatification in 1950 by Pope Pius XII.

On April 2, 1982, Pope John Paul II promulgated in Rome the Decree of Miracle for a cure attributed to her intercession; at the same time he announced her canonization.

THREE CENTURIES OF EVOLUTION AND EXPANSION

The educative and apostolic initiative of Marguerite Bourgeoys continued through the commitment of her sisters. More than 2600 sisters of the Congregation work in various fields of activity in schools, colleges and universities, in diocesan and parish social and family ministries throughout almost every province in Canada. Zeal to spread the Good News led them to the United States in 1860, to Japan in 1932, to Latin America in 1962, to Cameroun in 1970 and to Troyes, France in 1981.

Recently an attempt has been made to revive the "extern Congregation" established by Marguerite Bourgeoys. "Associates" are lay people who are inspired by her spirituality in renewing their dedication as committed Christians in the Church.

In 1975 the Canadian Post Office issued a stamp to commemorate the 275th anniversary of Marguerite Bourgeoys's death. In this way, Canada acknowledged her role in the country's social and educational history.



PRAYERS TO MARGUERITE BOURGEOYS

MARGUERITE BOURGEOYS,

you who contributed so greatly to the human and Christian promotion of the family in the New World, continue to protect our homes.

Inspire young couples to prepare in a Christian manner for marriage.

Help husbands and wives to grow in love and in fidelity to their commitments.

Assist parents in the education of their children.

Obtain for them the necessary material and spiritual means to provide for their needs.

Come to the help of those whose happiness is threatened or shattered.

Bring joy to unhappy children.

Stimulate and enlighten the zeal of those who, in their respective commitments, devote themselves as you did to the human and Christian promotion of families.

Grant that we may re-discover in the Holy Family of Nazareth an ever living model of family life based on Gospel values, and obtain for us the protection of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Amen.

* * *

O Mother Bourgeoys, you whose compassionate power is ever increasing, show us your way of Truth, Faith and Holiness.

Make us humble enough to abandon ourselves to the Will of God, generous enough to find in the Cross the joy of the Loving Giver.

May your fidelity to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament lead us ever nearer to this source of light and peace. May your spirit of openness help us to be concerned for our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

Finally, may Our Lady of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bring us to this unity of eternal grace to which God has called you for all eternity.

Amen.

(Rina Lasnier, 1978)



F. Delorme, enb.

The Chapel: - In 1657, Marguerite initiated the construction of a chapel outside the precincts of the fort; it was intended to encourage pilgrimages in honor of Our Lady of Good Help. Difficulties delayed the realization of this dream and the Chapel of Notre Dame de Bon Secours was completed only in 1678. The tiny "miraculous" statue which Marguerite had received from Baron de Fancamp in 1672 was venerated there. The original chapel was burned, re-built, and then restored. Today, Notre Dame de Bon Secours still welcomes all who come to 400 St. Paul Street East in Old Montreal.

A Community of Educators - Marguerite needed recruits; she did not hesitate to cross the ocean again, returning in 1659 with four companions. The common life which they led was the basis of her religious Community. In 1670 she again returned to France and came back with six companions. She brought back as well the Letters Patent signed by Louis XIV which gave a civil charter to her Institute of "the Secular Daughters of the Congregation de Notre Dame." In 1676, Bishop de Laval gave the community his episcopal approbation.

The King's Wards - During her voyages, Marguerite was entrusted with the care of young women destined to establish homes in the colony. In 1659, she brought back 32 of the King's Wards (Filles du Roi); she met and welcomed others when they arrived from France, lodging them in her own house, preparing them for their new life as pioneers, and protecting them until their marriage and afterwards. It is touching to see her signature on marriage contracts which were signed "in the parlour of the Congregation." In 1663, she even bought a house the better to welcome and accommodate these young women. Her devotedness to the people led her to be called "the Mother of the Colony."

The Vocational School - Marguerite's work as educator expanded rapidly in answer to the needs of the colony. On land which she had acquired at Point Saint Charles, she organized the remodelling of a farm house in 1668. There she set up "La Providence," a type of vocational school, to teach the various household arts.

This house is the present Saint Gabriel Museum, 2146 Favard Street, Montreal.

Progress of Her Work - Marguerite made a third trip to France in 1680 to obtain new recruits and to ensure the uncloistered character of her Institute. Bishop Laval of Quebec, then in Paris, forbade her to bring back any new recruits, but providentially, the entrance of Canadian-born young girls assured the survival of her work. The census of 1681 indicated that the Congregation consisted of 18 sisters, of whom 7 were Canadians. Besides the missions at Point Saint Charles and the Mountain Village, schools had been opened in Champlain, Pointe-aux-Trembles and Lachine. In later years, the sisters were established in Sainte Famille, Ile d'Orléans and in Quebec.

Welcoming the Indians - The Sulpicians had begun a centre on the Mountain to attract Indian children. From 1678 on, two sisters lived and taught in this village of birch bark cabins built near the place where Paul Chomedey de Maisonneuve had erected the first Cross on Mount Royal — the Cross which had been replaced under Marguerite's supervision.

Marguerite also welcomed two Indian girls into her Congregation, Barba Antontinon and Marie Thérèse Ganensagouas. She entrusted to them the task of teaching their own people, a great risk at this time because of the policies imposed by France.

MARGUERITE BOURGEOYS,
A WOMAN FOR ALL TIMES

Marguerite Bourgeoys's life can be summed up in the duality of prayer and of service — love of God and love of others, especially the suffering and the deprived. M. Eileen Scott, C.N.D. effectively described these characteristics in "A Spirituality of Compassion" when she wrote:

With the years, the Scriptures pointed out to Marguerite the pattern of total sharing in love: the mystery of the Visitation, a mystery of consolation, a desire to comfort one in distress or doubt, a constancy of presence that is faithful, accepting, affective. Sister Bourgeoys's choice of the Scriptural narrative was somehow inevitable. It was confirmation of the life-style she was to work out for and with others.

... The essence of Marguerite's spirituality is the spirituality of compassion. The spirit of compassion never failed her in the trials of her life, great or small; it grounded her relationships with her sisters, her voluntary work for the settlers....

Marguerite Bourgeoys was, and continues to be,
A woman for all times, all places, all peoples.