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The School Sister

of Notre Dame



*Those who are free
in God
will always remain
joyful and alive.*

Blessed Mary Theresa of Jesus

March, 1986



A Pilgrim Remembers . . .

by Sister Lucy Nigh
TYME OUT Community, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

From North and South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia we came, pilgrim travelers gathering in Rome for the beatification ceremony of our congregation's foundress, Mother Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger. We 850 School Sisters of Notre Dame (representing 7,500 members in more than 30 countries) were joined by 4,000 of our friends, family members, co-workers, and students, all witnessing to the influence of a nineteenth-century Bavarian woman.

Our pilgrimage led us into an overwhelming experience of international unity and multi-cultured joy. This simple yet incredible woman seemed to have reached through barriers of culture, language, time, age, and distance to bring us together. Clearly, Mother Theresa was a woman whose spirit has touched the world.

For me, it was more than a ten-day journey of miles. I found myself traveling into new awarenesses, opened to a world much bigger than I had previously understood. When my feet were resting, my mind and heart were busy pondering, journeying into a deeper appreciation of the gift and challenge of being part of an international religious community.

We came to Rome to affirm the goodness of our foundress, now "Blessed" Mary Theresa of Jesus. In the celebration I, too, had the experience of "being blessed." Throughout the days of pilgrimage I felt the warm strength and hopeful energy of a mother's blessing.

During the beatification ceremony on November 17, 1985 in St. Peter Basilica, Rome, Pope John Paul II bestowed the title "Blessed" upon Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger.



Walking the three-quarter mile descent to the Vatican and the return climb "home" to the pensione (lodging for the 53 North American pilgrims) was daily exercise and challenge.



We became weathered pilgrims. Four days of rain in Rome tried to dampen our spirits, but Sister Mary Caroline Jakubowski (below), guide and director of our American group, had a cheery quip in every situation.



On November 16, the 150th anniversary of Mother Theresa's profession of vows, we SSNDs gathered at our generalate. As we renewed our vows in seven different language groups and sang together the closing "Holy God," I was filled with wonder at the miracle of our unity and the mystery of my belonging.



Precious in this pilgrimage were the bonding moments of meeting sisters from many different places. We made some new friends and "reunited" with others.





The youngest member of the North American group, Molly Gallagher, is held by Sister Jacqueline Buckley, general councilor. Molly and her mother, Mary Beth (behind Molly), were invited by the St. Louis province to participate in the pilgrimage.



We were constantly aware of our privilege in being province representatives. Never too far from our thoughts, those back home pilgrimaged with us. Sister Arlene Simon wore a necklace with the "sewn in" prayer intentions of her sisters in the Chicago province.



A highlight of the pilgrimage was a special audience with the Holy Father, who spoke to us in several languages. Specifically addressing the English-speaking pilgrims, he said: "Although you live in a different culture and age than that of your beloved foundress, you keep alive the precious heritage which she handed on to you. . . I earnestly pray that all the School Sisters of Notre Dame will find fresh courage and strength in bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel."

That's me standing on a chair, waiting to greet Pope John Paul II.



The presence of SSND students from Europe was most appropriate for these special days of honoring Mother Theresa, a gifted educator. I will always remember the singing and joy of the Mass celebrated at the church of St. Paul Outside the Walls. Our practice of German, Latin, English, and Portuguese songs before the liturgy made me feel at home in the huge church. Symbolic gifts and beautiful prayers, presented by students from Germany and Austria, brought tears to my eyes.

"We bring an empty vessel as sign of our openness and readiness to allow our lives to be filled with you. . ."

"We bring a stone as sign of all that is hard and unyielding in life. We can also build bridges with the stones that lie in our way. . ."



*"We bring a burning torch as sign of our enthusiasm. . . and our mission to build a better world."
Main celebrant, Bishop Joseph Breitenbeck (center) of Grand Rapids, Michigan, received the gifts.*

It was a thrill to imagine the world of Mother Theresa during our three days spent in Germany visiting places of heritage. We walked the Danube River bridge and the streets familiar to Mother Theresa. Handling things that she used and being in the rooms where Mother Theresa spent many hours, I seemed able to touch this woman of uncompromising faith and love. Theresa also touched us through the gracious hospitality of our German sisters in Munich, Neunburg vorm Wald, and Stadtamhof, who continue the spiritual and educational tradition begun by her as early as 1833.



A surprise invitation brought us to Finkenhammer, the birthplace of Bishop Michael Wittmann, who encouraged young Caroline Gerhardinger in the establishment of a community of religious educators. Edward Wittmann, fourth-generation nephew of the bishop, told us stories about his uncle and enjoyed our wrapping a group with the cape under which the bishop traditionally carried gifts for the poor.



We visited the Stadtamhof convent, recently built on the site where the Gerhardinger family once lived. Although the old backyard pump was frozen, for Sister Dorothy Marie Zimmerman the well promises life, a gift that we continue to receive through Blessed Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger.

*May God the Son. . .
be the way you walk,*



*the truth you follow,
the life you lead.*

Blessed Mary Theresa of Jesus